

AUSTRALIAN BUSHFIRES

Self-care tips for leaders



Self-care for leaders to manage stress

In disaster and other high stress situations, leaders should remember to use self-care strategies to manage their own stress.

Disasters and other high stress situations require special measures for leaders, managers and supervisors to manage their own stress. Leadership is paramount in maintaining organised, efficient work for continuity of efforts and recovery.

When responding to large-scale disasters, it is important for leaders to be aware of their own levels of stress and to take appropriate measures for self-care. In order to take care of others, leaders must first take care of themselves. It can be difficult to predict the kinds of psychological issues that any individual leader will experience, however, the following management plan can help reduce the impacts on mental health and wellbeing.

- It is important to lead by example in demonstrating how to reduce the impact of stress.
- Establish a work-rest schedule for yourself and ensure you follow it.
- When taking breaks, sit down to rest in a comfortable space.
- Provide a rest area for yourself with water and food. If possible, try to keep away from news media and onlookers.
- Ensure a minimum of 4 hours sleep during each 24-hour period.
- If possible, return home to eat and sleep.
- Drink and eat on a regular schedule – take every opportunity to assure that you are hydrated.
- Drink BEFORE you are thirsty.
- Avoid all beverages containing alcohol.
- Avoid smoking.
- Caffeine is the only safe stimulant, but do not forget that it can increase nerves and dehydrate you.
- When you notice that others are stressed, check in with yourself to see whether you are also stressed.
- Identify a trusted colleague who can evaluate your level of effectiveness, and consult with them on a daily basis.



- Provide a similar service to a colleague who trusts you.
- Communicate clearly in an optimistic manner but be sure to identify mistakes clearly for yourself and others and correct them.
- Compliments can serve as powerful motivators and assist in moderating stress.

Adapted with permission from the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress

If anxiety, depression, sleep difficulties or irritability persist for more than two weeks after your return home, you should talk to your GP. For immediate assistance and/or 24-hour counselling and referrals, see details on the right.

Useful services and resources

Lifeline - for immediate assistance
13 11 14

Australian Psychological Society - find a psychologist
1800 333 497

Beyond Blue
1300 224 636