

# COPING WITH THE IMPACT OF BUSHFIRE

## Rural Adversity Mental Health Program

R A M H P . C O M . A U

### Normal responses to a bushfire

It is normal for individuals and communities impacted by the bushfires to feel frightened and emotional.

During and following a bushfire it is very common for people to:

- Feel stressed
- Experience memories of the fire
- Feel anxious as the body goes into 'fight' or 'flight' mode in response to keeping themselves safe
- Experience sadness, anger or guilt that they couldn't do more
- Have difficulty sleeping

### Self-care strategies

#### DURING A BUSHFIRE

- eat well and limit alcohol
- take a break when you can and prioritise sleep
- try to spend time with family, friends and don't isolate yourself
- try to get back to a routine but don't push yourself and work too hard
- limit the amount of media coverage and social media you see and hear
- know that you won't have all the answers
- accept that it is ok to not be ok & ask for support

#### FOLLOWING A BUSHFIRE

- spend time with family and friends
- take time out but don't isolate yourself
- accept help when its offered
- understand you are not alone in your experience
- write down your worries and concerns
- express your feelings in your own time and way
- know you won't have all the answers
- try not to take big risks or make life changing decisions until you are ready

### When to get help

While it's normal to be distressed or upset by what has happened and the losses which have occurred, you should see a mental health professional for assistance if you are experiencing:

- extreme feelings of distress
- emotional reactions that are lasting longer than a few weeks
- distress that is interfering with your ability to carry out day-to-day activities
- withdrawal from usual relationships or avoiding pleasurable activities
- feelings of overwhelming fear for no apparent reason
- panic symptoms (e.g. racing heart, lightheaded, breathing difficulties)
- avoiding things that bring back memories, so much that you can't carry out your normal activities
- feelings of excessive guilt
- using alcohol or other substances to cope
- a loss of interest in the future
- thoughts of self-harm or suicide

# Where to get help

**If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call 000 or go to your nearest hospital emergency department.**

- **General practitioners (GPs)** for advice, treatment, Mental Health Treatment Plan or referral
- **Specialised mental health clinicians & services**, such as psychologists, social workers, mental health nurses or psychiatrists (can be referred by a GP)
- **Online counselling & information services**  
beyondblue.org.au  
redcross.org.au  
phoenixaustralia.org  
kidshelpline.com.au  
headspace.org.au  
disasterassist.gov.au
- **Telephone support services**  
NSW Mental Health Line 1800 011 511  
Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800  
Suicide Callback Service 1300 659 467  
Beyond Blue Support Service 1300 224 636  
Lifeline 13 11 14  
MensLine 1300 78 99 78
- **Free face-to-face support**  
North Coast - Connect to Wellbeing 1300 160 339  
Hunter / New England - Healthwise 1800 931 540

RAMHP.COM.AU



**ramhp**  
RURAL ADVERSITY  
MENTAL HEALTH  
PROGRAM

**Contact your local RAMHP Coordinator** at ramhp.com.au. They are not clinicians but they can listen, provide support and help connect people to services in their local area.

**Online support** - for more information and support with the bushfires go to [crrmh.com.au/programs-and-projects/bushfire-support/](http://crrmh.com.au/programs-and-projects/bushfire-support/)

For more information and resources about **supporting children** during and following a bushfire, go to [emergingminds.com.au](http://emergingminds.com.au)

## Other useful links

Head to your local Evacuation Centre. Find out what Evacuation Centres and Disaster Welfare Points are open here - [emergency.nsw.gov.au/Pages/for-the-community/disaster-assistance/disaster-assistance.aspx](http://emergency.nsw.gov.au/Pages/for-the-community/disaster-assistance/disaster-assistance.aspx)

If you have been directly impacted by the bushfires please register for assistance with the **Disaster Welfare Assistance Line** which is staffed with counselling support and open 7 days from 8:30am - 4:30pm on 1800 018 444

Fire affected landholders requiring emergency fodder are being urged to call the **Agricultural and Animal Services Hotline** on 1800 814 647

The Salvation Army offers services and assistance to help people who have been impacted by disasters including financial assistance, emotional support and referrals. Contact the **Salvation Army Disasters Assistance team** - email [sal.disasters@salvationarmy.org.au](mailto:sal.disasters@salvationarmy.org.au) or call 1300 662 217