

Looking after yourself following a disaster

Te Whatu Ora recognises the significant impact that has come as a result of Cyclone Gabrielle. By nature, healthcare workers are empathetic people who prioritise the needs of other over their own. You may find this leaflet helpful if you or you whānau have been affected. It provides information on how you may expect to feel in the days and months ahead and provide guidance on what may help.

NORMAL RESPONSES TO TRAUMA

We all react differently to significant events. What may be distressing for one person may not be for someone else. Reactions to traumatic events can include a variety of response, signs, or symptoms, which may include:

- Exhaustion
- Feeling on guard
- Sadness
- Helpless
- Anxiety, including fear and worry
- Agitation
- Numbness
- Disconnected
- Guilt/Hopeless
- Confusion.



BURNOUT

It is also important to take care of ours as healthcare workers and be mindful of the signs of burnout. This may include:

- Feeling depleted
- A sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment
- Negative emotions towards one's job
- Disconnected from daily activities
- Less tolerant of others

WHAT YOU CAN DO

These symptoms reduce quality of life, and people suffering from stress may notice that work performance or relationships suffer more as a result. You may be able to use some the strategies listed here.

1. **Give yourself time to adjust.** Understand that these symptoms are normal following significant events. Allow yourself to mourn the losses you have experienced and try to be patient with changes in your emotional state.
2. **Engage in healthy behaviours to enhance your ability to cope with excessive stress.** Eat well-balanced meals and get plenty of rest. If you experience ongoing difficulties with sleep, you may be able to find some relief through relaxation techniques.
3. Learn **calming techniques** such as controlled breathing and progressive muscle relaxation, to train your mind and body to become more relaxed. These techniques require practice but can be helpful with regular use.
 - a. Smiling mind has a useful free mindfulness-based app:
<https://www.smilingmind.com.au/smiling-mind-app>
4. Recognise that you cannot control everything. **Focus on what you can control** e.g., scheduling to have at least a short lunch break each day, or to go to bed earlier so that you have more energy to cope with the daytime.
5. **Take time out.** Social support is a key component to disaster recovery. Family and friends can be an important resource. Most of us know that this is important but we do not all do it.

If you find it hard to make time for this, perhaps you need to take deliberate steps to have time out, such as set aside one evening a week where you meet up with friends.

6. **Limit your consumption of news.** We live in a society where the news is available to us 24 hours a day. The constant replay of news stories about a disaster can increase stress and anxiety and make some people relive the event. Reduce the amount of news you watch and/or listen to, and engage in relaxing activities.
7. **Establish and maintain a routine.** This could include: regular meal times, scheduling sleep and physical activity, including a positive/fun activity into your day.

WHEN TO SEEK HELP

Once initial reactions subside, people can experience a variety of persistent thoughts, feelings, and behaviours which may benefit from further support. These include:

- **Changes to thoughts and behaviour patterns.** You might have repeated and vivid memories of the event. These memories may occur for no apparent reason and may lead to physical reactions such as rapid heartbeat or sweating. It may be difficult to concentrate or make decisions. Sleep and eating patterns also can be disrupted.
- **Sensitivity to environmental factors.** Sirens, loud noises, or other environmental sensations may stimulate memories of the disaster creating heightened anxiety. These “triggers” may be accompanied by fears that the stressful event will be repeated.
- **Strained interpersonal relationships.** Increased conflict, such as more frequent disagreements with family members and co-workers, can occur. You might also become withdrawn, isolated, or disengaged from your usual social activities.
- **Stress-related physical symptoms.** Headaches, nausea, and chest pain may occur and could require medical attention. Pre-existing medical conditions could be affected by disaster-related stress.
- **Intense or unpredictable feelings.** You may be anxious, nervous, overwhelmed, or grief-stricken. You may also feel more irritable or moody than usual.
- **Symptoms of avoidance.** These may include excessive use of alcohol or use of drugs, staying away from activities, places, thoughts, or feelings related to the trauma or feeling detached or estranged from others.

WHO TO CONTACT

If you are struggling during this time please contact a health professional who can help manage the emotional reactions to the changes you have experienced. Helpful contacts are shown below.

- EAP – 0800 327 669
- Mental Health Foundation - www.mentalhealth.org.nz
- Free call or text 1737 any time for support from a trained counsellor
- Lifeline – 0800 543 354 (0800 LIFELINE) or free text 4357 (HELP)
- Healthline – 0800 611 116
- Youth line – 0800 376 633, free text 234 or email talk@youthline.co.nz or online chat
- Samaritans – 0800 726 666
- Suicide Crisis Helpline – 0508 828 865 (0508 TAUTOKO)



**PRACTICE
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