

A I M for being psychologically prepared in three steps

1. **ANTICIPATE** that the situation will be stressful
2. **IDENTIFY** your body changes related to anxiety and any frightening thoughts that are adding to the fear
3. **MANAGE** your responses using controlled breathing and self-talk

Seeking professional assistance

If you are finding that you are struggling to cope, then you may benefit from some additional help. In most areas of Australia, psychologists are available to provide a range of post-disaster assistance such as supportive counselling, grief counselling and stress management.

APS psychologists have at least six years of education and training. They are able to provide immediate, short-term stress management strategies and also provide long-term, ongoing support for more complex stress reactions.

To talk to an APS psychologist, ask your GP for a referral, phone the APS Find a Psychologist service on 1800 333 497, or locate a psychologist in your area by going to the APS Find a Psychologist website – www.findapsychologist.org.au.

DON'T PANIC:

BE PREPARED

Helpful tips for being psychologically prepared as you get ready for the bushfire season



To cope with the coming bushfire season you need to be very well prepared.

Your local Council and emergency services have pamphlets and brochures to help you get physically prepared to protect lives, homes and property in an emergency situation. A well practised household emergency plan will provide a greater sense of being in control in an emergency situation.

There are other very helpful ways to be psychologically prepared for a bushfire emergency. Being psychologically prepared when a bushfire is threatening can help you feel more confident, more in control and better able to think clearly about what you need to do to keep safe.

Being cooler, calmer and more collected can also be very helpful to family members and others who may not be as well prepared psychologically for what is happening.

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STEP 1

Anticipate your psychological reactions

Warnings and uncertainty in a bushfire emergency situation can leave people feeling anxious, helpless or confused.

- To begin preparing yourself, try to anticipate what your likely response to the highly stressful situation will be.
- Think about how you usually react to stress. Although these reactions are very natural they can get in the way of other necessary preparations.
- If you understand your usual reactions you can learn ways to manage them better when they happen.

STEP 2

Identify feelings and thoughts

In highly stressful situations, the body usually shows signs of anxiety, such as a racing heart, shortness of breath, dizziness and sweating.

These bodily reactions to stress usually trigger stressful thoughts such as 'I can't cope' or 'I'm so afraid'.

- Notice what is happening to your body and the changes that tell you that you're feeling anxious.
- Try to focus in on the frightening thoughts you may be having that are adding to the fear. Are your thoughts helping you or making things harder?
- Remind yourself that strong bodily sensations and frightening thoughts are normal reactions to stress but they are not helping you to stay calm and clear-headed. Don't get too critical of yourself though!

STEP 3

Manage responses to the stress

You can feel more in control through two strategies:

1. Slowing down your breathing to help calm your body's anxiety reaction
 2. Replacing frightening thoughts with more helpful ones.
- To slow your breathing down, take smaller breaths and pause between breaths to space them out. When you have breathed out slowly, hold your breath for a count of three before inhaling your next breath.
 - While concentrating on breathing out slowly, say to yourself 'Relax', or 'Stay calm', or 'It's OK, I'm managing OK'. These are good words to use because they are associated with feeling relaxed and in control.
 - Try not to dwell on the bad things that might happen, but instead tell yourself that the calmer you are, the better you'll be at managing exactly what needs to be done.

