

# Coping with Community Crisis or Natural Disaster

## What is community crisis?

A community crisis can occur following a natural disaster (e.g. bushfires, flood, cyclone) or another traumatic event (e.g. local tragedy, disease outbreak). These events are extremely challenging for the people directly affected, local families, workers, businesses, industries and the community as a whole.

It takes time to recover from these events - to rebuild and adjust to any changes. However, families and communities can work together to get through crisis and move forward.

## What helps?

**Realise when it's getting too much** – during a crisis, it's easy to get caught up in day-to-day activities and we often don't realise how stressed we are. Watch out for signs of stress in yourself and others and seek extra support or resources if things become overwhelming.

**Talk about your feelings** – it's important to let your emotions about the event out, rather than bottling them up inside. When you feel ready, talk to your family, friends or a health professional about your thoughts and feelings and encourage children to do the same.

**Develop an action plan** – dealing with a crisis can be confusing and sometimes it's hard to know what to do next. It can help to get together with family and/or the community to develop an action plan and decide who's going to do what and when. This can relieve stress and help you to feel like you're making progress.

**Take care of yourself** – it can be draining to re-establish ourselves after a crisis. Remember to take care of yourself by eating healthily, doing regular exercise and getting enough sleep. When you feel ready, try to get back into your normal routine. Avoid alcohol and drugs, as they can affect your judgment and make it harder to heal.

**Accept help and support** – it can be hard to accept help from family and friends. Sometimes they don't know how to support you during this difficult time. Explain your needs and what others can do. It may be emotional support or helping with more practical things, like financial assistance, cooking, running errands or looking after children.

## How do community crisis and natural disaster affect wellbeing?

Everyone responds to crisis differently – some people may appear to be managing the situation, while others may struggle to cope. However, most people do experience healing and recovery and go on to rebuild their lives and develop new strengths.

Some typical reactions following a community crisis may include:

- Feeling stressed, anxious, exhausted or confused
- Feeling sad, down or tearful
- Shock, denial or feeling "numb" (like you can't feel anything)
- Anger, fear, guilt, shame or blame
- Uncertainty about the future
- Feeling lonely, isolated or withdrawn
- Feelings of grief and loss
- Physical health problems – headaches, difficulties sleeping, weight loss/gain

Continued overleaf »

**Investigate financial options** – natural disasters and community crises can cause considerable financial pressure. Visit the Australian Government's Disaster Assist website for information about available financial assistance ([www.disasterassist.gov.au](http://www.disasterassist.gov.au)).

**Do things you enjoy** – it's important to take "time out" to relax and have fun. Connecting with family and friends and getting involved in activities you enjoy can really help you to stay healthy and assist in the healing process.

During a community crisis, it's important that we look after ourselves and each other.

## How do community crisis and natural disaster affect wellbeing?

- Difficulties concentrating
- Tension in personal relationships - loved ones may cope differently with the situation
- Feeling hopeless or helpless.

All these reactions to a crisis are normal and you may experience different emotions and reactions at different times. Media reports, anniversaries or personal exposure to similar events in the future may also trigger anxiety or stress.



Proudly supported by



## Find out more

Call Lifeline – **13 11 14** if you need to speak to someone about dealing with a community crisis or natural disaster.

Visit [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au) to find a range of self-help resources and information.

The assistance of *The Science of Knowing PTY Ltd* in producing this fact sheet is gratefully acknowledged.