

Looking after your mental wellbeing after a natural disaster



Feeling all sorts of stuff at the moment?

Right now, you may be dealing with the aftermath of Cyclone Gabrielle and other severe weather events. Maybe you've had to make big changes to your day-to-day personal and work life. You might be working tirelessly to help your whānau and community get back on track.

This can be a heavy burden to carry on your shoulders. If you're feeling overwhelmed, angry, frustrated, anxious, tired, or something else entirely, we hear you. These are all very normal and human responses to a difficult situation. But even when times are incredibly tough, there are all sorts of small things we can do which can, over time, help us boost our wellbeing.

Simple tips to help you cope and feel better

When you're cleaning up the mess after a natural disaster, it's easy to neglect your wellbeing and put everyone's needs ahead of your own. But to look after your loved ones and your community, you also have to take care of yourself. There are things we know can make a big difference to our wellbeing. Here are some no-nonsense tips and tools you can add into your routine, no matter how busy you are.

1. Recognise what you're feeling right now

After a traumatic event like a natural disaster, your brain might try to keep you safe by scanning the environment for more threats. This can make you feel anxious, overwhelmed, or on edge. Try not to fight your emotions – they are a normal part of the recovery process.



2. Take it one day at a time

When times are hard, it's easy to feel overwhelmed by what was lost and the uncertainty ahead. Taking things day by day, or even hour by hour, is all good right now.

3. Have a kōrero with friends and whānau

Share your thoughts with whānau, friends, neighbours, and others in the community who are going through a similar experience. There's a reason why people often say: "A problem shared is a problem halved".

4. Focus on what you can control

Make a list of everything that's weighing on your mind, then split it into two columns – things you can control and influence, and things you can't. Concentrating on the first will help you feel like you're back in the driver's seat again. If you can't do much about a problem right now, try to tweak how you think about it or respond to it emotionally.

5. Build a routine

When some things in your life feel uncertain, it's helpful to make other things as predictable as possible. Find a routine that works for you – going to bed at the same time every night, planning meals, spending time with your kids after dinner, etc.

6. Fill your tank with things you enjoy

With so much going on, doing something for fun might feel like a bit of a luxury. But it's important to make some time for small, everyday joyful things, like a hot cuppa, going fishing, exercising, or listening to music. Rest is also key. Find what works for you, then stick to it as best as you can.

7. Keep up hope

Our brains are very good at making us think that what we're feeling right now is how we will feel in the future, but these challenges will pass. Remember: if you're not feeling great right now, you won't feel like this forever. But it's important to reach out for help if you feel like you can't cope.

If these signs persist over time, you might need extra support:

- Feeling hopeless, worthless, useless.
- Being unusually tired, experiencing low energy levels.
- Changes in behaviour – eating or sleeping way more or less than usual.
- Resorting to drugs, alcohol, gambling.
- Isolating from your loved ones.
- Withdrawing from social events and activities you used to enjoy.
- Physical symptoms without an apparent cause (headaches, stomach aches).

Help is at hand

If you could use some extra support right now, or know someone who you think is struggling, it's okay, there is help available – no one should go through a tough time alone. If you're not sure where to start, you should talk to your GP. They're trained to assess and provide support and know what other services are available in your area.

To help you prevent problems from building up, there are new mental health and addiction services being developed across the country as part of the Access and Choice programme. Visit wellbeingsupport.health.nz to see if there is a service near you.

There are also a number of free helplines available:

Need to talk?

Call or text 1737 any time for support from a trained counsellor.

The Depression Helpline

Call 0800 111 757 or text 4202 to talk through issues with a trained counsellor.

Youthline

Text 234, call 0800 37 66 33, email talk@youthline.co.nz, or go to youthline.co.nz for an online chat.

Alcohol Drug Helpline

Call 0800 787 797 or text 8681 for confidential advice, information or support about drinking or other drug use.

In case of an emergency, call 111.

For more wellbeing tips, resources, and tools, go to allsorts.org.nz.



Free wellbeing apps

You can download wellbeing apps for Android and Apple devices from Google Play and the App Store, including:

Groov

Groov supports people to manage their mental health and wellbeing on a day-to-day basis and at times of increased stress or distress.

Headstrong

Headstrong is the result of a co-design between the University of Auckland research team and young people. Dubbed as a 'personal trainer for the mind', Headstrong's interactive chat function helps rangatahi feel like they're texting with a trusted friend.

Support for farming and rural communities

Farmstrong

Farmstrong is a nationwide wellbeing programme for the rural community, helping you live well to farm well. You can find a range of resources to help you manage stress and pressure on farmstrong.co.nz.

Rural Support Trust

Rural Support Trust (RST) is a nationwide network, run by local people, that helps farming families and rural communities. Call 0800 787 254 (0800 RURAL HELP) to arrange a free and confidential chat at a place that suits you, or visit rural-support.org.nz.