

# Overview - Elements

## 1 Pre-Disaster - The “Warnings” Stage

### 1.1 Why be Psychologically Prepared?

Why do we need to understand beforehand about the way we think, feel and act in an emergency situation?

### 1.2 Recognising Feelings

Understanding that we will all feel and react differently to a threat, and that for some people the threat can be very stressful.

### 1.3 Understanding Thoughts about Disaster

Understanding the different ways people might think about the threat of a natural disaster?

### 1.4 Understanding our behaviours and actions before disaster preparation

The sorts of things people do when they hear of the threat of a natural disaster.

## 2 During the Disaster Event – Coping

### 2.1 Identifying Stressful Feelings and Reactions

Understanding the feelings that different people may experience.

### 2.2 Managing Stressful Feelings and Reactions

Managing our feelings during a disaster warning or disaster situation.

### 2.3 Coping with a Real Threat or Severe Warning

Coping with our growing feelings during a disaster warning or disaster situation.

### 2.4 Helping Others to Cope

How you can help the people around you cope with a natural disaster, including friends, family and neighbours.

## 3 After the Disaster Event – Recovery

### 3.1 Checking How We Coped

Did we do OK? How you and I coped with the events and what worked.

### 3.2 Can We Be Better Prepared Next Time?

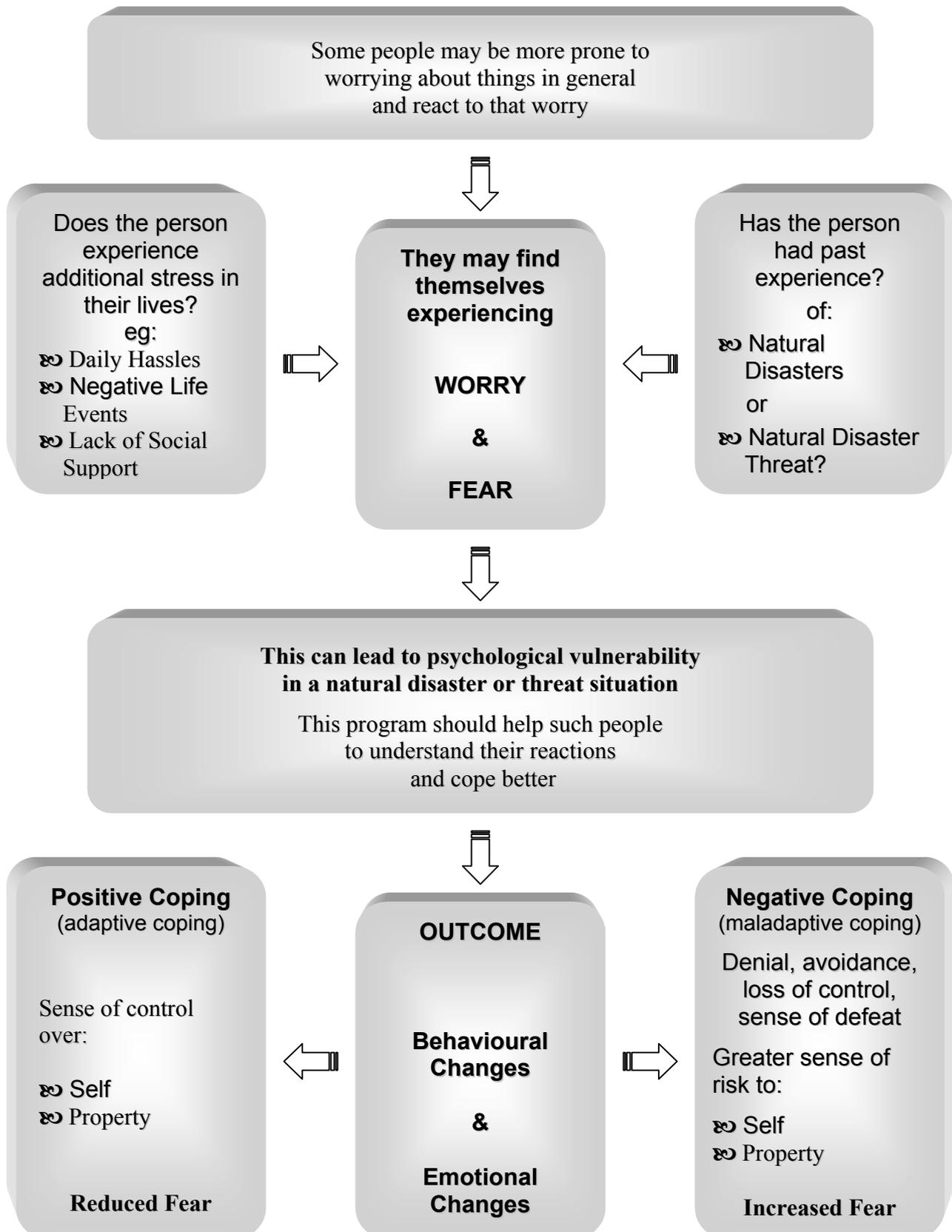
What we can do next time to better prepare ourselves, and our community, both psychologically and materially for a natural disaster warning or event.

### 3.3 Coping with Losses & Damage - Taking Stock

Communities may need to work together to restore services after a natural disaster and individuals need to know that it's OK to ask for help.

## Worry and Anxiety Table

It is normal to experience worry and anxiety in the face of disasters and this includes during the warnings stage. For some people though this reaction becomes extreme and distressing. The model below explains the process and the outcome.



# Impending Disaster Quiz

For each question place a 🗑 inside the ⑨ that represent your views about impending disaster.

There are a number of different views with respect to impending disasters. We are interested in YOUR view here. Please respond as best you can.

1. Do you believe that the likelihood of your community experiencing a natural disaster this year is?
  - ⑨ Highly likely
  - ⑨ Could happen
  - ⑨ Very unlikely
  
2. If your community or region experienced a **natural disaster warning** (flood, cyclone, etc) last year, how likely is it that your region will experience another **natural disaster warning** this year?
  - ⑨ More likely
  - ⑨ Same likelihood
  - ⑨ Less likely
  
3. If your region experienced an **actual natural disaster** (flood, cyclone, bushfire, tornado, earthquake, etc) last year, how likely is it that your region will experience another **natural disaster** this year?
  - ⑨ More likely
  - ⑨ Same likelihood
  - ⑨ Less likely
  
4. How **controllable** are natural disasters?
  - ⑨ Not controllable at all
  - ⑨ Somewhat controllable
  - ⑨ Very controllable
  
5. How **predictable** are natural disasters?
  - ⑨ Not predictable at all
  - ⑨ Somewhat predictable
  - ⑨ Very predictable

# Pre Disaster – The Warning Stage

## Summary Sheet

### 1. Good psychological preparation leads to:

- ☞ Better physical preparation
- ☞ Less fear, less hopelessness, more confidence and better coping
- ☞ A significantly better understanding, anticipation and identifying of feelings

### 2. Some people are more prone to worrying about things in general and this can make them more vulnerable in a natural disaster situation

### 3. All of us deal with the threat of natural disaster in different ways and many of us can be caught out by false beliefs or psychological 'traps' including:

- ☞ Denial – it's not going to happen to me
- ☞ Haven't been through a disaster so they can't imagine what it would be like and do nothing
- ☞ Not dealing with it at all because:
  - ☞ It is uncontrollable
  - ☞ It's just another warning situation that probably won't happen
  - ☞ We live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century so we'll be OK
  - ☞ We were OK last time and we'll be OK this time
  - ☞ We had a disaster last year so we're not due for one for a long time
- ☞ Some will be just do what someone else is doing and not think about it

### 4. The way we feel, think and react to a disaster situation is interconnected:

- ☞ The way we are feeling will affect our thoughts and actions.
- ☞ The way we are thinking about it will affect our feelings and actions.
- ☞ The things we do (actions) will affect our feelings and thoughts.

## What You Can Do

- ☞ Make sure you have a copy of your local disaster emergency guides
- ☞ Treat every warning as a real threat and do all the things necessary to prepare yourself
- ☞ Be careful not to be caught in any thought 'traps'
- ☞ Give support to your neighbours and friends (some will be doing the things identified in 3 above)
- ☞ Make sure that you stay calm and act rationally

# Normal Responses to Stressful Situations

## ☞ **Physical symptoms:**

- ☞ Shortness of breath
- ☞ Dizziness
- ☞ Nausea (the state that precedes vomiting)
- ☞ Flushes (A response of body tissues to injury or irritation; characterized by pain and swelling and redness and heat)
- ☞ Palpitations (a shaky motion caused by rapid or irregular heartbeat)
- ☞ Numbing and tingling
- ☞ Blood pressure rises
- ☞ Tense Muscles

## ☞ **Some stressful thoughts *during the disaster threat period***

- ☞ I can't cope
- ☞ This is awful
- ☞ We're going to get hurt
- ☞ The whole town will be washed away/burnt down/wiped out/destroyed
- ☞ We'll all die

## ☞ **Actions in the face of impending disaster**

- ☞ 'Freeze' or do nothing
- ☞ 'Panic'
- ☞ Heightened attention and nervous activity

# Subjective Units of Distress Scale

Levels of distress (including feelings, thoughts and actions) experienced during disaster warnings or disaster events

If you have ever experienced any of these responses during a disaster warning or disaster event, rate on the scale below how distressing these feelings/thoughts were.

<b>No Distress At All</b>	←————→				<b>Very Strong Distress</b>
<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

Shortness of breath	0	1	2	3	4	5
Dizziness	0	1	2	3	4	5
Nausea	0	1	2	3	4	5
Flushes	0	1	2	3	4	5
Palpitations	0	1	2	3	4	5
Numbing and tingling	0	1	2	3	4	5
Blood pressure rises	0	1	2	3	4	5
Tense Muscles	0	1	2	3	4	5
I can't cope	0	1	2	3	4	5
This is awful	0	1	2	3	4	5
We're going to get hurt	0	1	2	3	4	5
The whole town will be washed away/ burnt down/wiped out/destroyed	0	1	2	3	4	5
We'll all die	0	1	2	3	4	5
'Freeze' or do nothing	0	1	2	3	4	5
'Panic'	0	1	2	3	4	5
Heightened vigilance (attention) and nervous activity	0	1	2	3	4	5

## Breathing and Self-Talk

*“the way we feel  
in stressful situations  
is affected by  
the way we breathe  
and the things  
we tell ourselves”*

### For example:

- ∞ When we are upset, we are often told to “take a few deep breaths”. This is not quite right. When we are feeling anxious or frightened, we don’t need a deep breath, but rather we need to take normal breaths and exhale slowly. **Breathing out** is associated with relaxation not breathing in. Sometimes people find it helps to breathe in through the nose and out through their mouths.
- ∞ While concentrating on a long, slow exhalation (breathing out) it is a good idea to say the words ‘calm’ and ‘relax’. These are good words to use because they are already associated with feeling peaceful and at ease.
- ∞ The third thing to remember is to slow down the breathing. Often when people are afraid they begin to breathe faster, this is a natural reaction and prepares the body to deal with changes and if necessary, ‘run away’. However in a disaster warning and in some disaster events (e.g. cyclones), we may not want people to run anywhere, it may be much more appropriate to stay inside and wait for instructions from emergency services.
- ∞ Slowing the breathing down is easy, take smaller breaths and pause between breaths to space them out. When you have breathed out slowly, hold your breath for a count of three before inhaling your next breath.

## Tips to help cope with aroused feelings

- ⌘ Continue breathing slowly
- ⌘ Focus on what needs to be done
- ⌘ Focus on being relaxed and reduce tension
- ⌘ Check on family/neighbours (if appropriate)
- ⌘ Listen to emergency service advice on the radio

Remember even though we need to be able to draw on our survival resource, our 'fight' mechanism, we need to do so as sensibly as possible.

**Therefore it is important not to let the feelings and thoughts get in the way of careful and well planned responses.**

*“we should aim to respond not simply react and therefore concentrate on staying as calm as possible even during the disaster event”*

## Tips to help others to cope with their feelings

- ⌘ Teach them the simple breathing exercises
- ⌘ Be sensitive to them, do not judge (they may be feeling scared, angry or ashamed if they are not coping as well as you appear to be)
- ⌘ Encourage them to take responsibility for a task that needs attending to
- ⌘ Encourage them to listen to the emergency advice with you
- ⌘ Encourage them to talk about how they are feeling with you

Reser and Morrissey used the content in Handout #10 in the form of a fridge magnet.

Their research reported that people found this to be very helpful during the severe warning situation of Cyclone Justin.

*“adequate preparation for a natural disaster involves both preparing yourself emotionally and making your home situation as safe as possible*

## Self statements for dealing with anxiety and worry during a real threat or natural disaster warning

### 1. Preparing for Worry/Anxiety

Notice what is happening to my body..... Think about what I can do  
 ..... Relax and breathe calmly  
 Don't think the worst..... Think rationally  
 No putting myself down..... I can handle this

#### Action

Attend to the warning message and GET THE FACTS  
 Make a list of the practical things that need attention

### 2. Coping if feelings start to build

My muscles are starting to feel tight..... It's time to relax  
 My anxiety is a signal for what I need to do..... I can meet this challenge  
 I don't have to be totally calm to be OK..... Just breathe slowly  
 Think about what I have to do..... Take one step at a time  
 No need to add to the fear with worrying thoughts..... Stay relevant

#### Action

FOCUS ON WHAT HAS TO BE DONE  
 Emergency phone numbers  
 Emergency radio frequencies  
 Check that batteries work for radio  
 Check where family members or friends are  
 Make sure you have an emergency kit ready

### 3. Coping if feelings start to overwhelm

My fear is rising..... That's OK, stay with it  
 No need to panic..... I can handle this  
 It's OK to be afraid..... Stay with it  
 What do I need to do?..... Focus on the present  
 Get the tension down a little bit..... Just breathe easily and calmly

#### Action

Talk to a family member, check on your neighbour. Try not to add to your fears with worrying thoughts. Keep your emotions at a manageable level. Remind yourself that this is an emergency situation and that it's natural that you're feeling anxious and stressed.  
 You cannot control the event but you can control your own feelings.

### 4. Coping when it's all over

I wasn't perfectly calm but that's OK..... I tried and that's what counts  
 It wasn't as bad as I expected..... I'm coping better all the time

#### Action

Talk with your family or neighbours about the threat, about how prepared you were, about what might have happened had it hit (if in fact it didn't). Congratulate yourselves for being better prepared emotionally and practically this time. Identify those things that still need attention and make a plan to attend to them as soon as possible. Keep up the good work for the remainder of the threat season (if there is a season)..WELL DONE.

**Remember that adequate preparation for a natural disaster involves both preparing yourself emotionally and making your home situation as safe as possible.**





