

A close-up photograph of a firefighter wearing a red helmet and a yellow jacket, hugging a black and white dog. The firefighter's face is partially visible, showing a moment of connection with the animal. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting.

Recovering from a natural disaster

Promoting safety, comfort and help after a disaster

When a disaster happens in a community, it can be highly distressing for many people. But there is a lot that family, friends, volunteers and community members can do to help those affected.

Tips to help you recover from a disaster

- Recognise that you have been through a distressing experience and give yourself permission to experience some reaction to it. Don't be angry with yourself for being upset.
- Remember that there is no right or wrong way to feel.
- Remind yourself that you can and are coping.
- Spend time with people who are predictable, familiar and respectful.
- Do not try to block out thoughts of what has happened. Gradually thinking about and working through what has happened can assist in coming to terms with a traumatic experience.
- Don't 'bottle up' your feelings – share your experiences with people you trust when opportunities arise. But don't feel pressured if you don't want to talk now – this is also OK.
- Find other ways as well to express your feelings, e.g. through a diary or art work.
- Try to maintain a normal routine. Structure your day and try to have a balance between being busy and productive and allowing time to reflect and process your feelings and thoughts.
- Allow yourself time to rest if you are feeling tired. Regular exercise is also important.
- Make time to practise relaxation. 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.
- Avoid making any major decisions or big life changes.
- Make sure you do not unnecessarily avoid certain activities or places.
- Ask for support from people who care about you and whom you trust. Social support is enormously helpful in times of crisis.
- Let your friends and family know of your needs. Help them to help you by letting them know when you are tired, need time out, or want a chance to talk or just be with someone.
- If your recent experience stirs up other memories or feelings from a past unrelated stressful occurrence, or even childhood trauma, try not to let the memories all blur together. Keep the experiences separate and deal with them separately.
- Keep reminding yourself that things will get better, and you do have the ability to manage.
- Give yourself time to adjust. Resilience is the norm, but it can take a while to bounce back.

Seek additional support when needed

If you feel that the stress or anxiety you or your family are experiencing as a result of a natural 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 findapsychologist.org.au or call 1800 333 497
- ask your GP or another health professional to refer you.

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

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