



Looking after you and your family after a disaster

Traumatic experiences - like being involved in an emergency or natural disaster - can be sudden and overwhelming. It's normal to feel unsettled and disrupted for a while. You may feel depressed, anxious, sad, angry or exhausted. You might find it hard to sleep, concentrate or remember details.

Be aware that you have been through an extremely stressful event and give yourself permission to feel bad.

Children can also be stressed after a disaster. Looking out for your child's response to these events can help you to support them to cope with their feelings, thoughts and behaviours.

Looking after yourself

Here are some positive ways to cope:

- Focus on making daily decisions and actions, to start feeling in control of your life again
- Make time for rest, even if you can't sleep
- Try to eat regular, healthy meals and drink lots of water
- Keep a daily routine – include work, relaxation, exercise and something you enjoy
- Spend time talking or just being with people you care about
- Get involved in community activities
- Avoid making major life decisions too quickly.
- Avoid using alcohol or drugs to cope, it will create more problems in the long term
- Avoid stimulants such as tea, coffee, caffeinated drinks and cigarettes

Supporting children and young people

- Explain to them that it's okay to worry when facing challenges and uncertainty
- Listen to them actively
- Answer their questions as best you can with factual information
- Limit their exposure to news and social media
- Keep their routine predictable
- Maintain links with your child's school
- Remember to always model the behaviour you'd like them to have including staying calm

More information:

- Looking after your mental health: visit [thinkmentalhealthwa.com.au](https://www.thinkmentalhealthwa.com.au)
 - What to do after a disaster (during recovery): visit [dfes.wa.gov.au](https://www.dfes.wa.gov.au)
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When to get help

Most people will recover over time with the support of family and friends. Sometimes however, distressing events can be hard to overcome. After a crisis it can help to talk to someone who isn't involved and is trained to listen.

Think about seeking professional help if you:

- Continue to experience strong reactions more than two weeks after the disaster
- Feel very distressed, frightened, irritable or jumpy a lot of the time
- Can't carry out your normal roles at work, school or with your family
- Feel hopeless, despairing and think you cannot go on
- Are thinking of harming yourself or someone else

Your community and local professionals will want to support you.



Information for after a disaster

- Australian Red Cross – [Resources to Help You](https://www.redcross.org.au/resources-to-help-you) bit.ly/redcross3
- Beyond Blue – [Looking After Yourself After a Disaster](https://www.beyondblue.org.au/looking-after-yourself-after-a-disaster) bit.ly/beyondblue1
- Australian Psychological Society - [Recovering From Bushfires](https://www.psy.org.au/recovering-from-bushfires) bit.ly/aps33

For young people:

- Headspace – [How to Cope with the Stress of Natural Disasters](https://www.headspace.org.au/how-to-cope-with-the-stress-of-natural-disasters) bit.ly/headspace3
- REACHout - [Coping With Stress From the Bushfires](https://www.reachout.org.au/cope-with-stress-from-the-bushfires) bit.ly/reachout2

For community organisations:

- Emerging Minds – [Community Trauma Toolkit](https://www.emergingminds.org.au/community-trauma-toolkit) bit.ly/emergingminds1



Where to get help

Your GP is a good place to start, and they can also refer you to other services. Call first if you're unsure whether they are open. You can also check to see if it is possible to have a telehealth appointment. Pharmacies may be able to assist with filling essential prescriptions.

You can ask the Department of Communities staff at evacuation centres how to access psychological support. There are usually psychologists available at the centres, ready to support you. They can refer you to additional specialist support if needed.

If you are worried about your child, please contact your school to discuss support available.

If it is a life threatening emergency, call 000 or visit your nearest emergency department.

There are helplines you can call to speak to someone about how you're feeling.

- **beyondblue** provides free counselling and support via **1300 22 4636** and online chat and forums at [beyondblue.org.au](https://www.beyondblue.org.au)
- If you're worried about alcohol or other drug use, call the **Alcohol and Drug Support Line on 08 9442 5000** or 1800 198 024 (country toll free)
- In a crisis, call **Lifeline on 13 11 14**
- For other types of crisis - like concern about a child's safety, or if you have lost your home and have nowhere to stay, call the **Department of Communities Crisis Care** line on **08 9223 1111**
- **Lifeline's Bushfire Recovery Phonenumber 13 HELP (13 43 57)** is available for anyone impacted by the fires, no matter how you're struggling