

Supporting food business leaders impacted by Cyclone Gabrielle – with Jacqui Maguire



Session one: Looking after yourself and others so you can lead well during tough times

***Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini."
"My strength is not that of an individual, but that of a collective."***

This is an overview of part 1 of a two-part webinar series supporting food business leaders impacted by Cyclone Gabrielle with prominent clinical psychologist [Jacqui Maguire](#).

It was devised by the [Food and Grocery Council of New Zealand](#), and supported by [New Zealand Food Safety](#).

Session 1 (on March 6) covered the three stages of the psychological journey after a major event, which included:

- acknowledging the psychological impact of a disaster
- recognising signs of distress and poor mental health in yourself and others
- practical strategies of how to psychologically get through the early days
- the power of community and why social connection is so important, especially during loss and devastation – there is no weakness in needing others.

Jacqui also talked about how to check in with others and where to source help and, relevant for many, if you are a colleague in a different part of the country, what you can do to help.

Three stages of the psychological journey following a major event

Adrenalin Phase

- The first thing people will often experience is flight or fight mode which can typically last 4- 6 weeks.
- People tend to narrowly focus on practical concerns such as 'what I need to do now' to survive and be okay.
- People often form very tight bonds within their community among others with a shared experience of the disaster.
- Loss is a central theme for people – loss of security, perception of power, resources, daily routine, control, and for some support.
- Ability to concentrate can be difficult / repeat messaging can be helpful.
- Emotions will fluctuate rapidly, and it's normal for people to feel numb.

- A strong community bond is important – called social capital.
- Feelings of anxiety during this period of time are normal, especially in the acute phase:
 - acknowledge how you are feeling – name it / tame it
 - stay informed, but do not become all-consumed
 - have a plan – what will you do? Emergency supplies / route to safety
 - calm yourself: slow breathing / mindfulness / moments outside.
- Do not confuse normal reactions with someone not coping. We all exhibit our reactions differently. Focus on the basics:
 - eating
 - sleeping
 - connect with helpful people
 - Social relationships are critical to mental and economic survival.

For most people, these are acute reactions that are transient. Most will functionally recover well on their own.

Cortisol Phase

- This phase occurs moving out of immediate threat situation. It can last 2-5 years until normality resumes.
- Energy levels and endurance abilities are tested – many people may feel fatigued.
- With the body running on cortisol, the immune system can be impacted.
- Get breaks away from the situation to regain energy and focus. You can't face grief and hardship continuously without recovery.
- Focus on what is meaningful and important in these times – it can help direct focus to where your values are.

Some people will struggle through this time and will require extra support. Watch for signs that indicate someone is struggling to engage with daily life tasks, relationships, and work.

Recovery Phase

- This phase comes following rebuild and when infrastructure is back up and running.
- People may feel a big wave of grief at this point.
 - Focus on what is important, what will life look like for me going forward, how do I want to live.
 - What is meaningful to add back into my life again:
 - Hobbies
 - People around you
 - Prioritise
- Where is your time best spent?
- Need to look after yourself!

What increases someone's vulnerability to struggle after a natural disaster?

- Displacement from their home
- loss of a loved one

- how pervasive their loss is
- lack of mental preparedness (e.g., first time experiencing a traumatic event)
- disruption to family systems
- negative coping skills like increased alcohol and drug use.

Protective factors

- Recognising the factors you can control
- internal motivation to recover after the disaster
- good emotion regulation skills
- holding realistic hope
- good stress management techniques
- clear thinking
- social bonds in community
- an ability to adapt quickly.

Supporting someone impacted by a natural disaster

- Provide practical support
- be there for others to debrief to (if they want to – never pressure anyone to talk)
- send nice messages that don't require a reply, but that they know you are thinking of them
- ask – do you want to have a conversation / practical questions – are you sleeping/eating well?
- don't push for people to talk, this can be harmful to their wellbeing.

Children

Children are vulnerable after natural disasters because they may have limited understanding of what has occurred, have less control over their fate, and have less life experience.

- Signs to look out for that children are struggling (under 8):
 - physical symptoms like sore tummies
 - nightmares or bed wetting
 - trouble concentrating
 - loss of interest in things they normally enjoy
 - crying and tearfulness
 - increased clinginess
 - tantrums and disruptive behaviour
 - general fearfulness
 - incorporating aspects of the disaster into their imaginary play.
- Signs to look out for in children over 8:
 - Getting into trouble at school
 - withdrawal

- avoiding reminders of the event
 - getting angry and disrespectful
 - substance use.
- Risk factors for children:
 - Direct involvement in the cyclone
 - previous trauma
 - belief harm will come to a loved one
 - separation from caregivers
 - physical injury
 - low family resources.
- How to support children:
 - Cover a child's basic needs (shelter, food etc)
 - allow them to feel what they are feeling
 - limit exposure to the news
 - create a safe and supportive environment
 - reclaim routines
 - model calm as best as you can
 - find ways to allow children to assert control
 - reduce unnecessary stresses.
- Do not:
 - Expect them to be brave or tough
 - make them talk about their experiences
 - get angry if they are emotional
 - make promises to things you cannot ensure (e.g., when you'll return home).