

# 10-year anniversary of the 2009 Victorian bushfires

Recovering from long-term trauma  
Accessible version

10 YEAR  
ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE  
2009 VICTORIAN  
BUSHFIRES



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## Recovering from long-term trauma

- what to expect
- when to seek help
- contacts

## Traumatic events affect the whole of people's lives

Everyone copes and recovers differently.

Recovery time depends on what happened in the first place, the amount of available support, other stresses experienced in the person's life, personality traits, and whether the person has had other traumatic experiences.

In the aftermath of any traumatic event, people may experience strong emotional or physical reactions. These feelings are normal and on most occasions, will subside within a few weeks as part of the body's natural healing and recovery process.

Anniversaries and other events which remind us of the initial traumatic event can also bring up all of the same strong feelings of grief, trauma, guilt and loss. Again, this is normal, and usually, these feelings will naturally subside within a few weeks.



Health  
and Human  
Services

# Recovering from trauma

Any event that includes loss, danger and fear results in the body going into a state of heightened arousal. This 'emergency-mode' gives people access to a lot of energy in a short period of time to maximise the chance of survival.

Being in emergency-mode uses a lot of energy and people often feel deep exhaustion afterwards.

There are strategies you can use to cope. These include:

- accept that you have had a distressing or frightening experience
- rest
- exercise
- talk with friends, family and other community members.

You can find coping strategies at the [Better Health Channel](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) <www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au>.

It's important to remember everyone's journey through recovery is different and, for many, recovery remains an ongoing challenge.

For some people, emergency-mode does not switch off. To cope, they try to control their reactions through avoidance or closing off their feelings. This does not help the underlying problem and in time it can make it worse.

## Do I need help?

People should seek professional help if they or someone they know is:

- feeling overwhelmed and are unable to handle their intense feelings or physical sensations
- showing physical stress symptoms
- re-experiencing vivid flashbacks of the event
- find that relationships with family and friends are suffering
- becoming accident-prone
- using more alcohol or drugs
- being physically or emotionally violent
- experiencing other significant changes in their behaviour.

If you, or someone you know is finding this time difficult, it's important to remember you are not alone. There are many places you can go to for advice or help, including your local doctor, mental health support services, and online.

# Where to get help

- family and friends
- Your GP
- A mental health specialist, such as a psychiatrist, psychologist or social worker, with experience in treatment of PTSD if required
- Your community health centre
- Beyond the bushfires counselling: 1300 514 811  
www.beyondthebushfires.com.au
- The Australian Centre for Post-Traumatic Mental Health (03) 9035 5599

## General telephone counselling services

- Lifeline 13 11 14
- GriefLine 1300 845 745
- BeyondBlue 1300 224 636
- Beyond The Bushfires 1300 514 811

## Online resources

- [Better Health Channel](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)  
<www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au>
- [Sane](http://www.sane.org) <www.sane.org>

## Family violence

- If you are in immediate danger, call 000.
- National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling service on 1800 737 732 (1800 RESPECT).

To receive this publication in an accessible format, [email Emergency Management Communications](mailto:em.comms@dhhs.vic.gov.au) <em.comms@dhhs.vic.gov.au>

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