

- Disaster risk reduction management awareness/preparedness

## Keep an eye on mental health after disaster

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Mass natural disasters such as the impact of a cyclone can have lingering effects on our lives well after the cyclone has blown past.

Initially people are on high alert, adrenalin pumping through their bodies, ready for the impending cyclone. Not only is the trauma of experiencing a cyclone stressful enough, but the aftermath is equally anxiety provoking, lasting days, weeks and even months.

It's normal to feel intense emotion after a cyclone; anything from feeling sad, anxious, shocked, numb, irritable and everything in between is a normal reaction.

It's your mind's way of processing the situation. Allow yourself to feel the way you do, this is helpful for your recovery.

Take these four steps to keep yourself mentally well after experiencing a natural disaster.

### 1. Look after your body

A healthy body promotes a healthy mind.

Eat as well as you can, making sure you don't skip meals.

Keep active, whether it's cleaning up, going for a walk or any physical activity; moving helps to clear our minds.

Try to keep a sleep routine, going to bed and waking up at the same time helps to make us feel in control, relieving anxiety.

### 2. Take time out

Several times during the day, switch off from social media, especially photos of the devastation.

Keep informed of updated news and developments rather than focusing on the rebroadcasting of the devastation; this will only fuel anxious thoughts.

Following the aftermath of a cyclone, you may easily feel overwhelmed with tasks, try to break these down into manageable parts, focusing on one section at a time. Accepting support from others can also alleviate the load.

### 3. Connect with others Learn what local resources and support are available and make use of them.

Share your thoughts and concerns with others and listen to others sharing their experience of the cyclone.

This can be helpful in the sense that it helps "normalise the situation" that you are not alone in this, others are also experiencing what you are feeling.

Don't feel pressured to talk about the event straight away, talk about it when you feel ready and to someone you feel comfortable with. It might be that you won't need to talk about it at all; some people process traumatic experiences differently to others. There is no right or wrong way, we react differently and therefore, heal in our own individual way.

### 4. Keep a check on your mate

Remembering that all sorts of reactions are normal after witnessing a significant disaster. Some might feel exhausted and overwhelmed while others may have minimal reaction.

Displacement of friends and family and feeling powerless to help when there is no communication is extremely stressful. You can help by providing practical help and by offering emotional support by listening to their concerns.

Know that there can be a delayed reaction or slowed recovery following a traumatic event, so keep checking in after a few days and weeks.

Cyclones can bring a big blow to our mental health. Major stressful events can trigger memories of past traumatic experiences and exacerbate existing mental health conditions. People suffering from anxiety

and depression are at greater risk of developing post traumatic stress disorder.

Not everyone experiences distress, however. Most recover without help. Symptoms gradually go away after a few days or weeks, but if they persist and start to affect your day-to-day life, seek the help of a professional.

Your GP is the best place to start to get the help you need.

Chantal Bachere Crinquand is a mental health academic and mental health nurse at the WA Centre for Rural Health, Geraldton.