



## Dealing with Tragedy

When terrible tragedies like the bushfires in Victoria and NSW or the floods in Queensland occur, the effects can be far reaching.

Many people are directly impacted through loss of loved ones, homes or possessions, whilst many others can be distressed by the news that friends or colleagues have been killed or seriously injured.

IPS Worldwide wants you to know that the Employee Assistance Program is there to assist any employee or your family members through this time and that there are many avenues for you to get assistance - the 24/7 CrisisLine for individual crisis counselling, the TraumaAssist line to report a trauma or to organise an on-site trauma intervention, or you can simply call to make a face to face appointment to see a counsellor about how you are feeling.

To access any of these services you simply call **1800 451 138** (24 hours a day). This is a free, professional and confidential counselling service available to you and your family.

If any manager is concerned about an employee or needs advice about managing a situation in their team they can also call the Manager HelpLine™ (24/7 on the same number).

Below are some helpful hints for getting through this tragedy. They relate to those directly impacted but also those who are peripherally affected. Some people may be having flashbacks to previous traumatic incidents in which they were involved as a result of seeing the graphic vision on television or just remembering previous traumas.

- Stress can cause a range of reactions in people - often emotional feelings that are unusual for them - but this is absolutely normal. Always remember that you are a normal person, experiencing a normal reaction to a highly ABNORMAL event! Your reactions are more extreme because the event is extreme.

The good news is it will go away soon!

- People may be more emotional, teary or sensitive than usual. Others may seem more aggressive, angry or withdrawn.
- Be tolerant! Cut them a bit of slack and realise that this may be their way of expressing how they feel.

- Crying is often part of the healing process - just because someone is crying or upset it doesn't mean that they are "broken" or falling apart, so comfort them but don't stress about it or try to shut them down.
- Be respectful of people's grieving styles - different people express grief quite differently. These may be culturally based or religiously driven.
- Be aware that men and women often express grief and stress differently - just because someone doesn't show outward emotion it doesn't mean that they are not feeling anything.
- Be aware that people around you may be having thoughts about previous tragedies they have been involved in - perhaps events that you are not even aware of.
- Talk to your friends, family and colleagues as much as you can - this normalises the situation.
- Silences, however, are O.K. too. Give yourself time and space to think through the situation in a calm logical way if you can.
- Don't be afraid to show your emotions in front of your children - just make them feel safe and assure them that you will look after them.
- Getting back into normal routines is important for all of us but even more so for children - this gives us a sense of control and that's important when things seem out of control.
- As much as possible, let children know what is about to happen to them, and then, when it happens, confirm that this is what you had told them. This helps them to feel that the world is at least a little predictable.
- If you have elderly parents they may be feeling particularly vulnerable keep in contact with them and let them know you are there.
- Spend time with people who you care about and who care for you.
- At work, people may lose concentration, make more mistakes or forget to do things because their mind is not on the job at this time - be aware of anyone who is directly impacted by these events who might be working in a safety critical job!

- Talk to people about how you are feeling - the more you talk about it the less stressful it becomes.
- Talk to a professional counsellor if you are concerned about how you are feeling or if the thoughts are persisting (call the EAP for free, confidential, professional counselling).
- Focus on the future - don't dwell on the past.
- Focus on how you WANT to remember people that have been taken away / and try to focus on the "good times" rather than the tragedy of what has occurred.
- Don't allow yourself to dwell on what happened to the person - this just adds to your distress and doesn't help in any way.
- Thinking about how you managed through tragic events in the past and what you did that worked then can be really helpful now.
- Don't allow yourself to get into "blame games" or blame yourself - this doesn't help anyone!
- Don't increase your intake of alcohol, cigarettes, or coffee in comparison to what you would normally have. Alcohol and other drugs can make our reactions more extreme.
- Drink plenty of water - 2 litres a day is good - this cleans out the toxins that stress creates.
- Do more exercise than usual so that you use up the excess adrenalin in your system and try some slow deep breathing (counting slowly whilst you inhale and exhale can help). Be conscious of lowering your heart rate by focusing on your heartbeat while breathing very slowly.
- Rhythmic exercise is very good - swimming, rowing, cycling.
- Eat good, well balanced meals and perhaps take some multi vitamins for a few weeks - your immune system is negatively impacted by stress so you need to counteract this.
- Write your thoughts down in a journal (especially if you have trouble putting them into words) – it is amazing how much this helps the healing process.

- Remember that, although today things seem very black and overwhelming, things will soon get better or at least the strong feelings won't last forever even in the face of permanent loss.
- Remember you are not alone in this and your organisation and the EAP are there to help you through this difficult time
  - reach out if you need anything!

Bruce Parry  
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**To make an appointment or to report a traumatic incident  
please phone IPS Worldwide on 1800 451 138**