

MEDIA RELEASE



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Recognising normal reactions to a disaster

Clinical Adviser to *beyondblue: the national depression initiative*, Associate Professor Michael Baigent says it's important for people affected by floods to recognise they may experience a range of emotions at different times.

"Of course, it's normal for people who have been affected by the devastating widespread floods to feel overwhelmed - and many will experience emotions including shock, fear, distress, confusion, anger, anxiety, grief and sadness.

"People may also experience strong physical symptoms such as a fast-beating heart, shakiness, insomnia, sweatiness, faintness and nausea.

"However, it's important for people to understand these are normal reactions to a traumatic event and people will manage these feelings in different ways," he said.

"Generally, people will deal with these reactions naturally by talking (to the level they're comfortable with) to their friends and family - which can help enormously. But, not everyone will feel the need to talk, so you shouldn't pressure people to do so, if they don't want to.

"Over time, as people work their way through the difficult tasks of repairing and rebuilding their homes, their communities and their lives, in most cases the severity of these strong emotions will dissipate on their own without treatment.

"However, if the distress and emotional reactions persist when other people seem to be recovering or if you're finding it hard to carry out day-to-day activities when you think you should be able to, speak to a health professional," he said.

To help people deal with the emotional impact of a disaster, *beyondblue* has a free booklet – **Looking after Yourself after a Disaster** – which was developed in association with the Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health, the Australian Red Cross and the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement.

The booklet contains helpful information about the common reactions people may experience in the weeks and months following a disaster. It can be downloaded or ordered from the *beyondblue* website www.beyondblue.org.au or by phoning the *beyondblue* info line 1300 22 4636.

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