



Recovering from a disaster

Promoting safety and support following a disaster

When a disaster happens in the community, it can be highly distressing for many people. There is a lot that family, friends, volunteers, and community members can do to support those affected and each other.

Tips to help you recover from a disaster

- Recognise that you have been through a distressing experience and have the ability to cope. Remember that there is no right or wrong way to feel.
- Spending time with people who are familiar, respectful, and make you feel safe can be enormously helpful in times of crisis. Telling people *how* to support you (e.g., just listening, offering advice or distracting you with activities) can help both you and the people around you to support you in the right way.
- Communicate about how you're feeling with someone trusted when it feels safe to do so. If you're not feeling ready, this is also OK. You may find other ways as well to express your feelings e.g., through a diary or art work.
- Try to maintain a form of routine. Plan your day and try to have a balance between being busy or productive and allowing time to reflect or rest.
- Making time for regular exercise can be helpful, even if it is a gentle walk or stretching.
- Practicing relaxation is important. You can use a formal technique such as progressive muscle relaxation, or just make time to absorb yourself in a relaxing activity such as

gardening or listening to music. This will help your body and nervous system to settle and readjust.

- Avoid overuse of alcohol or other drugs to cope.
- If possible, try to delay making any major decisions or big life changes.
- Give yourself time to adjust. It is natural to bounce back and start feeling better, but it can take a while.

Seek additional support when needed

If you feel that the stress or anxiety you or your family are experiencing as a result of a disaster is getting too much, a psychologist may be able to help. Psychologists are highly trained and qualified professionals skilled in providing effective interventions for a range of mental health concerns, including stress. A psychologist can help you manage your stress and anxiety using techniques based on the best available research.



If you are referred to a psychologist by your GP, you might be eligible for a Medicare rebate. You may also be eligible to receive psychology services via telehealth so that you do not need to travel to see a psychologist. Ask your psychologist or GP for details..

There are number of ways to access a psychologist. You can:

- use the Australia-wide Find a Psychologist™ service. Go to <https://psychology.org.au/find-a-psychologist> or call 1800 333 497
- ask your GP or another health professional to refer you.

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The APS has a number of resources available to assist Australians during disasters. Visit www.psychology.org.au/for-the-public/Psychology-topics/Disasters