

Tips for coping after a natural disaster

It's normal to feel anxious about your safety, and that of your family and whanau, especially if you are living in an affected area. And it's normal to feel jumpy and scared, or worried about work.

All of us have different needs and different ways of coping. Acknowledging our feelings can really help us get back on track.

Here are some simple tips:

How adults can help children

- Talk to children and teenagers about their feelings and how they are affected.
- Use simple honest answers.
- Be prepared to discuss the same details many times.
- Ensure that they realise they are not to blame for what has happened.
- Let them know that adults also don't always understand why things happen.
- Do your best to be supportive, loving and predictable.
- Encourage them to engage in physical play and exercise.

Take care of yourself

- People have different ways of expressing their feelings after an event like this. Some may prefer to say very little and quietly focus on practical tasks whereas others may want to talk more. Act in the way that you feel more comfortable with but do reach out to others in your support network.
- Stay connected and reach out to others: your family, friends, neighbours and co-workers. Talk about your thoughts and feelings.
- Maintain balance in your life between your personal needs, your work and your family obligations. Manage your commitments even as you return to a normal routine. It's ok to say no sometimes.
- Eat sensibly; a balanced diet of healthy foods rich in nutrition serves as a natural defence against stress.
- Be as physically active as you can.

- Use relaxation techniques. Set aside time for a regular routine of deep breathing or other stress reduction methods to alleviate your feelings of anxiety.
- Maintain a daily routine as much as possible including regular sleep patterns.
- Find something constructive to do. Look out for others. Sometimes it pays to forget our own troubles for a while. All the 'what ifs' may be exhausting. Try and achieve little things that help to keep you positive.
- Laugh when you can. Reflect on the good things in life.
- Be patient with yourself. Know that you will recover balance and peacefulness at your own pace.

Physical reaction to natural disasters

Our brains release adrenaline in stressful situations. It can cause you to feel shaky, queasy, on-edge and make it hard to concentrate. This is known as the flight or fight response; it's your body telling you to be alert and ready for action.

- Try to keep a normal routine
- Take slow, measured breaths through your nose
- Remember, feeling fearful is to be expected

On your own?

No you're not! Sometimes it's hard to reach out to people around you. Think about ringing a community group for a chat, catch up with your neighbour, listen to the radio, or ring your family.

Maybe you can offer help to others.

Helplines

Visit the Mental Health Foundation's website (www.mentalhealth.org.nz) for a list of helplines you can contact for support. Here's a few:

- 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
- Youthline – 0800 376 633, free text 234 or email talk@youthline.co.nz or online chat

The [All Right? campaign](#) also have a range of articles for supporting people after a disaster.

See <https://allright.org.nz/theme/mind-your-head/disaster-support/>