



Looking after yourself following the bushfires – after six months

The year following bushfires

The bushfires were highly distressing for many people, not just those directly involved. It is not uncommon to continue to feel the impacts, even after six months or a year.

It is important to take time to check in on how you are coping, and if you need any further support.



Remember

- There is no right or wrong reaction or response to a natural disaster.
- There is no right or wrong pathway to recovery and everyone will recover at different times.
- You are not alone.
- Help is available.
- Most symptoms and reactions to stress are normal.
- Your community, Australia and icare, support you and are aware of the ongoing impact on you and your family.
- There are resources available to assist you.

It is normal to experience varying degrees of distress as we recover

Most individuals who have been experiencing symptoms of distress following the trauma of the bushfires will begin to recover. Some individuals are likely to continue to experience mild to moderate symptoms. A small number of individuals may experience significant symptoms over several years after the bushfires.

If you feel significant distress or are having difficulties functioning in your day-to-day life, seek professional help. Seeking help early can be beneficial to your recovery.

Continue to look after yourself

Give yourself permission to recover at your own pace and in your own way

- Do not compare to others
- Do not judge your own recovery experience or timeline.

Build personal resources

- Problem-solving skills
- Engage in positive activities
- Engage in positive thinking
- Social connections.

Maintain a normal routine

- Engage in day-to-day activities
- Plan for the future
- Maintain health behaviours.

Be aware of the impacts of distress on your concentration and memory

- Break tasks into manageable chunks
- Keep things simple
- Think carefully before making large or important decisions
- Take your time and be careful.

Look after yourself physically

- Exercise
- Eat well
- Drink water
- Engage in good sleep habits and routines.

Manage and minimise stress

- Stress management strategies (e.g. meditation, breathing, exercise, distraction)
- Engage in activities you enjoy.

Seek support

- Family/friends
- Community
- Professional support, when needed.

**Seek support and look after each other.
Build on your community support and connection.**

Normal responses to a disaster may include:

- Feeling overwhelmed or stressed
- Fear, anxiety and anger
- Sleep disturbances, including difficulty falling to sleep, and/or waking throughout the night
- Nightmares, dreams and flashbacks
- Difficulties concentrating or remembering things
- Thinking about the bushfires
- Feeling depressed or low mood
- Being over-protective of your family and your own safety
- Being alert and easily startled
- Disruptions to your relationships, including increased family conflict
- Feeling tearful.

It might be time to seek professional help if you are:

- Self-medicating
- Using alcohol, drugs and/or prescription medications excessively
- Overconsuming

- Oversleeping
- Overeating
- Overworking
- Constant and excessive replaying, thinking, worrying or questioning (what if ...)
- Engaging in reckless, dangerous or risky behaviours
- Feeling a sense of denial, suppression or avoidance
- Feeling excessive guilt
- Feeling numb or empty
- Feeling like you are unable to handle the intense stress you are experiencing
- Feeling that you have limited or no support, or nobody to talk to
- Experiencing distress that is interfering with your ability to participate in day-to-day activities, focus or solve problems.

Service Contacts



icare employer and business owner policy enquiries

13 44 22

GPs and other healthcare professionals

Make an appointment with your doctor, in-person or via telehealth

Disaster Welfare Assistance Line

1800 018 444

NSW Mental Health Line

1800 011 511

Lifeline

13 11 14

Beyond Blue

1300 224 636

APM Community Support Line

1800 276 113 for free telephone counselling

Australian Association of Psychologists Inc. - free SMS counselling services

Text 0488 807 266

Healthy Minds

1300 160 339 for free face-to-face or telephone counselling

Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement - Counselling and Support Service

1300 664 786 or 03 9265 2111