

Mental and Emotional Support for People Affected by Bushfires

Information for residents of Wollondilly and Wingecarribee Shires

It is normal to have strong emotional and/or physical reactions following a distressing event, including natural disasters, such as bushfiresⁱ. These reactions may be experienced if you were directly or indirectly exposed.

Almost everyone who experiences a distressing event will be emotionally affected, but not everyone will respond in the same wayⁱⁱ.

Possible reactions to traumatic events include:

- Feeling stressed, anxious, exhausted or confused
- Feeling sad, overwhelmed or angry
- Shock, feeling 'numb'
- Uncertainty about the future
- Feeling lonely, isolated or withdrawn
- Feeling unwell – headaches, difficulty sleeping, eating, weight loss/gain
- Resentment or blaming others
- Increased substance use
- Thoughts of suicide or self-harmⁱⁱⁱ

For most, these reactions subside over a few days or weeks.

When to seek help:

If distress lasts longer than one month, it is a good idea to seek the support of a health professional. Talking to your GP about how you are feeling is a good place to start.

Only some people who are distressed after a traumatic event will develop a mental illness such as Post Traumatic Distress Disorder (PTSD), Depression or Anxiety.

Self-help strategies:

- Find a safe place to stay
- Talk to someone you trust
- Know that how you are feeling is normal result of a traumatic event
- Give yourself time, know that the way you are feeling will not last
- Make time for relaxation
- Exercise and eat regular, well-balanced meals
- Restrict stimulants such as tea, coffee, chocolate, soft-drinks and cigarettes
- Avoid drugs and alcohol
- Try to get back to your normal routine as soon as possible

Supporting someone you know:

- Don't pressure the person into talking
- Be a good listener
- Be patient
- Provide practical support e.g. offer to watch children, pets, do the weekly shopping
- Encourage the person to take care of themselves and do things they enjoy
- Take care of yourself

More Information about trauma and recovering after a natural disaster:

Lifeline <https://www.lifeline.org.au/get-help/topics/recovering-after-a-natural-disaster>

Phoenix Australia: <https://www.phoenixaustralia.org/recovery/fact-sheets-and-booklets/>

This Way Up: <https://thiswayup.org.au/how-do-you-feel/traumatised/>

SANE: <https://www.sane.org/information-stories/the-sane-blog/managing-symptoms/tips-for-coping-with-the-effects-of-trauma>

FREE local support for mental and emotional health:

Residents of Wollondilly and Wingecarribee who have been affected by the Green Wattle Creek bushfire are encouraged to contact **Community Links Wellbeing**:

Phone: [\(02\) 4683 2776](tel:(02)46832776) (head office), from Monday, 6 January 2020

Website: <https://www.communitylinks.org.au/>

Alternatively, NewAccess provides free mental health coaching over the phone or face-to-face to anyone struggling to cope with the day-to-day pressures that are affecting their life.

Phone: [1800 010 630](tel:1800010630) (business hours, Monday to Friday, from Monday, 6 January 2020)

Website: <https://www.boltonclarke.com.au/additional-services/newaccess/>

Helplines

Lifeline: Call [13 11 14](tel:131114) (24/7) OR text [0477 13 11 14](tel:0477131114) (6pm – 12am, 7 days)

Kids Helpline (for children and young people 5-25 years): [1800 55 1800](tel:1800551800) (24/7) OR chat [online](#)

Beyond Blue Support Service: [1300 22 4636](tel:1300224636) (24/7) OR chat [online](#)

MensLine Australia: [1300 78 99 78](tel:1300789978) (24/7) OR chat [online](#)

GriefLine: [1300 845 745](tel:1300845745) (12pm to 3am, 7 days)

Counselling Online (Drug and Alcohol Counselling): [1800 422 599](tel:1800422599) (24/7)

Online Resources

Health to Health: <https://headtohealth.gov.au/>

Recovery Point: <https://recoverypoint.org.au/>

MindSpot: <https://mindspot.org.au/>

Mental Health Online: <https://www.mentalhealthonline.org.au/>

This Way Up: <https://thiswayup.org.au/>

PTSD Coach Australia App (free download)

If there is an immediate risk to your safety, or to the safety of others, please call triple zero (000) or go to the emergency department of your local hospital.

ⁱ Victoria State Government, Better Health Channel, Trauma – Reaction and Recovery

ⁱⁱ Phoenix Australia, Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health – What is Trauma

ⁱⁱⁱ Lifeline, Recovering After a Natural Disaster