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how to help a friend who has been impacted by a natural disaster

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If your friend needs urgent help contact 000

Has your friend been involved in a natural disaster?

Life changes for everyone during and after a natural disaster and we can all react and cope differently. If you know a friend who has been impacted by the bushfires, there are lots of things you can do to help, even if you have been impacted too.

How we are affected isn't always determined by how close we are to the disaster or ,
happened. Being exposed to media coverage, the stories of others, and the larger impact of the

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disaster on the community and the environment can be distressing and affect us even when we haven't been directly affected. That's why it can help to take a break from news and social media coverage.

Natural disasters can have a strong impact on all of us. When a friend's life has been impacted by a natural disaster, it can be hard to know what to do or say. It can also be complicated because natural disasters typically affect a lot of people, in many different ways. So if you live near your friend, it is quite likely that your life may have been impacted by it in some way too. When you have both been impacted, or a lot of your friends have been impacted, it is important to find a balance between being there for your friend/s and looking after yourself too. There are lots of things you can do to support your friend following a natural disaster.

The following covers information about common reactions to a natural disaster, how to support a friend who has been affected by a natural disaster, and how to look after yourself when you have been affected too.

What might your friend be going through?



Things you might notice in your friend



Supporting a friend after a natural disaster



What can I say to help my friend after a natural disaster?

It's important to encourage your friend to get further help. You can say things like:

- **"Have you talked to anyone else about this?"** It's great you've talked to me, but it might be good to get advice and support from a health worker. There's no right way to feel or respond. It's OK to feel how you're feeling" Statements like this can help your friend to feel listened to and that their experience is OK or valid. Try not to dismiss what your friend might be saying.
- **"You don't have to talk about it** (e.g., the bushfires) if you don't want to, but if you do, I'm here for you. It might be that you might just want to hang out or have someone around and that's fine." Never push someone to talk about a traumatic event. This can be harmful.
- **"I know you're not feeling great now,** but with the right support, you can get through this."
- **"Sometimes I feel pretty overwhelmed too.** It would be great for you to find an adult you trust who can help you with this stuff more than I can"
- **"There are some great websites** you can check out to get more information. Have you heard of [headspace](#) or [ReachOut](#) or [Beyond Blue - Issues for young people](#)?"
- **"Did you know that you can get free and confidential support online or over the phone** from places like [ehheadspace](#), [Kids Helpline](#) and [Lifeline](#)? All of these services are anonymous and can help you figure out what's going on for you and where to go for the right support."

What if your friend doesn't want any help?

Your friend may need time and space before they want to get help, or they might not feel they need any help. You may need to be patient with your friend and try to not judge them or get frustrated if you can't get through to them at first. Give them time. It might be that they just need some time to process things.

How do I support a friend if I've been impacted by trauma too? ▾

[download our fact sheet for more information](#)

When should I get help for my friend?

It is pretty normal to experience very strong emotions after a traumatic event like a natural disaster. They will normally lessen at around 6 weeks. If your friend is still noticing big changes in their emotions or is

finding it hard to do usual daily activities after this time, it is a good idea to let someone know. This isn't the wrong thing to do, although it can be difficult because you might feel like your friend won't open up to you again. If you decide to tell someone, try to let your friend know that you're planning on doing this first and encourage them to get involved in the discussion.

If you think your friend is at risk of harming themselves or somebody else, you need to seek help straight away, even if they ask you not to. [If your friend needs urgent help](#) you can call 000. You could also ask someone you trust, like a parent or teacher for help. There's a chance your friend might not be happy about this at first, but remind them it's only because you care about them. In the long run, they'll usually understand why you got someone else involved.

For more information, to find your nearest [headspace centre](#) or for online and telephone support, visit [ehespace](#).

The headspace Clinical Reference Group oversee and approve clinical resources made available on this website.

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Get professional support

If you feel you need help there are a range of ways we can support you.

[Mental health online support](#)



[Work & study support](#)



[Find a headspace centre](#)



[Emergency assistance](#)



You might also be interested in

how to cope with the stress of natural disasters

This information is for young people affected by a natural disaster such as a flood, bushfire, earthquake or cyclone.

supporting a young person after a natural disaster

Information for family and friends supporting young people affected by a natural disaster

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