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...
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.