

Useful skills for disaster recovery

Taking time for pleasurable activities

Now, a few months after the fires, many people are feeling tired and stressed, and they know that their daily struggle isn't going to be over any time soon. Disasters often disrupt routines or activities that have given people pleasure and a sense of control in the past, and people often don't make as much time as they used to for fun things. These recreational activities might have been sport, clubs or classes, walks or bike rides, visits to a favourite cafe, board games with the family, or regular get togethers with friends. Sometimes the disruption to recreation activities comes about because the places where they were held have been destroyed or damaged by the fires, or because club members have died or moved away. For some people, the grief and shock of the devastation of the fires, and the overwhelming task of recovery and rebuilding may have led them to withdraw from the activities or not make the time for the things they used to find pleasure in.

Doing things you enjoy is good for you

Doing activities that are enjoyable is very important as a way of gaining a sense of control and purpose in life, and for giving pleasure. Indeed, one of the most successful ways of improving people's mood, giving them a 'lift', and restoring a sense of control, is to increase their activity, create routines, and increase the number of positive events in their lives. When lives are unbalanced by a disaster, finding a new balance between work and pleasure gains importance. Pleasurable activities are important for our health, and for our connections with other people. It is important, too, that people have more positive experiences than negative experiences.

So, take some time out from the endless paperwork and the huge job that lies ahead, and give yourself permission to do some of the things you have enjoyed in the past – watching a DVD, having a day at the football, going out for a night with the girls (or boys), or just playing a game of scrabble. Try to plan ahead so that you've got things to look forward to. Try also to make sure that some of the pleasurable activities also involve enjoying your social connections with others. This is a great combination. Sometimes it can be easier to talk and share with people when you are busy doing something together.

You may find as you start picking up some of the activities you used to enjoy before the fires, that you're not enjoying them as much as you used to. This is very normal, and not a reason to give up. Sometimes after very traumatic experiences people's ability to enjoy themselves is diminished for the present. It can and will come back, and one important way in which you can help is by doing things that give you a break from the everyday stress of cleaning up, rebuilding and recovery, but which also help to rebuild some normal routines and a sense of wellbeing. And when you 'down tools' for a while and take time out for a bit of fun, you will probably pick up again when you're a little more rested, and you may even find that you make quicker progress with all of those jobs.

For more information about the APS disaster recovery resources please visit psychology.org.au/topics/disasters/