



Looking after yourself following the bushfires

Taking care of yourself after bushfire trauma

Traumatic events like the bushfires are highly distressing for many people, not just those directly involved, and the effects can last much longer than the event itself. Following a disaster, we can fall into the trap of not looking after our health and wellbeing, as we may be focusing on the immediate situation. During these times of high stress, it is important to look after ourselves.

Look after yourself:

- Give yourself time to rest.
- Try to keep your normal routine. Get up at the normal time and try to maintain your normal day-to-day activities.
- Talk to people you trust about how you are feeling.
- Be aware that your concentration may be impacted. Be careful, take your time, keep things simple and avoid making large decisions. Break tasks into smaller chunks to make them feel more manageable.
- Exercise. Even a 30-minute walk can provide health benefits.
- Ensure you are eating a healthy and well-balanced diet. You might not feel hungry but try to have regular, healthy meals.
- Seek out accurate information, resources and services when needed.
- Try not to focus on negative thoughts or allow yourself to feel overwhelmed. You may need to limit the amount of media coverage you read or watch if you find it too confronting.
- Make time for activities that you enjoy.
- Manage your stress through activities such as meditation, mindfulness, colouring, journaling, breathing exercises, physical relaxation, distraction (e.g. watching a movie), and more physical means (e.g. going to the gym).
- Use social supports to express your feelings:
 - | Connect and spend time with friends or family.
 - | Make it clear you are available to listen to others that might feel distressed.

Build social networks. This may be as simple as having coffee breaks with colleagues, phoning a friend, joining community groups, attending libraries, events, volunteering, or online communities.

Reflect on the collective community response within Australia. Know that you are not alone and others feel the same and care.

- Seek professional help when needed.

Service Contacts



icare Bushfire Assistance Line:

To arrange alternative treatment and care options call 13 99 22 or email disasterassistance@icare.nsw.gov.au

Disaster Welfare Assistance Line:

1800 018 444

NSW Mental Health Line:

1800 011 511

Lifeline:

13 11 14

Beyondblue:

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

Avoid using negative coping behaviours:

- Don't use self-medication (using alcohol and drugs to help you get by or to help you sleep).
- Don't overconsume (including oversleeping and overworking).
- Don't be in denial, block out, suppress or avoid the event. These behaviours can prolong recovery.
- Avoid constant replaying, thinking or worrying.
- Avoid reckless, dangerous or risky behaviours.

What can happen after a bushfire trauma: how you may respond

Reacting in an emotional way after a disaster is normal. Most of the time, any feelings of distress will go away quickly but sometimes we can fall into the trap of not looking after ourselves. Sometimes we forget to look after our health and wellbeing, but it is important to look after ourselves during these times of high stress.

What you need to know:

- There is no right or wrong reaction or response to trauma.
- You are not alone and help is available.
- Some people will feel extreme distress, and this is okay, while others may not. Your response, distress and feelings are valid for you.
- Remember that the trauma response after events will be different for everyone, and can often occur sometime after the event. You may react immediately or find that you react months, or even years after the event.
- Recovery times following an event will be different for everyone and that is okay.
- Suppression or excessive distraction from your feelings and distress can prolong your stress response.
- People connected to events may experience survivor guilt, e.g. not losing their property while others have.
- Even those who were not directly impacted by the disaster can experience trauma after witnessing the event.
- You may become distressed by excessive media coverage and may need to limit the amount you read or watch.

Normal responses to traumatic events include:

- Fear, anger and blame
- Sleep disturbances, nightmares, dreams and flashbacks
- Social withdrawal
- Mood swings
- Confusion and trouble concentrating or making decisions
- Physical symptoms – headache, nausea, aches and pains
- Feeling helpless and unsafe, or disbelief
- Replaying of events or constant questioning
- Mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, panic, fears and phobias.

While these are common responses to traumatic events, if the situation becomes too distressing or results in the following warning signs, you should seek help through the services listed on page 1.



Warning signs that you may need to seek help:

- Being unable to handle the intense feelings or physical sensations related to stress
- Feeling numb or empty
- Experiencing strong distressing and persistent emotions
- Being physically tense, agitated or feeling on edge
- Having disturbed sleep
- Experiencing relationship problems (including friends, family and colleagues)
- If distress is interfering with your ability to participate in day-to-day activities, focus, or solve problems
- Feeling that you have limited or no support, or nobody to talk to.

icare customers requiring immediate assistance should contact the services listed on page 1.

Impacted icare scheme participants can arrange alternative treatment and care options by calling icare on 13 99 22 or email disasterassistance@icare.nsw.gov.au