



Royal Flying Doctor Service
QUEENSLAND SECTION

Mental health and wellbeing *on the land*



The down-to-earth guide to mental health for people living on the land in regional, rural and remote Queensland.

Why we made this booklet

There's an unspoken understanding that country people are supposed to be resilient. Tough. We weather all the storms; we get up and out there, rain, hail or shine.

But this ignores the fact that we're human and face hard times. We have intense and often conflicting emotions, and sometimes we struggle to get through the day. This affects our health and wellbeing, just like everyone else.

This booklet offers straight-up, no-nonsense tips and strategies from mental health professionals working in the bush.

It is written for you: for Queenslanders who make a living on the land.

Feel free to share it widely. If you'd like more copies, call 1300 010 174.



The Royal Flying Doctor Service respectfully acknowledges and recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands, winds and waters where we live and work. We pay our respect to Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

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All content in this booklet is created and published for informational purposes only. It is not intended to be a substitute for professional advice and should not be relied on as health or personal advice. Always seek the guidance of your doctor or other qualified mental health professional with any questions you may have regarding your health.

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Let's talk about it



What is mental health?

Mental health is the ability to live your daily life in the best way possible, managing the normal stress of everyday life, having good relationships, making choices, working productively and contributing to the community.

It means feeling good and functioning well.

It's normal to feel up and down at various points in our lives, but if you get stuck feeling down for too long, it can cause problems.

It's the same with worry; we all worry sometimes, but if it starts getting in the way of us managing everyday life, it can become a problem, and we might need to take steps to protect our mental health.

Mental health is like physical health

Just like our physical health, we need to proactively look after our mental health. We need to take action every day to stay mentally fit and strong. When a mental injury or illness arises, we need to treat it properly and promptly, so it doesn't get worse.

You're not alone

When we struggle with difficult feelings, too many of us feel we 'should' be able to cope. 'Everyone else manages,' we tell ourselves. We don't want to admit we're struggling, or we don't want to burden others with our problems.

But everyone struggles. In Australia, one in five people will experience a mental health issue in any one year.

In rural and remote regions, it's even harder. There's less access to mental health care. People here are 1.5 times more likely to die from suicide than people in major cities.

That's why it's important to talk about it.

When you need to act

So, if it's normal to struggle, when should you be concerned? These are the signs you could look for:

- continuous negative thoughts such as 'This is too hard, 'I'm no good' or 'I can't do this'
- changes in appetite
- trouble concentrating or poor memory

- feeling numb and distracted
- feeling physically unwell, e.g. unexplained stomach upset, headaches
- sleep disturbances
- changes in mood – anger, irritability, tearful, on edge
- lack of motivation or loss of interest in usual hobbies and pastimes
- increased use of drugs or alcohol
- poor self-care
- isolating self from others
- thoughts of harming yourself or suicide
- thoughts of harming others.

You can find more specific information on the symptoms of depression on page 33 and anxiety on page 35.

What to do if you're concerned

You can process through a mental health injury the same way you'd manage a physical injury:

- 1 Let people know.** Talk about it.
- 2 Get help.** Reach out to a mental health professional or consider making an appointment with your doctor. You can use telehealth and online options if you prefer (see page 51 for online health services). If you need immediate help, call 000 or Lifeline on 13 11 14 or take a look at the list of emergency and 24-hour services on page 50.
- 3 Heal and recover.** Remember, you might not just 'get over it'. Give yourself time to recover.
- 4 Work on increasing your mental fitness.** See next section, *How to keep yourself well*.

How to keep yourself well

Just as there are exercises to boost our physical health, there are also ways to boost our mental health.

By keeping yourself well, you're more able to cope with challenges when they arise.

The following section provides practical tips on:

- stress
- self-care
- relaxation & mindfulness
- breathing
- sleep
- exercise

We're all different. Not every technique in this booklet is suitable for everyone. Try different things and find out what works for you.



Stress

Practical, feasible, low-cost ways to manage stress

All of us experience stress from time to time. It's simply an emotional and physical response to pressure.

Common sources of stress include:

- relationships
- work demands
- illness
- life changes such as marriage, divorce, retirement
- juggling many roles or tasks at the same time
- positive events such as organising holidays, starting a new job, parenthood.

How stress affects us – and what to do about it

When we're stressed, our brains send messages to our nervous systems to release stress hormones to help us cope with the situation.

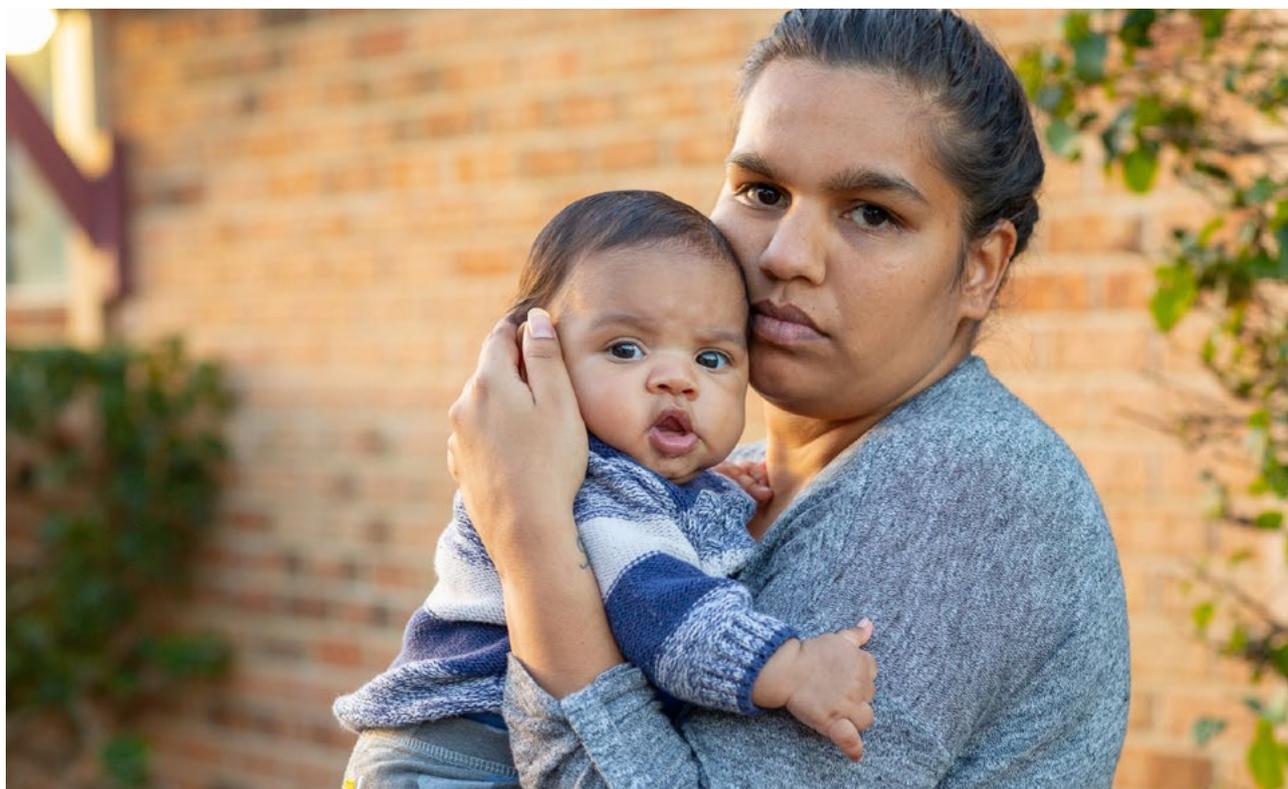
In prehistoric times, this prepared us to fight a woolly mammoth or run away fast. This is the classic 'fight or flight' response. Once the danger had passed, our bodies could relax again.

In our modern day lives, we rarely get to physically fight or run away from a stress, so our stress hormones continue to rise. If the levels of stress hormones in our bodies remain high over a period of time we can become unwell.

It's important to act early to manage our stress, so we don't feel stressed all the time, or feel so overwhelmed by stress that it affects our daily life.

How to manage stress

When you're living on the land, it can be frustrating to get stress management advice such as 'take a mini holiday' or 'book a massage'. This section focuses on practical, proven and effective things you can do when your stress levels are high.



Self-care



It's not what you think

Self-care is the actions we take daily to look after our mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health.

It's not the same as pampering, personal hygiene or self-indulgence. It can mean standing up for ourselves, having boundaries or saying no. It can mean intentionally carving out time for things we enjoy – even if they don't earn money or seem productive.

Too often, we put our own needs last, focusing on the needs of our family, property or other work. And when life is busy and stressful, our self-care goes even further down the list of priorities.

Yet self-care is the backbone of good mental health. In an ideal world we would practice activities of self-care as part of our daily lives, not waiting until we're forced to because of illness.

How to know what self-care you need

Many of us rarely stop to consider our needs. Plus, everyone has different self-care needs and these needs change over time, even day to day.

Yet we are often bombarded by self-care 'must dos' from the media or wellness brands, or well-meaning people in our lives who want us to do what works for them.

That's where the Circles of Self-care (opposite) can be helpful. The circles are a prompt to help you think about all the types of self-care that might work for you this week.

Circles of self-care

Sensory

Our senses get neglected in the busyness of our lives. Give yourself time to notice a beautiful sunrise, listen to music, or really enjoy the colour of the sky.

Remember to feel the ground beneath your feet or notice the soft sheets in bed.

Interpersonal

Humans are born to be social. We need interaction that is meaningful to us. Find new ways to connect with people you care about, and who care about you. Carve out time to stop and chat or send a text.

Creative

We are all creative, even if we don't feel we're artistic. Think of ways to express your creativity throughout your day and in your work. When you cook, add a bit of personality and flair. When doing a daily task, notice ways you can be creative that give you a sense of satisfaction. Put your own special mark on the way you do your work.

Physical

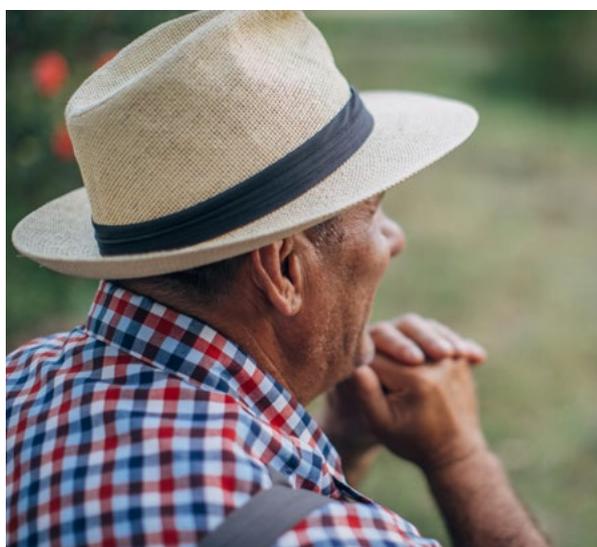
Sleep + food + exercise are the holy trinity of physical self-care. Paying attention to each of these needs gives us fuel for tougher times. When one of these is neglected, your mental health can start to feel shaky.



Spiritual/emotional

We need ways to express our feelings, to acknowledge them as feelings, and then look past them to our deeper selves.

It's important to spend time connecting in with ourselves and with sources of spiritual energy. For some, this is prayer; for others, this may involve rituals such as lighting a candle or feeling grateful for a good day or a good meal.



Self-care is not selfish

Self-care is essential, just like breathing or eating.

If you're worried that self-care feels 'selfish', remember if you don't take care of yourself, you can't be helpful and supportive to others. You can't pour from an empty cup.

If you're a parent, or part of a team at work or on the land, it's vital that you look after yourself, so you can be there for the other people in your life.

Relaxation



How to relax even when you're flat-out

We often think of relaxation as being on holiday or taking time off, but it's possible to create the same feeling of relaxation within your everyday life, even when you're facing stress.

Think of relaxation techniques as a way to tell your brain and body they can calm down now. These techniques can send a message to your nervous system to switch out of 'fight or flight', reducing your stress hormones and helping you feel calmer, clearer and more in control.

Technique 1: progressive muscle relaxation

First, take some slow deep breaths to quieten your mind.

Then, starting with your toes, bring your attention to each muscle group, tense it for a few seconds and then quickly release. This helps release the tension that has built up and teaches your muscles to relax.

Technique 2: body scan

After taking some deep breaths to quieten your mind, slowly scan your body from head to toe, looking for any tension or discomfort.

Then scan again, looking for parts of the body that feel relaxed.

You don't need to do anything, just notice. Also notice any thoughts that arise without judging them.

Breathing

How to make it count

Your breath is one of the most powerful relaxation tools you have.

By slowing our breathing down, we calm our nervous system, reduce our heart rate and blood pressure and restore a sense of wellness in our mind and body.

Here's a simple but powerful breathing technique you can do any time:

Technique 3: breathing

- 1 Find a quiet place where you can sit, lie or even stand comfortably. Relax your face and body and breathe naturally through your nose.
- 2 Place your hand on your belly.
- 3 Focus your attention on the breath as it moves in and out of your body, through your nose.
- 4 Consciously draw your breath into your belly, letting it fill up with air.
- 5 Consciously exhale and become aware of your breath as it rises up through your body and back out slowly through your nose.
- 6 Begin to make your inhalations and exhalations the same length. For example, inhale for a count of five, and then exhale for a count of five.
- 7 Over time, you can gradually increase the length of your exhalations until they are twice as long as your inhalations. For example, inhale for five, and then exhale for ten.

Dropping anchor

How to feel steady when things get shaky

This is a grounding technique when you're in the middle of an emotional storm such as distressing thoughts and feelings, flashbacks, panic attacks or chronic pain. It supports and holds you steady, so you don't get swept away, allowing time for the storm to pass. To drop anchor, use A C E:

A is for Acknowledging your thoughts and feelings

Observe what's going on inside you. Silently and kindly acknowledge whatever is showing up, such as your thoughts, feelings, memories or urges.

C is for Come back into your body

Instead of trying to avoid or escape your feelings, connect with your physical body by slowly trying one of these:

- push your feet hard into the floor
- straighten up your back and spine
- press your fingertips together

- stretch your arms or neck and shrug your shoulders
- breathe.

E is for Engage in what you're doing

Get a sense of where you are and refocus your attention on the activity you are doing. In your surroundings, notice:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can hear
- 3 things you are touching
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 taste in your mouth.

Finally: Notice what you are doing.

Mindfulness



You can do it anywhere

Mindfulness helps you relax and see things more clearly. It's about being present and paying attention to what is happening right here, right now, rather than being consumed by anxiety about what might happen or negative thoughts about things from our past.

You can practice mindfulness simply by noticing your breath. Techniques are purposely simple, and others won't even know you're doing it.

Try these techniques:

Technique 4: mindful thinking

Become aware of your thoughts, simply observe them and allow them to come and go with acceptance.

You don't have to follow each thought, or even believe it; just let it pass like a cloud across the sky.

Technique 5: mindful walking

Go for a walk and notice the ground under your feet, the views and objects that surround you, the smells and the weather, paying attention to those things with acceptance.

Technique 6: mindful eating

When you eat, concentrate on the texture, taste and smell of the food, and what it feels like to chew and swallow the food.

Eat deliberately rather than scoffing your food quickly to get onto the next activity.

Sleep

How to get enough even when you're up at dawn

It can be a vicious cycle: when we're stressed it's hard to sleep, which makes it harder to cope with stress.

Plus, when you're working on the land you often have to work long hours with early mornings and late nights, and your sleep can feel squeezed.

Yet getting enough sleep is essential for your mental and physical health.

If you struggle with sleep, you probably know that stressing about not getting enough sleep doesn't help. Instead, try these proven techniques developed by sleep scientists and researchers:

- 1 Keep it regular.** Go to bed and get up at the same time each day – even on a day off.
- 2 Sleep when you're tired.** Only sleep when you feel tired or sleepy. If you haven't been able to get to sleep after about 20 minutes, get up and do something calming or boring until you feel sleepy and then return to bed and try again.
- 3 Bed is for sleeping.** Try not to use your bed for anything other than sleeping and sex, so that your body associates bed with sleep. If you use bed as a place to watch TV, eat, read or work on your laptop, your body will not learn this connection.
- 4 Avoid alcohol, caffeine and nicotine.** Alcohol affects your nervous system and sleep hormones, while coffee, tea, chocolate and cigarettes keep you awake. Avoid for four to six hours before bed.
- 5 Switch off the screens at least an hour before bed.** The blue light of electronic devices confuses your sleep hormones.
- 6 Take time to calm down before bed.** Develop sleep rituals to remind your body that it is time to sleep, such as relaxing stretches or breathing exercises. A hot bath one to two hours before bed is proven to help with sleep also.

Exercise

If it was a pill, everyone would take it

Research shows that people who exercise regularly are more resistant to mental illness. What's more, exercise can be just as effective for treating mild to moderate depression as therapy and medication.

Exercise is vital for your mental health because it:

- releases chemicals such as serotonin and endorphins which improve mood
- improves sleep by tiring out the body and mind
- increases social connection
- provides a sense of achievement and can improve self-esteem
- reduces stress by providing a physical and mental release
- pumps blood to the brain which helps you think more clearly.

How much exercise do I need?

The quick answer is: **any exercise helps.**

Aim for 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise on most days.

Start with an easy exercise goal that you know you can achieve, such as going for a walk every day. Commit to the goal by telling someone else, so you stay accountable.

While it might be hard to go to a gym when you live remotely, you can find easy exercise and yoga videos and classes online.

How to keep your relationships healthy

Relationships are our greatest source of happiness – and also one of our greatest sources of stress.

A Harvard study followed people for almost 80 years to find out what made them healthy and happy¹. They found the number one predictor of happiness wasn't good genes or money or fame; it was having close relationships.

The following section provides practical tips on building healthy relationships and gives you expert advice on what to do when things are going off track.



Healthy relationships

What they are and how to maintain them

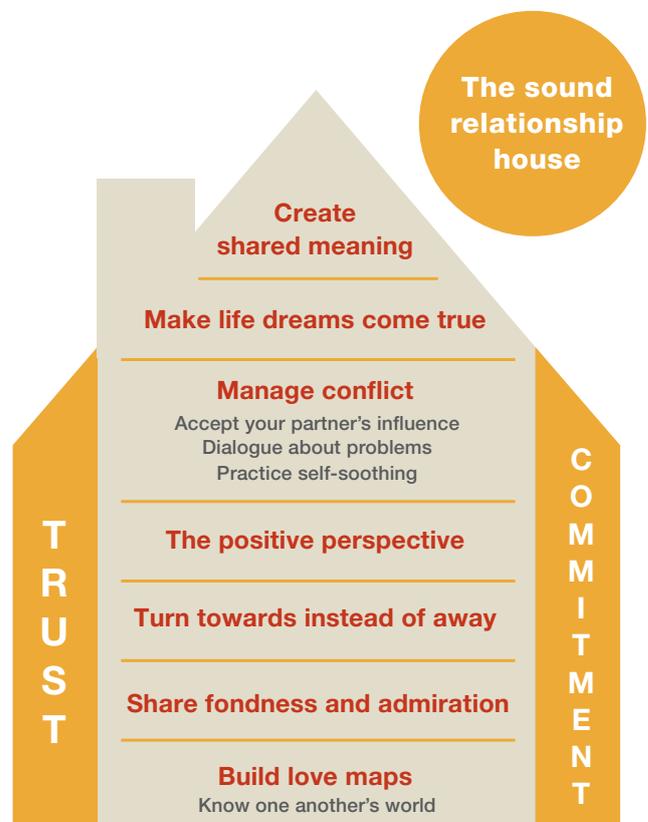
Not everyone grew up with healthy relationships, and we need to learn and practice the skills involved. Knowing what a healthy relationship should look like, and how to build and maintain one, is vital for your mental health.

What does a healthy relationship look like?

Your relationship is healthy when you are emotionally connected and support each other through the good times and the hard times. A healthy relationship is based on:

- communication
- trust, honesty and respect
- understanding and acceptance of differences
- the ability to provide emotional support to each other
- shared interests, activities and companionship
- shared goals and hopes for the future
- agreement about how to manage responsibilities, finances or other areas of importance.

The Gottman Institute, a world leader in relationships, says a foundationally secure partnership is like a house. It has weight-bearing walls and levels that each person builds upon to create a sturdy bond.



How to manage conflict

All relationships face challenges and conflict, and in a healthy relationship, conflicts don't cause long-term problems. Rather, they are addressed, handled with respect and then repaired.

The Gottman Institute offers six key ways to effectively manage conflict with your partner:

- 1 Soften the start up.** The first three minutes of the conversation is crucial to resolving conflicts. Start softly, with respect, and use facts.
- 2 Use I statements.** Start sentences with 'I' not 'you', so it doesn't feel like an attack. Instead of saying 'You're not listening to me,' you can say, 'I don't feel like you are listening right now.'
- 3 Complain but don't blame.** Avoid accusing or criticising. Explain what's happening and how it makes you feel and why. For example, instead of saying 'You never unload the dishwasher', say 'I'm exhausted today and I can see the dishwasher is still full. Can you unload it, please?'
- 4 Repair and de-escalate.** Keep rephrasing and adapting communication to understand each other better. Listen to understand your partner's needs and point of view. Be open to other perspectives and allow your partner the opportunity to express opinions and ideas that may differ from yours.
- 5 Be polite and appreciative.** Just because you are in conflict with your partner doesn't mean your respect and affection for them has to go too. Adding phrases such as 'please' and 'I appreciate it when you...' can be helpful in maintaining warmth and emotional connection even during a difficult conversation.
- 6 Don't store things up.** When you're exhausted and overwhelmed, one issue leads to another, and you can suddenly find yourself bringing up a laundry list of issues that feel related, but really are not. Don't wait to bring up an issue with your partner; instead address concerns as they arise.

Honest and assertive communication

The healthiest communication is assertive: it's not passive or aggressive, but instead involves clearly expressing what you think, how you feel and what you want, without demanding that you must have things your way. The basic underlying assumption is 'We both matter – let's try to work this out'.

You can practise assertive communication by using the DESC formula:

- D Describe** the behaviour that is concerning you objectively.
Try to be neutral: avoid emotionally loaded words like 'appalling' or 'disgraceful'.
- E Express** how you feel about it.
Use 'I' statements, not 'you'.
Say 'I feel...' not 'You always...'
- S Specify** the behaviour you want.
Focus on the positive changes you want, not what they're doing wrong.
- C State the Consequences.**
Try to flip it around to have positive consequences for the new changes you want to see.

Separation and divorce

How to keep it together when it falls apart

The stress of a relationship breakdown can have a severe impact on our mental health.

Often, the stress has been going on for months or years before the separation. This difficult time impacts the individuals involved, their children and even the extended family.

Separation and divorce impact our sense of who we are and how we fit into the world. Many things about our lives will change with a separation, where we live (which may mean moving locations as well as moving to a new house), our workplace, our social and support networks and our extended family.

Issues related to the care of children can become challenging and taking their needs into consideration can create enormous stress.

Separation may not be what both parties want. It can be a sudden event leaving little time for a person to prepare themselves mentally. If one partner is lacking support from family or social networks this can cause further stress.

It's more complex when you live on the land

When couples who work on the land separate there are major implications regarding the running of the property and family business. Decisions have to be made about who will leave the property, where they will live and what they will do for employment.

Financial implications can be complex, especially around dividing property and calculating child support.

Most families can negotiate separation without the need to attend family court unless the former partners find it difficult to communicate effectively.

For free advice, information and referrals, call the Family Relationship Advice Line on 1800 050 321 or visit familyrelationships.gov.au

Expect many emotions

Beyond Blue notes: 'It's important to remember that everyone experiences divorce and separation differently. The way you feel, and the intensity of your emotions, will change over time. You may feel:

- loneliness
- sadness
- shock
- hurt
- anger
- guilt
- overwhelmed
- frustration
- powerless
- relief
- excitement and optimism about your future.

These responses are all perfectly normal. The good news is that most people who face these intense feelings go on to live fulfilling and happy lives. Recovery takes time and it's important to look after yourself.'

Remember self-care

Use the advice on pages 6 – 7 to look after your mental, emotional and physical health during this stressful time. Take time to do things you enjoy and spend time with supportive friends and loved ones. Allow them to support you.

Further information is available from:

Beyond Blue: beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/separation-and-divorce

Family Relationships Online: familyrelationships.gov.au/

Relationships Australia: relationships.org.au/

Unhealthy relationships



What they are and how to manage them

All relationships experience ups and downs, but when is a relationship ‘unhealthy’? Your relationship might be unhealthy if you can see any of the following:

- 1 Controlling behaviour:** one partner attempts to control the behaviour of the other person by making all the decisions, telling them how to behave, what to wear, how to speak and so on. This is known as coercive control.
- 2 Disrespect:** one partner may treat the other with disrespect, e.g. saying mean things, yelling, swearing, being sarcastic or talking down to them.
- 3 Dishonesty:** they lie about where they’re going, what they’ve done or money, for example.
- 4 Jealousy** and mistrust from one partner to the other.
- 5 Lack of communication:** not telling the other person how they feel or where they’re going, for example, which will impact trust between partners.
- 6 Manipulation:** one person manipulates the behaviour of the other to get what they want.
- 7 Fear:** one person is fearful of the other and does not feel safe either physically or emotionally.
- 8 Isolation:** a person feels isolated and alone because the other does not allow them to spend time with friends and family or attend social events.
- 9 Financial violence:** one person controls the finances, so the other person needs their permission to access or spend money.
- 10 Physical violence:** one person is violent towards the other. This can range from hitting or pushing to punching, kicking, choking, stabbing or shooting the other person.
- 11 Sexual violence:** one person behaves sexually with the other person, without the other person’s consent.

Domestic and family violence

In many cases unhealthy relationships have a number of characteristics of domestic and family violence.

Family and domestic violence is any behaviour that's violent, threatening, controlling or intended to make you or your family feel scared and unsafe. This can include emotional and financial abuse and coercive control.

Family violence occurs across all sections of society; it's not limited to particular social groups or geographical locations.

And it's far more common than you might think.

When you need to leave

People facing domestic violence often feel trapped. They might not have anywhere to go, might not have access to money, or their partner may have threatened violence if they leave.

But you can leave safely, and you are not alone. Services are available 24 hours to help you reach safety:

000: If the situation is an emergency, phone the police.

1800 737 732 (1800RESPECT): a 24-hour helpline for anyone experiencing or at risk of family or domestic violence or sexual assault.

1800 811 811: DVConnect Womensline, a 24-hour crisis helpline for Queensland women.

1800 600 636: DV Connect Mensline, a crisis helpline for Queensland men, 9:00am to midnight.

Daisy: a free app for your phone that puts you in touch with support services. It's developed by 1800RESPECT, and your use won't show up in your internet browser history if your partner checks your phone.

If you don't have access to a phone, go to your nearest hospital or police station.



How to keep your thinking healthy

We think tens of thousands of thoughts a day. Yet 95% of these are repetitive. Plus, around 80% of our thoughts are negative.

Most of us are thinking the same awful things over and over, often not even aware we are stuck in a pattern.

By changing what you think about, you can change how you feel. You can proactively improve your mental health – one thought at a time.

In this section, you'll learn to identify common thinking traps, and find practical, feasible ways to think more helpful and positive thoughts.



Thinking traps

Why not all thoughts are helpful

We all think in repetitive patterns, but some patterns are more damaging to our mental health.

Start to pay attention to your thinking and see if you recognise any of these damaging thinking traps:

Filtering

When you focus only on the negative and ignore the positive in a situation. The whole picture becomes coloured by a single negative detail.

Jumping to conclusions

When we assume what others are thinking or think we can predict what's going to happen. We usually imagine something negative.

Personalisation

When you blame yourself for everything that goes wrong or could go wrong, even when you're not responsible.

Catastrophising

When we blow things out of proportion and assume the worst. We imagine terrible and permanent consequences to a problem that's probably quite small.

Black and white thinking

When we see things as 'all or nothing', with no in-between. You're either right or wrong, and things can only be bad or good. For example, thinking if you don't win a competition, you must be a failure.

Shoulding and musting

When we put unreasonable pressure on ourselves by expecting too much. If you find yourself saying 'I should' quite often, that's a clue. It's often combined with 'always' or 'never': 'I should never argue with my partner.'

Overgeneralisation

When we take something that happened and assume it will always happen. Words such as 'always', 'never' and 'every' are clues. For example, 'I always stuff everything up' or 'Everyone is against me today.'

Labelling

When we make global assumptions based on specific actions. For example, your friend was late once, so you think she's always inconsiderate. Or when you make a mistake and call yourself 'stupid'.

Emotional reasoning

When we make assumptions based on how we're feeling, not on facts. For example, you feel jittery so you assume something bad is going to happen.

Magnification and minimisation

When you put yourself down by minimising your good qualities but raise others up by magnifying their positive attributes. For example, 'They don't really mean it. They were just being polite.'

How to manage unhelpful thinking

You are not your thoughts

We all get caught up in unhelpful thinking patterns sometimes. Mentally healthy people know how to manage those thoughts.

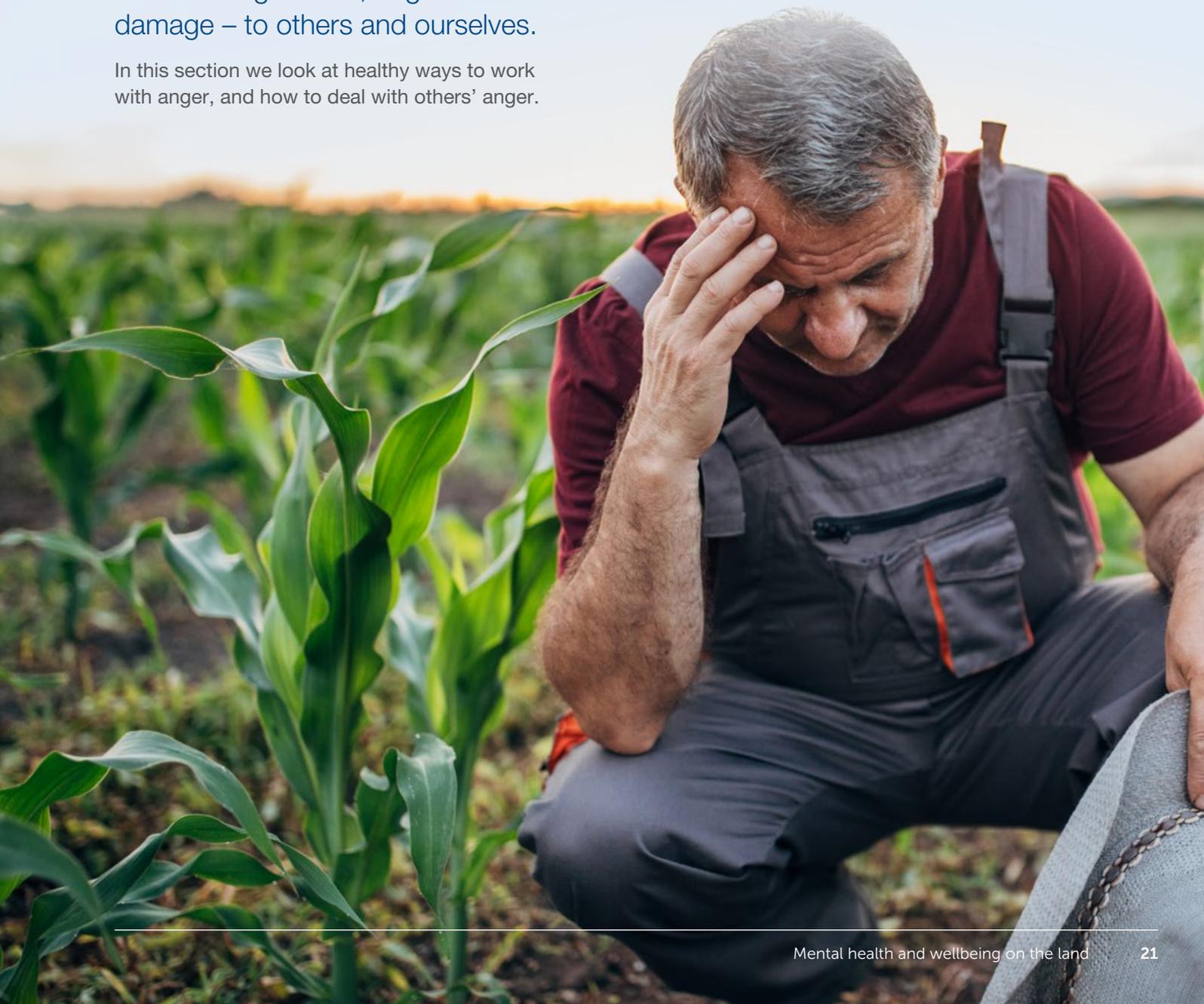
The key is to be able to separate yourself from your thoughts. You are in charge of what you think, not the other way around. So how do you do this?

- 1 Start with noticing that you're having a thought.** Often, we're so used to our mental chatter that we don't even realise it's happening. We just go along with it and believe it without questioning. Remember that you are a person having a thought; that thought does not define who you are. For example, if I have the thought 'I am stupid', it does not mean I am a stupid person.
- 2 Stop believing every thought you have.** Just because you think it doesn't make it true. A thought such as 'I always make a fool of myself in front of new people' is not necessarily true. As you can see from page 19, it's an example of black and white thinking.
- 3 Question and reframe your thoughts.** Ask, is that really true? For example, if you find yourself thinking, 'Everybody hates me' you can reframe it to say, 'Some people may not like me, but that's okay and I can accept it.'
- 4 Let your thoughts go.** This is a version of mindfulness. Notice the thought, allow it and then let it go on its way. Some people find it useful to imagine that they are the sky, and their thoughts are clouds, or see thoughts as cars passing by. You don't have to get in the car; you can just let it drive past.
- 5 Turn off the 'struggle switch'.** Psychotherapist Dr Russ Harris gives the example of what happens when we're experiencing some anxiety – a common experience for many. Too often, we don't just notice the anxiety. Instead, we start worrying about the anxiety. We worry how it might affect our work or our sleep. Then we start to get angry about it. Then we might get sad about being so angry. Then we might feel guilty about being so sad and angry when other people have bigger problems. And so our thinking, our 'struggle', makes it worse. Dr Harris encourages us to learn how to turn off the struggle switch, so that when anxiety arises we notice it, acknowledge it and then move on.

How to cope with anger

We all feel anger, and that's okay. If we manage it well, anger can be a source of positive change. But if we don't manage it well, anger can cause damage – to others and ourselves.

In this section we look at healthy ways to work with anger, and how to deal with others' anger.



Understanding anger

(Hint: it's often just the tip of the iceberg.)

We all know how it feels to be angry. It's often connected with frustration – things didn't turn out the way you planned, or other people didn't act in a way you think is fair.

Anger is often the tip of the iceberg: it's an indication of far deeper and more complex feelings underneath, such as sadness, shame, hurt, guilt or fear. These feelings can be harder to acknowledge and express.

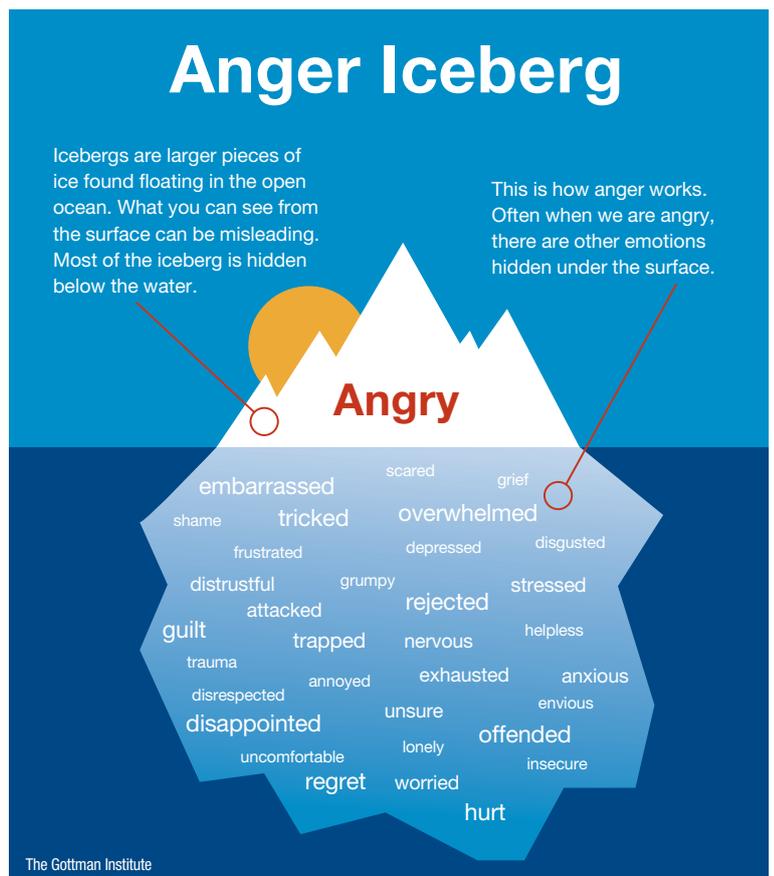
How anger affects us

People express anger differently. Some might yell, hit or cause conflict, while others withdraw and avoid. Others might turn the anger on themselves and feel anxiety or depression.

How do I know if anger is a problem?

Anger might be a problem for you if you:

- feel angry, irritated, or tense a lot of the time
- seem to get angry more easily or more often than others around you
- use alcohol or drugs to manage your anger
- sometimes become so angry that you break things, damage property or become violent
- sometimes feel your anger is out of proportion to the situation that set you off
- find your anger leads to problems with relationships, such as with family, friends or at work
- find it takes you a long time to 'cool off' after you have become angry or irritated
- tend to take your frustration out on loved ones or people less powerful than you, rather than dealing with the situation that triggered your anger.



Managing anger



How to control your anger, not the other way around

Anger is not bad. It's just a sign that things aren't right for you. As with all emotions, anger gives us information and indicates we might want to change something.

Here are proven ways to manage your anger better:

- 1 Pay attention** to your body's reactions when you're angry, so you can manage it before it explodes. Look out for increased heart rate, sweating, tightening in the chest, feeling flushed or tense muscles.
- 2 Ask yourself**, 'Why am I angry?' Often there will be something going on that is quite reasonable to feel angry about, so allow yourself to acknowledge this. Other times, you might discover you're actually angry about something else that you haven't processed yet. For example, something that happened at work that morning.
- 3 'Count to 10'** actually works. Taking a few slow, deep breaths in and out helps to calm the body and the mind. Counting to 10 buys us some thinking time, so we can respond rather than react.
- 4 Use distraction** and remove yourself from the situation when you feel anger rising. Go for a walk, or if you can't leave, find something else to focus on such as listening to music. See page 8 for on-the-spot relaxation techniques.
- 5 Express how you're feeling** in a non-aggressive yet assertive way. Let the person know how the situation or behaviour is impacting you.
- 6 Identify the other feelings underneath.** We often think we're angry when we're actually feeling deeper feelings, such as frustration, injustice, sadness, guilt, grief or betrayal (see the Anger Iceberg on page 22). These feelings can sometimes be hard to talk about and can build up and then explode as anger. Once you have figured out what's behind your anger, you can address the problem more logically.

How to deal with difficult times on the land

Working on the land brings unique challenges. It can often feel like one disaster after another.

Fire. Flood. Drought. Serious accidents. Threats to life and, tragically, loss of life – these are all traumatic events that can affect us for years to come.

Just because we experience many of them doesn't mean we should be able to cope. In fact, it can wear us down.

In this section, we help you navigate issues specific to people in rural and remote communities, including:

- natural disasters
- children leaving for boarding schools
- needing to retire, leave or sell the property.



Natural disasters

How to protect your mental health in the face of disaster

Natural disasters are one of the biggest challenges we face in rural and remote communities.

Queensland is the most disaster-affected state in Australia. In the last decade alone, we've been through more than 80 natural disasters including fire, flood, drought and cyclones, along with a global pandemic.

Natural disasters often hit quickly and can catch us off guard. You have to swing into action to manage the devastating impacts: loss of life to people and stock, crop loss, property damage and loss, family displacement and disruption. Plus you need to manage the financial stress that goes along with it.

Trauma, stress and mental health impacts

We're often running on adrenaline for weeks following a natural disaster. This increase in stress hormones in our body helps to sustain us at difficult times, but when prolonged can lead to health problems and can trigger anxiety and depression.

Trauma reactions are common following a natural disaster. For example, we might feel:

- constantly on guard
- less tolerant
- unable to concentrate
- angry about what has happened
- overwhelming fatigue and sadness.

We might not be able to sleep, or we may experience nightmares.

Please see the Trauma section of this booklet (page 40) to help you manage the potential effects of natural disasters on your mental health. It's important to seek help if any of these effects continue over a period of weeks.

Plan ahead to minimise the impact

Having flood, bushfire and cyclone plans will not only help you manage the impact on your property but also the impact on your mental health.

The National Centre for Farmer Health has wonderful resources including useful tip sheets regarding the management of floods and fires. These can be accessed from their website at farmerhealth.org.au

James Cook University has a good tip sheet regarding the management of cyclones which can be accessed by searching 'Cyclone Response' on their website at jcu.edu.au

The Queensland Government offers a year-round program helping Queenslanders prepare for natural disasters. Information is available at getready.qld.gov.au

Small Talk, Big Difference is a program delivered in partnership between the Royal Flying Doctor Service (Queensland Section) and Queensland Health, supporting people in disaster-affected communities to confidently start the conversation about mental health and find the right support. Visit smalltalkbigdifference.com.au

Retirement or selling up

When you decide to move on

The decision to retire or leave your property is not like leaving a regular job. Your land is part of your identity – and part of your family.

It can be a highly emotional time for you and the members of your family who have a shared sense of history and belonging to the property.

These emotions can be positive or negative, or a mix of many feelings. For many land owners the time to sell or retire is a positive outcome which brings relief and celebration, a sense of moving forward.

Yet at the same time, it can be stressful. Some common problems you may face include:

- **Your family's expectations:** Properties are often managed by extended families who have thoughts and expectations about the future of the property. Your children may or may not want to inherit the property or continue to manage the property.
- **Family arguments:** Family members may feel overlooked or disregarded or feel as though their needs and wishes are not being considered. If not addressed, this can lead to long-term fractures.
- **Anger and sadness:** If you need to sell because of financial or health reasons, this can cause enormous stress for the family. You may feel sadness, anger or guilt that you've been forced to make a decision you didn't want.
- **Grief and loss:** When a property has been in a family for many years it can be very stressful if it has to be sold and will no longer remain in the family. A sense of shared loss and grief can be experienced by the family members who have to say goodbye to a place that is their home as well as their business. (See page 29 for advice on grief and loss.)

How to navigate this emotional time

- **Plan ahead.** Discuss your thoughts about succession planning with your family well ahead of the time you think you will retire. Be open and honest with family members about what you're thinking and have difficult discussions ahead of time, so everyone that will be impacted can be a part of the process.
- **Discuss all options.** Be respectful of people's choices. Consider the needs of the family and the needs of the business.
- **Keep communications open.** Revisit these conversations as situations alter over the years. People's needs and expectations can change.
- **Seek financial advice.** Make an appointment to see a financial planner or discuss options with the Rural Financial Counselling service (rfcsnq.com.au or rfcssq.org.au).
- **Seek legal advice** well ahead of time.
- **During stressful times** practice self-care, eat well, minimise alcohol intake, get enough rest and do some physical activity just for you – outside work on the land. See page 4 for further advice on looking after yourself.

Boarding school

How to cope when your child is leaving for boarding school

Boarding school is a huge transition for both parents and children. It brings many mixed emotions from excitement and anticipation to dread and fear.

Here are some tips from child experts and parents who have done this before:

For parents

- Enjoy some special one-on-one time with your child that isn't about school preparation.
- Work out a communication plan which may involve phone calls, emails, visits, snapchats and group chats for the whole family.
- Talk to other experienced boarding parents about how they cope and what works for them. These may not work for you, but a list gives you ideas to try.
- Acknowledge your own feelings as valid – missing your child, worrying about them, losing control of parenting, overthinking about whether they will be happy, liked, cared for and safe.
- Talk with your child about their fears, concerns, and excitement and validate all of these as real.
- Do not judge or dismiss your child's fears, concerns or strange questions. Solve problems or potential fears with information and a plan.
- Maintain your own daily structure when your child is away but also make room for down time, self-care and communication time with your child.
- Visit the school beforehand to meet teachers and dorm staff and familiarise yourself as a parent with the layout and routine of the boarding house, so you know when meals, homework time and free time are.

For your child

- Make sure your child knows how to use all the items you've carefully packed in their suitcase, such as when to use conditioner and how to clean fingernails. For girls, have a conversation about periods.
- Let them know they can contact you at any time if they feel lonely, worried, sad, happy, excited or want to share their day. Have a plan about who they can go to or call if you're not available and they're feeling low or need someone. This may be a friend closer to the school, dorm supervisor, counsellor or a sibling.
- Celebrate the independence your child will gain and the trust you will develop in them as a growing young person.
- Ensure when your child is home for school holidays you have time to reconnect and enjoy each other's company.
- As your child may also need to sleep and recover from the busy routine of boarding school, limit expectations in the first few days of their return home.

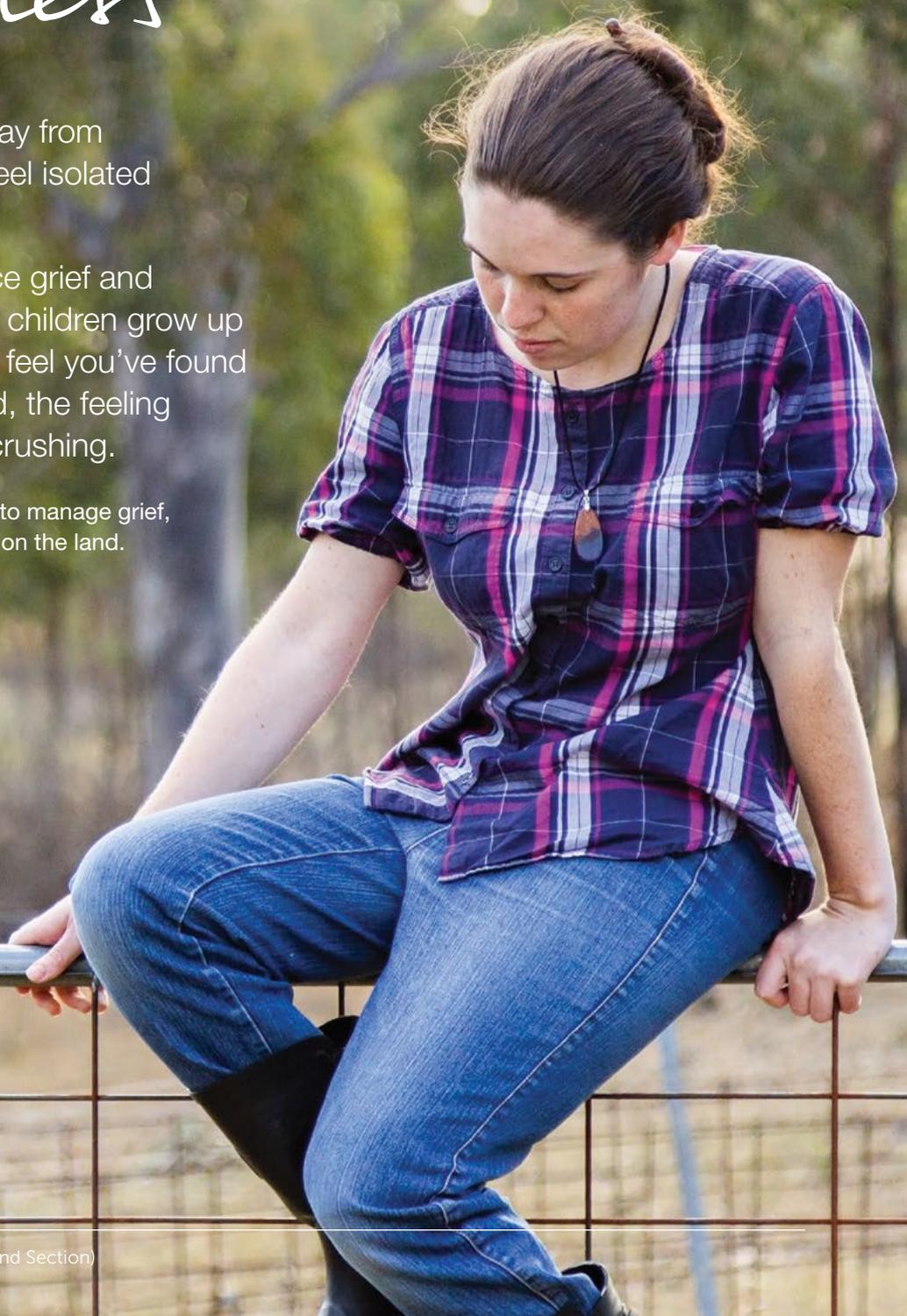


How to deal with grief, loss and loneliness

When you live a long way from anywhere, it's easy to feel isolated at the best of times.

So when you experience grief and profound loss, or when children grow up and leave, or you don't feel you've found people who understand, the feeling of being alone can be crushing.

In this section we look at ways to manage grief, loss and loneliness when living on the land.



Grief and loss

Understanding grief - and how to get through it

Grief is our response to loss. It could be the loss of a loved one, pet, pregnancy, job, relationship, your land or produce, or even a way of life such as the sale of a family property.

Grief can leave you with a mix of emotions, including sadness, shock, anger, disbelief, relief, numbness, fear, loneliness, irritability and feeling overwhelmed.

Grief has no absolute pattern or time frame. It will vary from person to person, and even week to week. It can feel worse a few weeks or months after the incident, as this is when others return to normal in their own lives and you can feel your loss even more.

How to help someone who is grieving

- Be available to them to talk with them about their thoughts and feelings without judgement or well-meaning advice.
- Ask them what they need from you rather than assuming what they need.
- It's perfectly okay to say, 'I don't know what to say or do but I'm here with you.'
- Keep an eye on their wellbeing and note whether they're eating, sleeping, and attending to their self-care. If these points become an issue, help them to see their doctor.
- Talk about everyday life and current events as well.

How to help yourself if you are grieving

- Moving through grief is an individual process and may require trying different ideas to see what works for you. Those around you may offer well-meaning advice, and this might help you or annoy you.
- Give yourself the time, space, and respect to feel your feelings and acknowledge your loss.
- Do not invalidate your loss or minimise it. For example, 'Others have it worse than me' or 'I'm being silly/indulgent/sooky.'
- Talk to those around you who care and allow them to nurture, distract and feed you, and assist you with practical tasks.
- Take things step-by-step. Do one task at a time. Most things are not urgent and can be tackled when you're ready.
- Seek professional assistance if you're not sleeping or eating or you're feeling unwell (physically and/or mentally).

Loneliness

Why you feel lonely and what to do about it

Loneliness comes when our need to connect with others is not met.

You can feel lonely even when you're around other people. It can arise when we feel misunderstood, isolated or vulnerable.

According to the Black Dog Institute, one in three people are experiencing loneliness right now, and likely everyone will experience loneliness at least once in their lifetime.

Our modern culture is lonely

Historically, people working on the land used to work together with their neighbours or extended family on major projects such as harvesting. The local community came together and worked together to get the job done, sharing meals and time together as they went.

Today's automated farming equipment means that one person can now manage the job it took a whole team to do in the past. This means that people do not get the opportunity to come together to share the work, socialise and learn from each other as they once did. We're often working alone.

Plus, financial pressures often mean that primary producers work long hours to get the job done and then don't have time with family in the evenings or the chance to go to social occasions.

On top of this, we're dealing with geographic isolation. Poor rural broadband, large distances and transport connections also limit our social interaction. Although online groups are good, it's important to remember that it is the quality of our online connections that really counts.

Social connection: the antidote to loneliness

For your mental health, it's important to prioritise spending more quality time connecting with friends, family and your wider network.

Social connection is one of the most important building blocks of good mental health. Social connections are the relationships you have with others; this could be the people you live with, friends that live nearby, family or acquaintances such as people you attend groups with or run into when shopping.

Research shows that people have lower levels of anxiety and depression when they feel connected to others. They also have higher self-esteem, a sense of belonging and safety and are more trusting of others. Spending time with others actually can make you feel lighter and happier.

Things to do if you do feel lonely:

- Find *meaningful* connections (not just surrounding ourselves with people).
- Call a friend, family member or neighbour.
- Get creative (play games, tinker in the shed, cook, learn a new skill, walk, exercise).
- Find ways to volunteer to make new connections (SES, local town clubs etc).
- Join online groups (try Facebook's 'Discover' section).
- Spend time with animals.

If your feelings of isolation or loneliness are becoming overwhelming, speak to your GP.

Call FriendLine on 1800 424 287. FriendLine supports anyone who's feeling lonely, needs to reconnect or just wants a chat.

Call Lifeline on 13 11 14.

Navigating serious mental health concerns



Mental illness

Just like a serious physical illness, a mental illness such as depression or anxiety needs proper treatment. It might not go away on its own, and you might not simply recover without treatment.

In this section, we talk about mental health concerns which require intervention, including depression, anxiety, addiction and trauma.



Depression

How to manage it when living on the land

Depression is different to feeling sad or down. It's a physical, emotional and mental feeling that doesn't shift even when things 'should' be okay.

Symptoms of depression last for two weeks or more, affect your functioning at home and work, and could include:

- **Negative thoughts** such as 'Everything is hopeless – nothing can change' or 'I'm useless.'
- **Physical changes** such as tiredness, difficulty concentrating or remembering, loss of interest in activities, or changes to sleep and appetite.
- **Behaviour changes** such as not going out or getting things done, withdrawing from people, increased alcohol or drug use.

How to break the depression cycle

1 Do things differently

It can feel hard to break through the lethargy and lack of motivation, but changing things up can help break the cycle:

- Do something different to what you normally do, even for 5 minutes.
- Try relaxation and mindfulness techniques (see page 8).
- Talk to someone, even just to chat about nothing.
- Move your body – even if you don't feel like it. It will boost your mood.
- Write down your thoughts and feelings – get them out of your head.

2 Think differently

Notice and try to catch negative thoughts, and then look for alternative ways to see things.

Ask yourself:

- What am I reacting to?
- Is this fact or opinion? Am I blowing things out of proportion?
- How important will this be in six months' time?
- Am I focusing on the worst possible thing that could happen? What would be more realistic?
- How would someone else see this situation? (See page 18 for more suggestions on managing unhelpful thinking.)

How to get help

Often people who work on the land try to soldier on in the hope that things will improve; however, when depression becomes serious, this is not enough.

If you've tried these strategies and your symptoms of depression don't improve, it's time to see a health professional. It's a strength to know when we need to ask for help.

You have lots of options. You can:

- **Go to your doctor**

Tell them how you've been feeling. It's important to be open and honest about your symptoms.

If you can't get to a doctor in person, you can use telehealth appointments. Call your doctor to find out how.

Your doctor can link you to the appropriate local mental health service, which may be available at a reduced cost or no cost through Medicare.

At times your doctor may recommend medication to help you manage your symptoms. Have a thorough discussion with your doctor about the pros and cons of medication.

- **Find a good counsellor**

Sometimes we need to talk to someone other than our family and friends. A trained mental health professional can teach you techniques to help you manage depressive symptoms.

It is important that you find a mental health professional who you feel comfortable with. Ask your doctor to recommend someone or make enquires online. You can do therapy by telehealth, no matter where you live.

- **Get free counselling**

You don't always have to pay for counselling.

Free counselling is available through health services throughout Queensland including the Royal Flying Doctor Service. Call 1300 010 174 (Outback Mental Health) or 07 4040 0444 (Far North Mental Health and Wellbeing Services).

- **Go online**

Many websites such as Beyond Blue provide expert support. See the list at the end of this booklet.

If feelings of depression become overwhelming and you are having suicidal thoughts, go to your nearest hospital or reach out to someone by phone. 24-hour emergency phone numbers are listed in this booklet. Lifeline is always there on 13 11 14.



Anxiety



How to manage it when you live on the land

Anxiety is the body's way of responding to danger – even when the danger isn't 'real'.

If we think something bad is going to happen, or has happened, our body and nervous system respond. Our brain activates our body's fight or flight alarm system which releases adrenaline and stress hormones. Sometimes this system kicks in even when it's not needed. That's when anxiety can cause problems.

What happens when anxiety hits

Anxiety can impact your thoughts, feelings and behaviours:

- **Thoughts**

You might have thoughts that overestimate or exaggerate the actual threat and minimise your ability to cope. For example, 'The worst possible scenario is going to happen, and I won't be able to deal with it.'

- **Behaviours**

You might find you try to avoid or escape situations, or you only want to go to certain places at certain times. You might also try to self-soothe through repetitive actions such as rubbing your arm or pulling your hair.

- **Feelings**

Anxiety can feel like fear, dread and panic. It can also cause physical feelings such as heart palpitations, breathing fast or feeling tense, light-headed or shaky.

Anxiety comes in many forms

- **Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD):** When you have GAD, you worry about a lot of things constantly, and feel worried most of the time to the point where it is impacting how you live your life.
- **Social Anxiety:** This is when you are fearful in social situations. You might feel intensely uncomfortable and embarrassed having conversations with others, or you might fear making a mistake or upsetting someone.
- **Specific Phobias:** These include intense fears associated with a specific situation, animal or event, such as flying or spiders.
- **Panic Disorder:** Panic attacks may include breathing difficulties, heart racing, chest tightness or pain, and perspiration. You might feel overwhelmed and unable to regain calm easily. If this occurs regularly over a month, it is considered to be a panic disorder.
- **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder:** When you experience ongoing, recurring, invasive thoughts related to fears such as germs or safety, e.g. 'Have I left the iron on?' or 'Are there germs on this?' These fears lead to rituals of checking and rechecking to make sure things are okay.

How to manage anxiety

First, see your doctor.

Tell your doctor how you're feeling and they can give you some techniques, help you find a therapist and/or discuss medication.

Identify your triggers.

What are the times you are likely to get anxious? If you can identify the patterns, then you can prepare and respond differently.

With support, plan to gradually build up to doing the things you avoid. It takes time and practise, but you'll find you can still enjoy these events and that the anxious feelings will reduce.

Use the STOPP technique:

STOPP

- S Stop.** Don't react automatically.
- T Take a breath.** Notice your breath as you breathe in and out.
- O Observe.** What are you thinking and feeling? Is this fact or opinion?
- P Pull back.** See the situation as an outside observer. What would someone else see and make of it? Is there another way of looking at the situation? What advice would I give to someone else?
- P Practice what works.** Do what is most helpful. Focus on your principles and values and consider whether your actions will be effective, appropriate and proportionate to the event.

Alcohol



How alcohol affects your mental health

Alcohol is everywhere in Australia, particularly in the country.

Reports show that people living in regional and remote areas are significantly more likely than their counterparts in major cities to drink at a level that puts them at long-term risk of harm.

It's considered normal to drink far more than we should. Binge drinking, especially among young people who work on the land, is very common. Consider a typical camp draft, rodeo or B&S party and the amount of alcohol consumed.

Alcohol doesn't just give you a hangover: it can damage your mental health as well as your physical health.

Links between alcohol and mental illness

Drinking too much alcohol can increase the risk of mental health conditions **and** increase the seriousness of mental health concerns already present.

Plus, people experiencing anxiety or depression can often try to self-medicate with alcohol to cope, but this only makes the symptoms worse.

It can even lead to higher risk of suicide.

How to reduce the risks

- 1 Know your limits.** A standard drink contains 10 grams of alcohol, regardless of whether this is beer, wine or spirits and regardless of what it is mixed with. Often a glass of alcohol served at a bar or pub, and especially a 'home pour', contains more than one standard drink.
- 2 Limit your drinks.** Aim to reduce the number of drinks you have each day and the number of days each week that you drink. Try to have alcohol-free days each week. The *Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol* recommend no more than 10 standard drinks a week and no more than 4 drinks on any one occasion.
- 3 Delay the start.** If you're under 25, consider delaying drinking alcohol as long as possible. Your brain is still developing.
- 4 Go light.** Consider drinking mid-strength or light beer if you're a beer drinker. There are now many zero alcohol beers available that taste almost the same as alcoholic beer, and zero alcohol wines are becoming increasingly popular.
- 5 Alternate.** Drink water or soft drink or other non-alcoholic drinks between each alcoholic drink.

Alcohol dependence and addiction

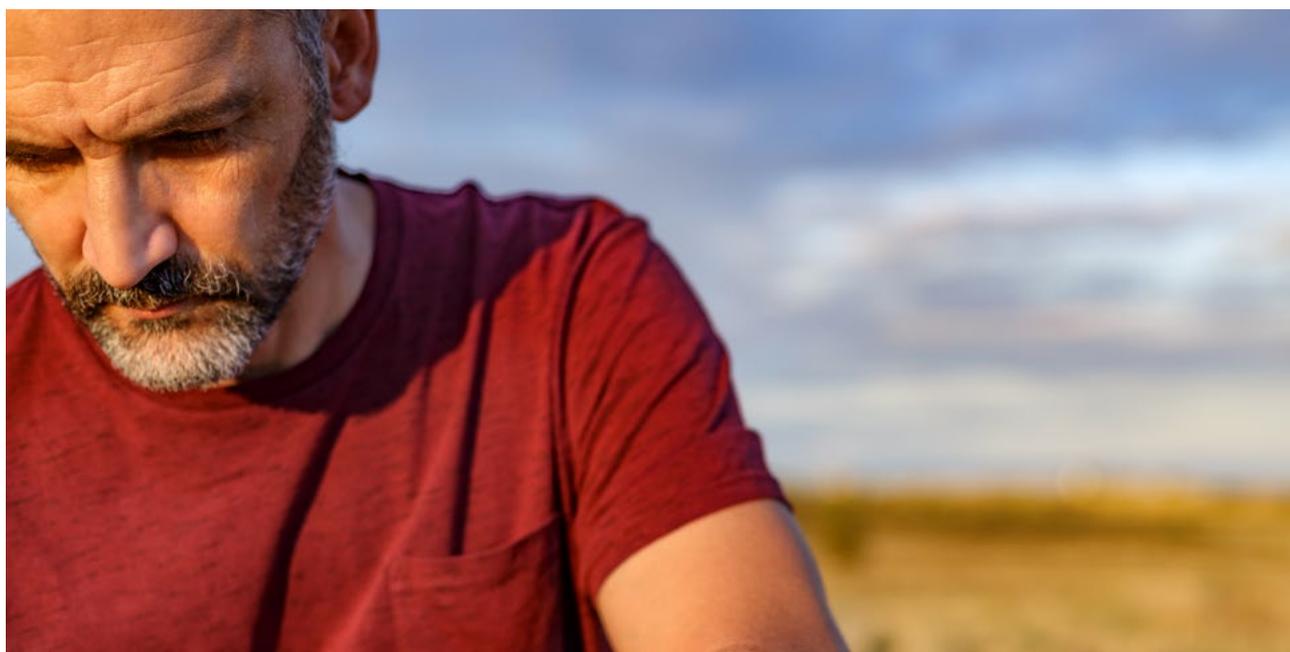
Alcohol is highly addictive, and it's important to know the signs of addiction – for yourself or for someone you care about.

People with alcohol dependence or addiction show the following signs:

- Craving for alcohol and physical feelings of withdrawal such as tremors, agitation, elevated blood pressure, seizures, anxiety, feeling like you cannot function without a drink and needing to drink more to get the same effect.
- Alcohol becomes a priority or 'the' priority in your life – you may go out of your way to find it and drink it.
- Making excuses to have a drink and for why you may have been so inebriated.
- Getting into trouble because of drinking (drink driving, domestic violence, assaults, gambling, sexual impulsivity and drug use).
- Poor mental health and exacerbation of conditions such as depression or anxiety.

What to do if you think you are dependent on alcohol

- Talk to your doctor or health care provider.
- Alcoholics Anonymous can link you with a support group and buddy. (This may not be in your local area but may be someone to talk with on the phone.)



Drugs

Prescription and substance use and abuse

The abuse of drugs does not just mean illegal drugs. Drug abuse also includes:

- The overuse of **prescription medication**, e.g. taking more than the prescribed dose, continuing to take medication after the symptoms ease, taking another person's medication, doctor-shopping for prescriptions or using medications for a different effect.
- Using **substances** such as glue, petrol, and other solvents and aerosol sprays to achieve a mood-altering effect. This also includes **alcohol**.

Illegal drugs

Illegal drug use includes drugs usually known by their street names, e.g. ice, speed, dope, gunja, pot, weed, MDMA, meth, amyl, cody, oxy, bennies, eight ball, speedball, special K, roofies, party pills, tabs, coke, snow, crack, hash, LSD, candy, downers, uppers, mushies, GHB and GBH to name a few. These names are used to hide the illegal and dangerous nature of these drugs.

You may think this doesn't apply to people in the bush, but research tells us people in remote and very remote areas of Australia are 2.5 times more likely to use methamphetamines ('meth', 'ice', 'crystal', 'speed').²

Using drugs in the short term may trick you into feeling relief from your thoughts and feelings, but continued use and overuse may lead to catastrophic physical, mental and emotional health consequences.

Addiction

Addiction is where you crave the substance, become willing to take risks to obtain it, need more of it as you develop a tolerance to it and disconnect from your usual activities and connections because of it.

Withdrawal

You may suffer **withdrawal** if you stop using the substance by choice or because you cannot obtain it. Withdrawal can mean irritability, insomnia, cravings, mood swings and agitation. Your GP or hospital can help you withdraw safely.

Signs and symptoms of substance misuse?

- Struggling to meet responsibilities.
- Withdrawing from family and friends.
- Taking risks e.g. drink/drug driving, sharing dirty needles, unprotected sex.
- Changing behaviour, e.g. aggressive, depressed, agitated, unpredictable.
- Going out of their way to obtain 'a hit', e.g. travelling long distances to buy drugs, taking drugs in secret.
- Showing withdrawal symptoms if unable to obtain the drug.

What to do if you or a loved one is struggling with drugs

The first step is to acknowledge the problem. Ask for help. Talk to your GP, health centre staff, family, friends, someone you trust. You may need ongoing support from professionals to manage withdrawal and longer-term addiction.

² <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/illegal-use-of-drugs/2016-ndshs-detailed/summary>

Trauma



Trauma overwhelms your ability to cope

When you live on the land, traumatic events are likely at some point.

They can include natural disasters such as bushfires or floods, accidents, the death, injury or illness of someone close to you, or physical or sexual assault.

When you've experienced trauma, you don't just have a reaction to that situation. You can also have an extreme emotional response to a daily stress which may appear to others like an over-reaction. This is because your body and mind have remained on high alert.

A reaction to trauma can include:

- **Shock:** A sense of disbelief, unreality, numbness and difficulty comprehending what has happened.
- **Physical symptoms:** Shaking, feeling weak, feeling tense, feeling sick in the stomach, sweating, heart racing, tiredness, loss of appetite.
- **Thoughts:** Sometimes people can't stop thinking about what has happened or may remember other stressful events. They may experience an inability to think clearly, have difficulty concentrating, feel confused or have memory problems.
- **Flashbacks:** Flashbacks are very real images of the event. These can include visual images but also smells and sounds. They often include clear details that stick in people's memory and won't go away. People say they're like a video of the event playing before your eyes. Flashbacks can be triggered by a similar event or appear for no apparent reason.
- Sometimes people who did not witness the event itself but are close to people who did, find themselves involuntarily imagining what happened.

- **Emotions:** Fear, sadness, anger, looking to blame someone or something, horror, apathy, lack of motivation, lack of energy, helplessness, a constant feeling that safety is threatened, rapidly changing emotions.
- **Behaviour:** On alert, can't settle, hypervigilant, increased alcohol and/or drug use.
- **Sleep problems:** Unable to go to sleep, unable to stay asleep, nightmares, dreams.
- **Attitudes:** Feelings of guilt at surviving or not being there, feelings of blame and failure, questioning what they could have done differently, and why it happened.

How to manage the effects of trauma

- Keep in touch with people you're comfortable with and allow others to support you.
- Sometimes people feel they should be able to cope, but it's okay to ask for help.
- If it feels right for you, talk about the event and the way it has affected you, and express changing feelings as they arise.
- Don't fight the reactions. Work through them, and they will subside.
- Take time off if you can, go away, even if it's just a weekend.
- Minimise alcohol intake.
- Use physical activity to burn off the stress that builds up.
- Eat small, well-balanced meals, even if you don't feel like it.
- Try relaxation exercises, especially deep breathing techniques.
- Allow yourself time to come to terms with what has happened and don't rush yourself.

When the trauma reaction doesn't pass

Most people who experience a traumatic experience are able to bounce back, and don't go on to develop a diagnosable illness. But when a person experiences the effects of a trauma in an ongoing and intense way, they may be at risk of developing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Beyond Blue describes PTSD like this:

'People with PTSD often experience feelings of panic or extreme fear, similar to the fear they felt during the traumatic event. They can also experience depression, anxiety and alcohol or drug use.'

In some cases, people experiencing PTSD may have little or no memory of the event. They may believe they are to blame for the event. At times they may have angry outbursts or engage in self-destructive behaviour.

Professional help has been demonstrated to be very useful in treating PTSD. Effective treatment is available.

For more help:

Blue Knot Foundation Helpline provides support, education and resources for the families and communities of adult survivors of childhood trauma and people with experience of trauma.

Call **1300 657 380**, Monday to Sunday between 9am and 5pm AEST or via email helpline@blueknot.org.au.

How to support others experiencing trauma

How to help someone experiencing trauma

Trauma can produce unpredictable emotions and reactions, and it can be difficult to know how to help a loved one.

Here are expert tips for helping someone immediately after the trauma and ongoing:

- **Stay with them but don't crowd them.** When someone has experienced a traumatic event, they need to know support is nearby but they often need space.
- **Don't take over.** Help but allow them to have some control. People need to feel they have some control in what feels like an out-of-control situation.
- **Listen if they want to talk.** Don't force them to talk, instead let them know you're there to listen if they change their minds.
- **Remind them of self-care.** Encourage rest, eating well and sleep, along with minimal drug and alcohol use.
- **Reassure them.** They are safe now.
- **Help with simple tasks.** If they want you to. Often people affected by trauma find even small tasks difficult.
- **Don't take their anger personally.** Often it's not you they're angry at, even if you're the target of their anger. People often take out their frustrations on those closest to them. Let them express their feelings as long as it's done safely.
- **Don't try to make light of the situation.** This is not helpful when people are feeling distressed. Keep in mind their reaction may be different to your own.

How to support children who experience trauma

- **Address the facts.** Give children open, honest information and keep this age appropriate and simple. If children are not provided with the facts they will often make up their own version of events which can be more damaging than the truth.
- **Remind them they are safe.** Children need to be reassured that they're safe now and will be protected.
- **Stick to routine.** Structure and normal routines give children a sense of security.
- **Let them talk.** Allow them to discuss their fears if they need to.
- **Reassure them it's not their fault.** At times children blame themselves for what has happened even when there is no possibility that they have had any role in the event, e.g. 'If I hadn't been naughty, this wouldn't have happened.'
- **Reassure them that you're okay.** Children sometimes feel the need to care for and protect their parents after a trauma.

Birdie's Tree has great resources available for children, especially around traumatic natural disasters: childrens.health.qld.gov.au/natural-disaster-recovery/

Mental health for children and young people

Young people who live in rural and remote areas face specific mental health challenges. It's harder to find mental health support, and they can sometimes feel isolated.

Then you throw in climate change, pandemics, global uncertainty and social media, and growing up in the country can be extra tough.

In this section we address how to identify and manage mental health issues for young people.



Your child's mental health

Advice for parents of country kids

It's normal for kids to feel up and down. It's normal for them to wonder and even worry about the future, and it's normal for them to have hormonal mood swings. So how do you know when to worry?

The red flags to look out for

Look out for changes from their usual self. This could include:

- withdrawal and/or avoidance from friends/ family/ activities
- overly concerned by connection to social media, secrecy around friendships and online connections
- sudden increase/decrease in weight – coupled with focus on eating, not eating, exercise, calorie counting, weighing in, covering the body with excess clothing
- changes in mood – teary, angry, depressed, agitated, elevated, withdrawn.

What to say

When in doubt it's always best to check in.

An opening such as, 'Hey, I've noticed you seem a little on edge/withdrawn/worried. I just thought I would check in and let you know I'm here for you and might be able to help if there's something going on. Are you okay?', can be a good starting point for a conversation.

What about anxiety and depression?

Anxiety and depression can have similar symptoms.

Anxiety in young people can look like:

- worrying thoughts in general, or specific worries about dying, a parent dying, getting lost, vomiting,

being embarrassed, or other triggers such as flying, public speaking, sport performance, wetting their pants and nightmares

- shortness of breath, pounding heart, teariness, withdrawal from the trigger situation, insomnia, headaches, stomach upsets, tight chest, sweating, nausea, agitation and aggression.

Depression in young people can look like:

- frequent sadness, tearfulness, and/or crying
- hopelessness
- decreased interest in activities or inability to enjoy previously favourite activities
- persistent boredom; low energy, the inability to feel joy
- not wanting to play with friends
- low self-esteem and guilt. When asked, 'Are you important to somebody?', depressed kids say no
- extreme sensitivity to rejection or failure
- increased irritability, anger or hostility
- difficulty with relationships
- frequent headaches or stomach aches
- frequent absences from school or poor performance in school
- poor concentration
- major change in eating and/or sleeping patterns
- talk of, or efforts to, run away from home
- thoughts or expressions of suicide or self-destructive behaviour.

What to do as a parent

- Let them know they're not alone, and you are doing your best to support them. Seek assistance if the thoughts and feelings persist.
- Share the advice in this booklet to help them understand their thoughts and help them manage these big thoughts and feelings.
- Be open and non-judgemental of your child's thoughts and feelings; their worries may be simplistic to you, but they're real to them and just as important.
- Seek assistance from a GP, school counsellor, mental health professional.

Helping a child who self-harms

You might notice your child deliberately causing pain or injury to themselves by cutting, burning, scratching their skin, or pulling out hair.

For some young people it can be a one-off event; for others it becomes a pattern of behaviour or a coping strategy.

Why do young people self-harm?

Self-harm is often an attempt to manage overwhelming feelings and emotions. It is usually not with suicidal intent, but it may escalate. It can also be a method of punishing themselves for perceived misdeeds, thoughts or behaviours.

What to do as a parent

Discovering your child has been deliberately harming themselves can be very confronting. It's vital to withhold your judgement and fear to understand what is at the root of this behaviour. If you shame them or punish them, they'll only become more secretive. Make it clear that you support them unconditionally.

You can get help through telehealth counselling and resources at headspace (headspace.org.au) or talk with your GP.

If the wounds are significant, seek medical attention to treat them.

Always check with your child to understand if they're feeling suicidal. If this is the case, seek emergency treatment (also see page 47).

Helping your child manage social media

Social media is your child's normal world: it's where they connect with peers and learn.

For young people living in regional or remote areas, social media can be a lifeline to friends and a world they want to know more about.

Social media for young people includes popular platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, WhatsApp, group chats, gaming platforms and discussion boards for particular interests.

How to keep social media use healthy

Do:

- Set clear rules about when they can use it, and especially rules around photos, personal details (address, age and contact) and sharing information about other people.
- Set boundaries around who they can interact with, and the order of their priorities (e.g. homework and household duties, sleep, eating, real time activities with friends and family first).
- Help them make good decisions about what to post online. Use the parent test – ask your child to consider what their parent may say or do if they read or saw the words and/or images they were posting online.
- Use privacy settings to ensure your child is only interacting with people who are known to them.
- Keep the channels of communication open. They are learning their social skills and won't always get it right.

Do not:

- While it is appropriate to be a 'friend' with your child on the social media platform, it's not okay to post photos or comments on their page without prior agreement.
- Trust is a two-way street, so seek to earn their trust by presuming they will do the right thing. Breaking into their accounts is a sure way of breaking their trust, often driving them deeper into secrecy.

Suicide: how to address it front-on

Suicide takes the lives of eight Australians every day.

It's the leading cause of death for our young people, and across the board takes more lives than motor vehicle accidents.

The rate of suicide is even higher in the country than in metropolitan areas.

According to the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, people living in rural and remote Australia are up to twice as likely to die by suicide as people living in major cities. Rates of suicide increase with the level of remoteness.

Suicide is preventable. In this section, we address what to do if you or someone you care about is suicidal.



Suicide

What can I do if I am having thoughts of suicide or harming myself?

Often when people are having thoughts of harming themselves or taking their lives, they feel isolated, misunderstood, helpless and hopeless.

You are not alone. You are never truly alone. There is always someone who can listen to you.

13 11 14: Lifeline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

000: Call emergency or attend an emergency centre such as your hospital or doctor if you feel unsafe and alone.

Talking can help interrupt your negative thought loop

It's important to reach out and talk to someone whose view is more objective when you're buried in your thoughts.

Making a connection, talking with another human being, and sharing the thoughts burdening you is vital to interrupt the negative thought loop. You can become trapped in this thinking and presume it's normal, making it feel permanent and hopeless.

Negative, suicidal thoughts are temporary. They're frightening, confronting and overwhelming, but they are temporary and do not mean they need to be acted upon. Our thoughts are not a measure of our reality; they can be distorted and compounded by only having yourself as the audience.

That's why talking with someone is a great way of interrupting the thoughts, getting perspective and seeing a way forward no matter how small it may be at the time.

More ways to interrupt the negative thoughts

- Remember, you don't need to make any decisions right now. Just sit with today. You may feel like you will cope better tomorrow.
- Talk to someone who can help you interrupt the thoughts.
- Try some things to ground you in the present and get you out of your thoughts:
 - have a cold shower
 - put some ice in your hands and feel its coldness
 - dig in the garden
 - notice your breath going in and going out and slowing down as you focus on it more.
- Stay away from drugs and alcohol. It never helps and clouds your judgement even more so.
- Go to a safe place where you're away from items you may harm yourself with. You could go to a friend's house, the library, a park, church, the doctor or a hospital.
- Distract yourself with activities such as washing, cleaning, cooking, walking or strenuous exercise.

Suicide: how to ask the question

How to ask someone if they're suicidal

If you're concerned that someone you know is at risk of taking their own life, you might feel worried you'll stuff it up or make it worse.

You won't. **It's always better to ask than not.**

You can't make the situation worse by showing you care about someone. In fact, research tells us the sharing of these feelings can help the person feel better even in the short term.

How to ask, step-by-step

- 1 Find a quiet private setting. (See box opposite, if you can't be with them in person.)
- 2 Frame the reason for the chat. For example, 'You're probably going to be cranky with me for asking you these questions as they're very personal and uncomfortable, but I'm doing so because I care.'
- 3 Ask the question clearly and directly. For example, 'I've noticed/heard you're feeling very low, and I'm worried you may be feeling so low you're thinking of suicide or you may even have a plan to take your life. Are you having thoughts of suicide?' and 'Are you planning on taking your own life?'
- 4 Leave out any judgement. For example, don't say, 'You're not thinking of doing something stupid to yourself, are you?' Don't judge the person for their thoughts and feelings or tell them to 'snap out of it'. Don't minimise their feelings by saying 'Others are worse off than you' or 'You're overreacting. It's not that bad.'
- 5 Do not promise to keep it a secret, even if they beg you to. For example, say, 'I cannot keep this a secret; I need to be able to help you, so we need to talk about who else we can reach out to, so you can stay safe. You might be annoyed with me talking to other people about this, but we're only going to talk to people who can help you.'

- 6 Ask about their support. 'Who else knows you aren't feeling well – who do you have in your corner to support you?'
- 7 Be prepared for the answer. This is big stuff for the person experiencing these thoughts, and for you, so you may need to talk with someone else for your own support along the way.

If they answer that they're thinking of taking their life, here are the steps you need to take:

- 1 Plan with them to contact their GP, ambulance or family if helpful.
- 2 Stay with them. Just being present and sitting with someone (in person or by phone) who is feeling suicidal can be a comfort to them. Let them know you care about them and will stay with them while a safety plan is determined.
- 3 Once they're in a safer space to be left alone, help them work out a safety plan. (See box opposite.)
- 4 Seek help and support for yourself. Supporting someone who is having thoughts of suicide or is actively suicidal is a very serious, overwhelming situation, and you may feel drained, helpless and frightened. For your own self-care don't go through this alone. Seek assistance via counselling and/or support groups. Involve others in the care and safety planning for the vulnerable person, so you're not the only support they're relying on.

How to develop a safety plan

After you've arranged further support, you can help put together an interim safety plan. The plan is based on their answers to the following questions:

- What works to manage the suicidal thoughts and feelings? This could be talking to someone, sleeping until the crisis thoughts have passed, listening to music, exercising or cooking and eating a meal.
- What can I tell myself to manage my thoughts?
 - For example, 'This will pass', 'I've had the thoughts before and I managed them safely', 'They are just thoughts – I don't have to believe them or trust them.'
 - Who can I call or visit when I can't get myself out of the suicidal thoughts? For example: family, friends, support person, my counsellor, GP, Beyond Blue, Lifeline, emergency services.
- Where is a safe place I can go until the thoughts and feelings pass?
 - For example: family, friends, support persons, public place, hospital, doctor's office, counsellor.

When you can't be there physically

If you're unable to be with the person physically and are on the phone to them, here's what to do:

- 1 Ask direct questions about their immediate safety such as: access to weapons (guns etc), medication, illegal substances, chemicals, vehicles, and their plan on how they think they may take their own life. These are very difficult questions to ask, but you need to know how immediate the danger is and what emergency assistance they may need.
- 2 Keep the person on the phone while you get help by texting, emailing, radioing, to ask another person to call for assistance.
- 3 Tell the person you're going to stay on the phone with them, and you're doing so to keep them safe, because you care.
- 4 Determine their location if they're away from their home on a property or an outstation, so you can provide this information to the emergency services if necessary.

Suicide: crisis support

Who to call

Never try to cope alone.
Always reach out for help.

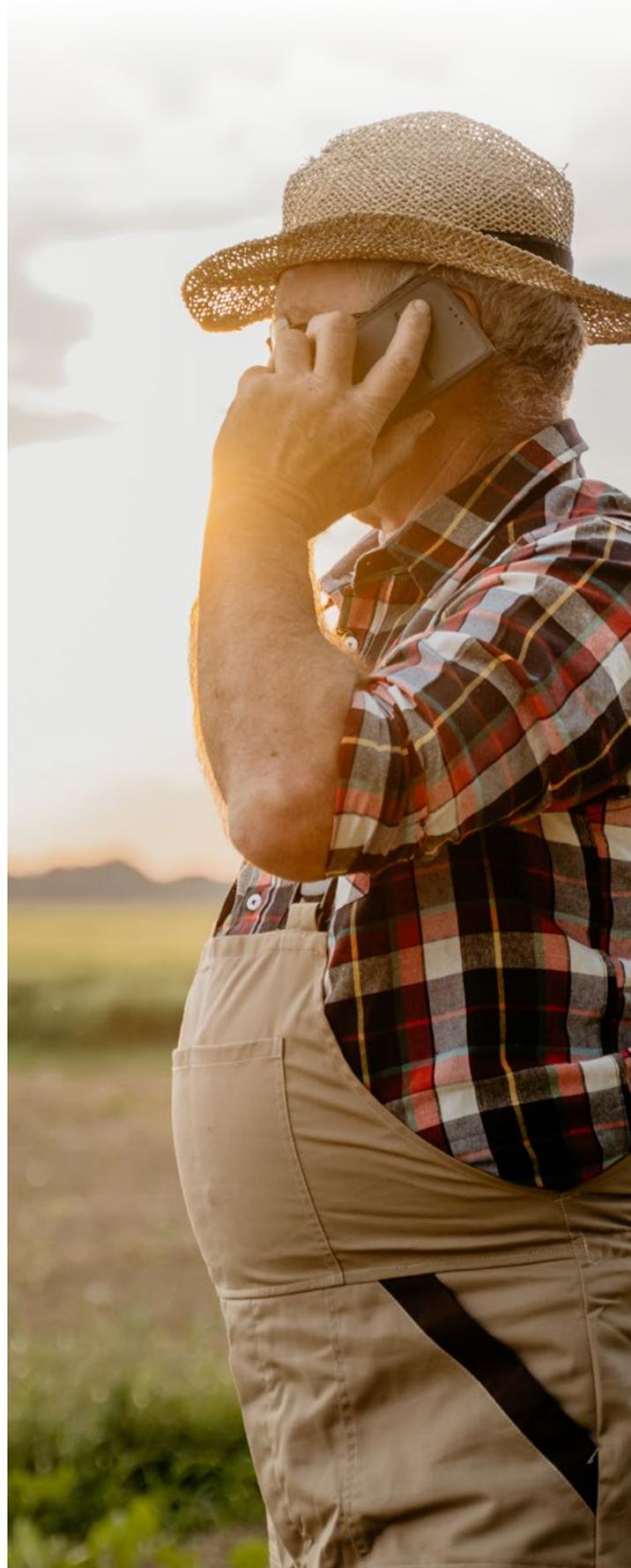
Many telephone helplines are available 24 hours a day to support you. Never feel you're overreacting by calling any of these services. It is better to be safe and have a conversation than not.

000: If you or someone you know needs help now, call the emergency services.

13 11 14: Lifeline crisis support and suicide prevention. Free 24/7.

1300 659 467: Suicide Call Back Service. Free 24/7.

1800 55 1800: Kids Helpline. Free 24/7.
A confidential counselling service for children and young people aged 5 to 25.



Help resources

Where to get help: helplines and websites

Lifeline

24/7 free crisis support and suicide prevention.

Call: 13 11 14

Text: 0477 131 114

Online chat: lifeline.org.au/crisis-chat

Website: lifeline.org.au

Kids Helpline

24/7 free confidential and private counselling service specifically for children and young people aged 5 to 25.

Call: 1800 55 1800

Online chat: kidshelpline.com.au/get-help/webchat-counselling/

Website: kidshelpline.com.au

Beyond Blue

24/7 free support for people concerned about anxiety, depression or suicide.

Call: 1300 22 4636

Online chat: beyondblue.org.au/support-service/chat

Website: beyondblue.org.au

headspace

Free online and telephone support and counselling to young people 12 to 25 and their families and friends.

Call: 1800 650 890, 9am to 1am AEST / 7 days a week.

Website: headspace.org.au

MensLine Australia

A free 24/7 telephone and online counselling service for Australian men.

Call: 1300 78 99 78

Online chat and video chat: mensline.org.au/phone-and-online-counselling

Website: mensline.org.au

SANE Australia

Support for people affected by complex mental health issues, as well as their friends and family members.

NOT an emergency or crisis service.

Call: 1800 18 7263: 10am to 10pm AEST (Mon-Fri)

Chat and email: sane.org/get-support/drop-in-service

Website: sane.org

MindSpot

A free telephone and online service for people with anxiety, stress, low mood or depression. It provides online assessment and treatment for anxiety and depression.

NOT an emergency or crisis service.

Call: 1800 61 44 34 8am to 8pm (Mon-Fri); 8am to 6pm Sat

Website: mindspot.org.au

QLife

Telephone and web-based services for LGBTI peer support and referral for people wanting to talk about a range of issues including sexuality, identity, gender, bodies, feelings or relationships.

Call: 1800 184 527: 3pm to 12am (midnight)

AEST / 7 days a week.

Website: qlife.org.au

PANDA (Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia)

Supports women, men and families across Australia affected by anxiety and depression during pregnancy and in the first year of parenthood.

Call: 1300 726 306: 9am to 7:30pm AEST (Mon-Sat)

Website: panda.org.au

Open Arms – Veterans and Families Counselling

Free 24/7 counselling to anyone who has served at least one day in the Australian Defence Force, their partners and families.

Call: 1800 011 046: 24 hours

Website: openarms.gov.au

National Centre for Farmer Health

Useful tip sheets, education sessions and information for people who live and work on the land.

Website: farmerhealth.org.au

Rural Financial Counselling Service

Free financial counselling for your agribusiness or small business.

Northern Region (QLD) **07 4652 5669** rfcsnq.com.au

Southern Region (QLD) **07 4622 5500** rfcssq.org.au

Birdie's Tree

A suite of resources to help children prepare for, cope with and recover from a natural disaster or disruptive event.

Website: childrens.health.qld.gov.au/natural-disaster-recovery

Your Mental Wellbeing

Resources from the Queensland Government to promote a healthy sense of mental wellbeing.

Website: mentalwellbeing.initiatives.qld.gov.au

Help resources

Where to get help: apps



Headspace

Headspace is everyday mindfulness and meditation, so you can make mindfulness a daily habit.



Clear fear

Provides a range of ways to manage the symptoms of anxiety.



Calm

An app for sleep and meditation, whether you're brand new to meditation or a seasoned expert.



Niggle

Niggle is a great app for kids that helps with emotional regulation.



Smiling Mind

Free mindfulness meditation app developed by psychologists and educators to help bring balance to your life.



One-Moment Meditation

One simple exercise that takes just one minute to be effective.



PTSD Coach Australia

Helps people understand and manage the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).



BeyondNow suicide safety plan

Developed by Beyond Blue. If you or someone close to you is considering suicide, a safety plan can be a reminder of the reasons to live and ways to stay safe.



iBobbly

Social and emotional wellbeing self-help app for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over.



Combined Minds

Helps families and friends support young people with their mental health.



Sober Time

Helps you track your addictions, stay motivated, and interact with others in recovery.



Insight Timer

A meditation app with a free version. Recommended for dealing with anxiety and stress, getting to sleep and listening to music tracks and ambient sounds to calm the mind.



Calm harm

Helps to resist or manage the urge to self-harm.



AODCONNECT

National directory of alcohol and other drug treatment services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Royal Flying Doctor Service (Queensland Section)

The Royal Flying Doctor Service provides free mental health and wellbeing support to people in a range of communities and towns across Queensland and Australia.

For more details, visit our mental health website: flyingdoctor.org.au/qld/what-we-do/mental-health

For services in your area:

Far North Mental Health and Wellbeing Services
(07) 4040 0444 or
mhadmin@rfdsqld.com.au

Outback and Central West Mental Health and Wellbeing Services
1300 010 174 or
outback@rfdsqld.com.au



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Royal Flying Doctor Service
QUEENSLAND SECTION