

After a storm or flood: mental health and wellbeing

Community information

It is normal to experience a range of physical, mental, emotional and behavioural reactions following an emergency or distressing event.

It is important people look after their mental health and that of their friends, family and neighbours.

Elderly or isolated people, and those who have a pre-existing mental illness, history of trauma or recent bereavement may need extra support during an emergency.

If you are feeling overwhelmed and finding it difficult to cope, reach out for help from friends and family or contact the services listed below.

If at any time you are worried about your mental health or the mental health of a loved one, call Lifeline 13 11 14 or the Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

Or contact:

- Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 offers free (even from a mobile) 24/7 support by qualified counsellors for young people aged 5 to 25 – also available via webchat and email, visit <https://kidshelpline.com.au/>
- Beyond Blue 1800 512 348 has trained counsellors available to talk to you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on Beyond Blue's phone support line and online chatservice visit <https://coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au/i-need-support-now.html>
- Parentline 13 22 89 is a phone service for parents and carers of children from birth to 18 years old offering confidential and anonymous counselling and support on parenting issues
- Your regular GP or health centre
- Family and friends
- Better Health Channel (betterhealth.vic.gov.au)
- If you are in an emergency, or at immediate risk of harm to yourself or others, please contact emergency services on 000.

The way you react to an emergency, including your mental and emotional response, and the time it takes to recover, depends on many things. This includes the amount of support available, other stressors being experienced, or previous traumatic experiences. Recovery will be complex and unique to your own circumstance.

How to help someone who is struggling from the floods and storms?

If you know someone who is struggling from their experience or impacts due to the floods and storms, it's a good idea to check in on them to see if they are ok. People find it helpful to know that family and friends are thinking of them and talking and providing support can be beneficial.

Conversations around traumatic incidents like storms and flood can feel uncomfortable, but it is important to just let people know you are there for them if they need to talk. It's ok if what you say isn't perfect – just give lots of opportunity for the other person to talk if they want to.

Sometimes, just giving people an opportunity to feel heard and acknowledged is enough to make a big difference.

Most of us have had a time in our life where we have felt sad, guilty, fearful or anxious. Try to remember how you felt in those moments and the things that helped you.

- If the other person wants to talk, it's ok to ask questions about how they feel.
- Be sensitive to the other person's situation and be guided by them as to what is and isn't ok to talk about.
- If the other person doesn't want to talk, try talking about general topics. They may need more time to feel comfortable.
- Sometimes, just trying is the most important thing. You don't even have to talk – a hug, sitting with someone, a cup of tea or dropping a hot meal on their doorstep can mean the world.

Do you need professional help?

People should contact the services listed above if they or someone they know is:

- feeling overwhelmed and are unable to handle their intense feelings or physical sensations
- showing physical stress symptoms
- find that relationships with family and friends are suffering
- using more alcohol or drugs
- being physically or verbally violent
- experiencing other significant changes in their behaviour.

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