



## Info Sheet: Coping after a serious event

Many people in Christchurch and across New Zealand (and even the world) will experience distress such as acute stress reactions and horror following the fatalities in Christchurch - this is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation.

Most people will manage, and the distress will subside over time.

Psychological distress is a normal response to this situation. Distress is not only experienced by people directly impacted, it is also experienced by people witnessing injuries and distress to others.

However, there will be some people that will have more profound reactions, particularly later on some time after the event, and will require assistance.

Sharing video footage or images on social media and irresponsible media reporting can be extremely unhelpful for vulnerable people, not just in New Zealand, but all around the world. It may trigger previous trauma for them, or if they are directly impacted and have had loved ones harmed or killed, may experience a more intense trauma response. Merely viewing this material and discussing it with people who are vulnerable can also be unhelpful.

### How you are feeling

People react in different ways – there is no right or wrong way to feel. You may experience fear, confusion, shock and disbelief, which is a normal reaction to this situation.

Many people in Christchurch and Canterbury may remember previous events such as the Pike River Mine Tragedy, the Christchurch Earthquakes, and Kaikoura Earthquake and feel overwhelmed.

If you are feeling distressed, stay with people you trust, or if others are distressed make sure they are not left alone and try to keep safe until the reaction passes or until you can find help from a professional.

Over time, in days, weeks or even months after an event like this, some people realise the extent of the loss or damage and may respond in other ways:

- emotional reactions - guilt, crying spells, sadness, apathy
- cognitive reactions – nightmares, poor concentration, intrusive thoughts and memories, self-blame, confusion, disorientation, indecisiveness, worry, revenge
- physical reactions – difficulty sleeping, upset stomach, exaggerated startle response, 'jumpy', tension, fatigue, aches and pains, nausea, change in appetite, loss of concentration, breathlessness, shakiness, muscle weakness
- interpersonal reactions – distrust, conflict, withdrawal, irritability, on edge
- anger and blame is common and some may become angry at God or other deities or groups.
- children may show similar reactions as well as become clingy or angry. They may appear to return to regress to earlier younger behaviour.

## Keep Yourself and Children and Young People Safe

Protect yourself and especially children and young people, as well as our elderly, from being exposed to any shocking images on TV or social media, like any footage from the event or even following the event (e.g. injured people). Even hearing stories about the event can upset children young people or vulnerable adults so be careful around any discussions that young children can overhear.

If children are already aware of what happened, simple explanations can help them. Reassurance of their safety is also important. Answer any of their questions as honestly and generally as you can but without any distressing details. Be aware that some young people may have different levels of exposure to media material and talk about the situation. As caregivers it is important that you are aware of what your child or young person is exposed to best help them through this time.

## If you are helping others, look after yourself

Helping responsibly also means taking care of your own wellbeing.

As a helper, you may be affected by what you experience in a crisis situation, or you or your family may be directly affected by the event. It is important to pay extra attention to your own wellbeing and be sure that you are physically and emotionally able to help others.

Take care of yourself so that you can best care for others. If working in a team, be aware of the wellbeing of your fellow helpers as well.<sup>1</sup>

## Positive ways of coping

At times like this we have an enhanced appreciation that family and friends are precious and important, so spend time with them. Some helpful tips...

- Connect with friends and whanau: Face to face connections are best, but even picking up the phone or making a video call can help.
- Look after your health and the health of your family: get adequate sleep, eat healthy meals and avoid alcohol or other drugs.
- Encourage children or young people to talk to you or use drawings to express their feelings.
- Return to your normal daily routines and activities as much as possible, particularly for children.
- Take time out: schedule tension and anxiety-reducing activities into your day, such as going for a walk, listening to music, praying, meditating or breathing exercises.
- For more advice, visit the online wellbeing websites and support provided this factsheet.

## When to ask for extra help

For some people, trauma and stress can be ongoing and affect their physical and mental health and wellbeing. It's important to ask for help if you:

- are not getting enough sleep, or are having difficulty falling or staying asleep
- feel very distressed, irritable, on edge, panicky, experience angry outbursts or are agitated much of the time
- feel hopeless, in despair, miserable or that you can't go on
- have trouble concentrating, are distracted and cannot do your usual tasks
- feel your health is not so good
- have new symptoms.

For children, withdrawal, aggressive behaviours, difficulties at school, problems separating from parents or going to sleep may indicate the need for help if these behaviours continue for more than a couple of weeks.

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organisation, 2011. *Psychological First Aid: Guide for Fieldworkers*. World Health Organisation  
[https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/44615/9789241548205\\_eng.pdf;jsessionid=82C5EA151FC70877BDCB1E5953EFA10C?sequence=1](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/44615/9789241548205_eng.pdf;jsessionid=82C5EA151FC70877BDCB1E5953EFA10C?sequence=1)



## Where to get help for wellbeing

You can text or freephone 1737, New Zealand's free support service with qualified and confidential counsellors. Let them know what's going on for you or the person you are concerned about, and they can support you.

**NEED TO TALK?**












**free call or text  
any time**

## Other free helplines

- Youthline** 0800 376 633, free text 234, webchat at [www.youthline.co.nz](http://www.youthline.co.nz) (7pm – 11pm)
- What's UP** 0800 942 8787 - Advice & counselling support for 5-18-year old's; 1pm to 11pm.
- Kidsline** 0800 54 37 54 (0800 KIDSLINE) - Advice & counselling support up to 14 years; 4pm to 6pm weekdays.
- Youth Law** 0800 884529 (0800 UTHLAW) - Free legal help for children and young people.
- OUTLine NZ** 0800 688 5463 - Support for sexuality or gender identity issues.
- Safe to talk** txt 4334 or online chat to someone - Confidential advice for sexual harm issues.
- Samaritans** 0800 726 666 - Counselling advice and support.
- Healthline** 0800 611 116 - General health advice and information from a registered nurse.
- Lifeline** 0800 543 354 or Text 'Help' to 4357 - Counselling advice and support.

## Free online tools & info

Click on the logo to link to the website.

 <p><b>Education &amp; support to look after your mental health, with free web-chat 24/7.</b></p>	 <p><b>For when life sux, Aunty Dee can help you solve your problems.</b></p>	 <p><b>Locally led info for mental wellbeing of Cantabrians.</b></p>
 <p><b>Online community &amp; support for young people.</b></p>	 <p><b>Information &amp; resources to support mental health.</b></p>	 <p><b>Support and advice for managing online safety.</b></p>
 <p><b>Culturally based tools to support Pacific young people to unleash their full potential.</b></p>	 <p><b>Support for young people experiencing depression or anxiety.</b></p>	 <p><b>A step-by-step approach for working through anxiety &amp; depression.</b></p>

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