Mental health recovery after a disaster

After a disaster or major incident, it’s common to feel stress and grief. For some people it can affect their mental health straight away, but others may not feel the impacts until later. Disasters can also have a long-lasting effect on some people’s mental health.

Common reactions after a disaster
- Anger, fear, sadness
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering details
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Trouble thinking clearly or making decisions
- Changes to eating and sleeping habits

Dealing with the emotional impact
There are many things that you can do to help your mental health:
- Acknowledging your feelings and talking about them
- Accepting support from family and friends, and community programs
- Getting back into a routine
- Looking after your physical health through exercise and regular healthy meals
- Not over-indulging in alcohol or comfort foods
- Taking time out from work or other roles to relax and unwind
- Talking with your doctor or a counsellor if needed

When to get help
If you or someone you know is experiencing any of the following symptoms please seek professional help:
- Thoughts of self-harm or suicide
- Loss of hope or interest in the future
- Finding it difficult to participate in day to day activities
- Experiencing overwhelming fear, poor sleep, flashbacks or persistent thoughts
- Feelings of sadness or depression that are severe or lasting too long
- Using excessive amounts of alcohol or drugs to cope with the situation
Where to go for help

If you feel a person’s safety is at immediate risk:

dial 000 (Triple Zero) or Teletype 106

Mental Health Triage Service (24/7 mental health emergencies)

Call 13 14 65

Examples of a mental health emergency:

> If you, or the person, have concerns about their safety including an increased risk of self-harm and/or thoughts about suicide
> Concerns about the person’s behaviour, safety and welfare have escalated and require more immediate attention, and the person’s needs are not able to be met through other support systems (eg. GP or other local services)

Other useful services

Health Direct 1800 022 222
Red Cross 8100 4500
LifeLine 13 11 14
BeyondBlue 1300 224 636
Regional Access 1300 032 186
Nurse-on-call 1300 606 024
Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467

Help for children and young people

Children and young people exposed to disasters will react in different ways. It is important to be aware of changes in a child or young person’s conversation, behaviour, level of activity, physical health or emotional state so they can be linked in with supports early.

If you are concerned about the mental health and wellbeing of a child or young person, contact:

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) 08 8161 7198

Further information

For further information and resources, visit