

DISASTER

# Practitioner tips



**Phoenix**  
AUSTRALIA

## Looking after yourself following a natural disaster

Potentially traumatic events involve situations that are either life-threatening or have the potential for serious injury, such as a natural disaster or a serious accident. Queensland communities can be exposed to a range of natural disasters including cyclones, hail storms, storm clusters, flooding and bushfires.

People who are working to support those experiencing distress, fear, anger or agitation following a disaster, may start to feel the effects of burnout over time. If you are working with disaster-affected individuals, it's important to also look after yourself. This fact sheet will provide you with some self-care strategies that you can use.

### What you may be experiencing and when to seek help

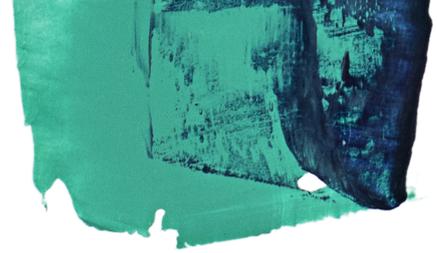
#### The impacts of burnout

The impacts of burnout can include:

- feeling on guard, having difficulty calming down or falling asleep
- feeling overwhelmed or exhausted
- not looking after yourself as well as you usually do
- socialising less with friends and family
- feeling cynical or detached from work
- feeling a sense of ineffectiveness or lack of accomplishment
- increased feelings of anxiety, irritability, anger, or
- numbness.

#### Recognising the need for professional support for yourself

- Following a natural disaster, many people who are in support roles will go through times when they find things difficult or challenging, and it is important to understand the benefits of professional assistance. It is ok to seek support for yourself, and many people find it useful to talk to a professional if they notice that they are experiencing disturbed sleep, withdrawal from family/ friends and/or increased use of substances.
- You may find it useful to talk to someone who is not a friend or family member. Many people find that one or more visits to a counsellor, chaplain, GP or psychologist greatly assists their recovery. Making the decision to access professional assistance if you need it is a wise choice that can often help you to regain emotional strength and resilience. If you've tried these strategies and things still aren't improving after a couple of weeks, or if you are having trouble coping, talk to your GP or mental health professional.



## Looking after yourself

It is important for your health and wellbeing to look after yourself, so that you are able to support others more effectively.

Some self-care tips include:

- Recognise that the work you are doing is stressful, and that you may have a physical and emotional reaction to it. Give yourself permission to have a reaction, but also remember your strengths – even though it's tough, you can deal with it.
- Look after yourself by getting plenty of rest (even if you can't sleep), regular exercise, and by eating regular, well-balanced meals. Physical and mental health are closely linked, so taking care of one will help the other.
- Minimise your intake of alcohol, caffeine or nicotine and avoid the use of non-prescription drugs. Use all prescription and over the counter medications as indicated.
- Make time for relaxation – whether it's listening to music, taking a bath – whatever works for you. It might be helpful to learn a relaxation technique like meditation, yoga, progressive muscle relaxation, or breathing exercises.
- Tackle the things that need to be done a bit at a time and count each success.
- Try to schedule at least one enjoyable activity each day. Try making a timetable for each day, including some exercise and relaxation.
- Try not to bottle up your feelings or block them out. Recurring thoughts, dreams, and flashbacks are unpleasant, but they will decrease with time.
- Spend time with people you care about. Sometimes you will want to be alone, and that's OK too, but try not to become too isolated.
- Talk about your feelings to other people who will understand, if you feel able to do so. Talking things through is part of the natural healing process and will help you to accept what has happened.
- Write about your feelings if you feel unable to talk to others about them.
- Seek professional supervision or peer support at work
- Maintain strong boundaries at work. Recognise your limits – we all have them. In fact staying within your limits supports your wellbeing and makes you feel more effective at work.

## Additional Services

For more mental health support and information resources, please visit, [www.phoenixaustralia.org/find-help/](http://www.phoenixaustralia.org/find-help/)

For urgent support, call Lifeline on 13 11 14