

## Gambler's Fallacy

It is common to reassure yourself with the thought that a disaster is unlikely to really hit your community or your house, and/or to take comfort from the thought that this house came through the last disaster or that another disaster event is not yet 'due'.

*"I read that a disaster has only happened a few times in the last 100 years in this area and we had one a few years ago so we're not due for one for a long time yet"*

### What happens:

Whether a disaster strikes this year does not depend on how long it has been since we had one. This error in judgement which people make is known as the "Gambler's Fallacy". People also tend to under-estimate personal risk and over-estimate personal control over events.

### What to do:

Trust your disaster warning messages not your gambling hunches and do all the things you should do according to your local disaster emergency guide.

## Confusion of Uncontrollable Events with Controllable Consequences

Another cause for feelings of worry and helplessness when a natural disaster threatens is the repeated thought that a natural disaster is an awesome and uncontrollable 'act of nature'.

*"The thing will either hit us or it won't and there's nothing we can do about that so why even bother trying to do anything"*

### What happens:

These feelings of helplessness often cause you to do nothing.

### What to do:

It is important to remind yourself that although you cannot exercise control over the natural disaster, you are not helpless to protect yourself and your family from its consequences. Undertaking all the protective measures contained in your local disaster emergency guides will not only increase your safety, it will help you to feel more in control and less worried.

## Negative Thinking and Feeling Helpless

When people are worried about an event occurring that they cannot control, they often add to that worry by the way they think.

For example:

*“This is going to be terrible”*

*“This is awful”*

*“I can’t cope with this?””*

*“There’s nothing I can do”*

These thoughts only serve to increase the fear and can actually interfere with a person’s ability to cope. In effect this type of worrying leads to some people feeling even more helpless. It is important to remember that you can challenge and change your thinking in this situation, which in turn will affect how you are feeling and how well you cope with the situation at hand.

In the next section of the guide we offer some coping strategies that might help you counter you negative thoughts.

## Common psychological ‘traps’ or faulty beliefs

### ‘Unreality’ of the Event

Unless you have been through a natural disaster, it is difficult to imagine fully what it will be like and your own feelings of fear and panic. One way in which you deal with this possible situation is to not deal with it, not to think of the threat or event as *real* and requiring a changed response from yourself. This unreality is often helped along by television images, limited information, the anxiety caused by the warnings, the serious nature of the event, and, very often, the seemingly normal nature of other things about you.

*“I’ve never been through a natural disaster and I’m so worried because I’ve seen how much damage they do on the TV”*

### What happens:

This ‘unreality’ can greatly interfere with disaster preparation by not dealing with it.

### What to do:

You need to keep telling yourself that what is happening is very real and requires sensible behaviour on your part.

## Dealing with Anxiety and Worry During an Emergency Warning Situation

(some common thoughts or statements and what to say to yourself)

### 1 Preparing for Worry or Anxiety

What to do	How to cope
Notice what is happening to my body	I can handle this
Think about what I can do, try not to think the worst	Think sensibly
Attend to the warning message – get the facts	Relax and breathe calmly
<b>Make a list of the practical things that need attention</b>	

### 2 Coping if Feelings Start to Build

What I might feel	How to cope
My muscles are starting to feel tight	It's time to relax
My worry 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 on track

## Human Response to Emergency Warning Situations

### Warning situations can themselves be very stressful

An emergency or disaster warning situation is a stressful situation. Most of the information available for dealing with an emergency or disaster situation is about 'physical preparedness' like 'battening down' your home, cleaning up rubbish around the yard, making sure you have batteries for the radio and touch, candles, fresh water, and the list goes on. Authorities will advise you about the location of the threat, its intensity and the safety of yourself, your family and your property...and of course this is extremely important.

Natural disasters, like cyclones, bushfires, floods, earthquakes and tornados can be very destructive and can injure and kill, to say nothing of the huge property damage. Disaster warning alerts can also be difficult to deal with emotionally. Many areas of Australia might receive several warnings or alerts during the course of the disaster season, which, for most areas of Australia, is likely to be the summer and autumn months, particularly for cyclones, bushfires, and flood. These repeated alerts or even false alarms (eg, cyclones) can in themselves be very stressful. To deal with the normal practical preparation effectively, it is necessary to prepare for the emotional stress as well.

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### Suggestion:

At this time it is important to have a good understanding of what is actually happening. Make sure you know where your family members are so you won't be unduly worried if the situation worsens and check the following:

- ☞ Watch and listen to disaster emergency messages closely and make sure you know where the threat is, relevant to where you are.
- ☞ Monitor any other relevant information. For example:

**Cyclone:** What cyclone category is it? If you don't know what the different categories are they are listed on the following page.

**Bushfire:** Which way and how strong is the wind blowing and is it likely to blow toward you?

**Flood:** What are the water levels relevant to your position and rates of rising floods?

**Tornado:** What is the current path being travelled and is there a likelihood of additional tornados forming?

## Forward

This guide is intended for use as a tool to help people who may be affected by natural disaster understand and cope with their feelings and emotions before, during and after a disaster event or warning. The impact of a natural disaster or even the warnings that come before a disaster can be very stressful.

The guide provides some very useful strategies and information for managing your emotions and helping you to prepare yourself more effectively for a disaster situation. The information relating to psychological response and preparedness to disaster warnings and situations was taken from research undertaken by Associate Professor Joseph Reser and Doctor Shirley Morrissey, psychologists working at James Cook University, during the cyclone season in 1996/97.

The terms natural disaster or disaster or emergency situation, might be substituted by a more relevant term, like cyclone, flood, bushfire, lightening strike, etc., according to your locality and most common or likely natural disaster threat.

### Suggestion:

At this point, talk to a family member, or check on your neighbour. It might help if you can help someone else stay calm. Try not to add to your fears with worrying thoughts. Monitor your feelings. Keep the emotions at a manageable level. Remind yourself that this is an emergency situation and that it's natural that you're feeling worried and stressed. You cannot control the disaster but you can control your own feelings.

### 4 Coping when it's all over

How did I feel	How to cope
I wasn't perfectly calm but that's OK	I tried to manage the anxiety and that's what counts
It is normal to feel worried during a disaster event but it wasn't as bad as I thought this time	I'm coping better all the time

### Suggestion:

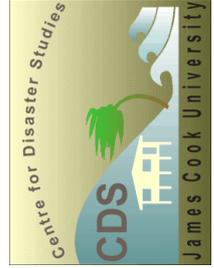
Talk with your family or neighbours about the disaster, about how prepared you were, about what might have happened had it hit and congratulate yourselves for being prepared emotionally and practically on this occasion. Identify those things that still require attention and make a plan to attend to them as soon as possible. Make sure you keep up your disaster preparedness plan of action at all times and in particular during peak disaster threat season.

Remember that being prepared for the disaster season involves both preparing yourself emotionally and making your home situation as safe as possible.

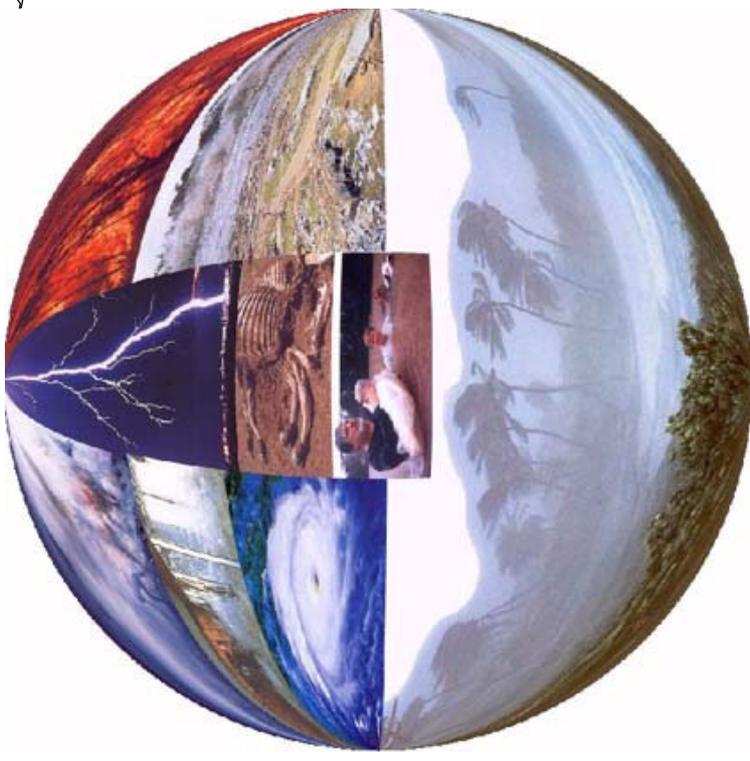
## Contents

<b>Glossary of Terms used in this Guide Forward</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Human Response to Stressful Events</b>	<b>3</b>
The importance of Coping	4
People Cope and Respond Differently	
<b>Human Response to Emergency Warning Situations</b>	<b>5</b>
Warning situations can themselves be very stressful	
<b>Understanding and Dealing with Feelings</b>	<b>6</b>
Anxiety and Defence	
<b>Common psychological 'traps' or faulty beliefs</b>	<b>7</b>
'Unreality' of the Event	
Anxiety (Worry) Triggered by Actual Natural Disaster Preparations	
Confusion of Uncontrollable Event with Controllable Consequences	
Desensitisation	
False Sense of Security	
Gambler's Fallacy	
Suggestibility	
<b>Negative Thinking and Feeling Helpless</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Strategies for Preparing for an Emergency or Disaster Situation</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Dealing with Anxiety and Worry During an Emergency Warning Situation</b>	<b>16</b>
Preparing for Worry or Anxiety	
Coping if Feelings Start to Build	
Cyclone Categories	
Coping if feelings start to overwhelm or the warning event is becoming more of a threat	
Coping when it's all over	
<b>Checking How You Coped and what Worked</b>	

*Awareness*  
*Endurance*  
*Recovery*



*Awareness, Endurance, Recovery*



*Psychological Preparedness for Natural Disaster Warnings and Natural Disasters*

*Participant's Preparedness Guide*