

Dealing with stress

January 2013

Tasmania's bushfires are unsettling for all of us. In times of emergency our human response is naturally to respond to immediate danger, usually out of instinct. While we tend to focus on physical damage and loss, the toll on our emotions is equally significant.

Natural disasters and catastrophic events are extremely stressful for survivors and observers. Whether or not you have been directly impacted by the traumatic events still occurring in Tasmania, it is normal to feel anxious, scared and uncertain about what the future may bring.

For most of us these unsettling thoughts and feelings fade as life returns to normal, but you can help that process by putting in place some simple strategies.

Seek comfort and support

Natural disasters and traumatic events turn our world upside down and shatter our sense of safety. Being proactive about our wellbeing – and that of our loved ones – will help make you feel less powerless and vulnerable. Focus on things that help you feel calmer and in control by:

- re-establishing a routine. Structure the day with regular times for eating, sleeping and spending time with family. Do things that keep your mind occupied – such as reading, watching a movie, cooking or playing with the kids.
- connecting with others. While it may be tempting to withdraw and avoid others after a traumatic event it is important to stay connected to life and the people who care about you. Spend time with your loved ones. Connect with other survivors. Do “normal” things that have nothing to do with the trauma you have experienced. Participate in memorials and events, and get involved with support groups such as your local church, community organisation, sports group and friends.
- reminding yourself that you have the strength and coping skills to cope with challenges and tough times. A good way to do this is by helping others by volunteering your time.

Minimise media exposure

While some people gain a sense of control by watching media coverage of the event and recovery effort, others find reminders upsetting. Limit your exposure to the disaster, and don't watch the news just before going to bed. Protect your children from seeing or hearing unnecessary reminders, and after watching coverage talk with your loved ones about the footage and what you are feeling.

Online resources include:

- Beyond Blue – provide a range of resources for people dealing with the effects of Natural Disaster.
- Headspace – a national youth mental health foundation with plenty of resources for young people, parents and carers.
- Reachout – an online mental health service for youth, including tips on how to help friends who are stressed.
- Mindhealth Connect – the Australian Government’s national E-Mental Health Strategy, providing a gateway for issues surrounding mental health care and meeting the needs of individuals, carers and health professionals.

Other bushfire help:

- For more information on the fire situation and support services call 1800 567 567.
- Up-to-date information on the fires is available at www.fire.tas.gov.au
- Information on grants and other support available to those affected by fires can be found at www.dpac.tas.gov.au/bushfires

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