

# Tune In & Tune Up

Drought and  
Wellbeing  
Webinar Series

the power of  
humanity



# Webinars

- 1. Maintaining wellbeing through drought & prolonged stress (Wed 17 June)**
2. The drought cycle; adaptation and strengthening resilience (Wed 1 July)
3. Wellbeing after the rains (Wed 15 July)
4. Family wellbeing in the face of ongoing stress (Wed 29 July)
5. Preparing for tough times (Wed 12 August)

# This Session

- Recording:  
<https://bit.ly/2MqY7ez>
- Q&A
- Chat box



# Maintaining Wellbeing Through Drought & Prolonged Stress

## Red Cross 'Tune in & Tune Up' Free Webinar Series

Supporting Those Living & Working in Affected Communities – 17 June 2020

## David Younger, Clinical Psychologist & Independent Consultant

Consultant to Emergency Management Sector



David Younger  
Psychology



# **WEBINAR OVERVIEW**

**1. Understanding Prolonged Stress**

**2. Providing Support to Community Members**

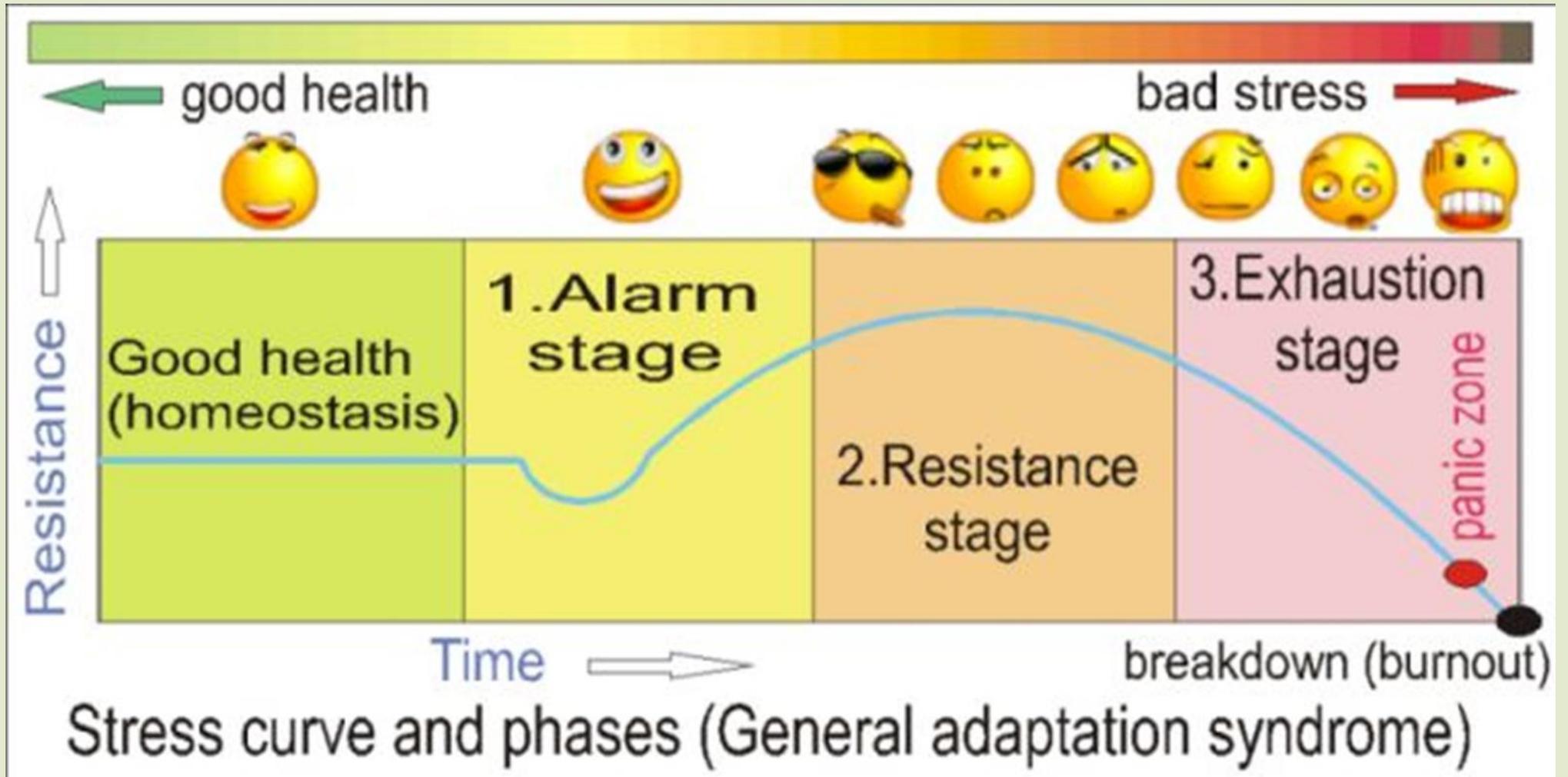
**3. Strengthening Self-Care Skills & Promoting Wellbeing**

# 1. UNDERSTANDING PROLONGED STRESS

## Prolonged Stress Effects Health & Wellbeing

- The basis of good human health is balance, stability, equilibrium, between the parts – multiple systems & organs
- The body works to maintain health by constantly making adjustments ('adaptations')
- Homeostasis (the state of balance) involves 'resisting' change to achieve a stable & constant internal environment
- We might use the phrase, 'remaining in one's comfort zone'

# Adapting to Stress (GAS) <sup>(1)</sup>



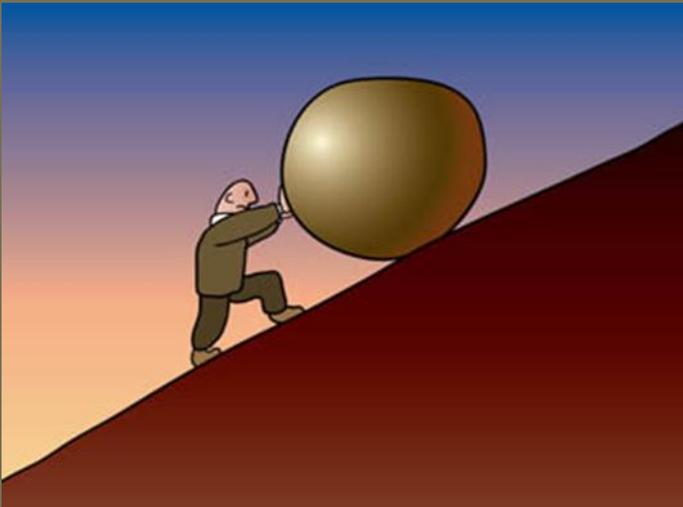
# Stage 1: Alarm Stage

- Commonly referred to as 'fight – flight – freeze'
- The adrenalin state or, 'survival mode'
- A temporary state of specialized functioning to deal with physical threat
- Redirection of resources away from less vital functions & towards more important functions
- Natural disasters activate 'survival mode'
- Subsequent disasters may re-activate 'survival mode'



## Stage 2: Resistance Stage

- When the threat subsides (drought, fire, COVID-19) the body will aim to re-establish balance
- That is, to bring a person back to 'comfort zone'
- But often the threat does not subside entirely
- As a result, the 'resistance stage' of stress begins
- Resistance is the body adapting to meet the 'subjectively perceived' threats & demands of the situation
- Eg, the fires are out but the drought continues





## Stage 2: Resistance Stage

- Resistance is driven by cortisol, a stress hormone that gives access to energy reserves
- Resistance commences when you function outside of comfort zone for an extended period
- It is a 'protracted stress' state but over time adaptive energy reserves diminish
- The result can be the emergence of ill health & a decline in wellbeing
- Cumulative events (drought, fire, COVID-19) drive a person deeper into resistance

## Stage 3: Exhaustion Stage

- The body is unable to resist & adapt any further
- All energy resources have been depleted
- There is no more energy, it has been entirely used up
- Multiple systems breakdown & susceptibility to illness emerges

### ❖ Heart disease

❖ Asthma

❖ Obesity

❖ Diabetes

❖ Headaches

### ❖ Depression & Anxiety

❖ Gastrointestinal eg, IBS

❖ Auto-immune Illness

❖ Alzheimer's Disease

❖ Cancer

**NOPE.**





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# Signs of Protracted Stress

- **Emotional:** lack of feeling, numbness, guilt, feeling helpless, fear of recurrence
- **Physical:** restless, agitated, unable to relax, very fatigued – tired
- **Social:** wanting contact & reassurance, poor relationships with others, avoid people
- **Existential:** loss of commitment to job, work satisfaction, purpose, motivation



## Prolonged Stress Results In...

- Reduced capacity for problem solving
- Not helpful for creative thinking & planning
- Judgmental, jumping to conclusions
- Ongoing bias towards threat information
- More reactive, emotionally unstable
- Life is constantly about problems & stress
- Personal relationships suffer

## 2. PROVIDING SUPPORT TO COMMUNITY

### Providing Support to Community Members

- As we have come to understand, many community members have been in a 'resistance stage' of stress
- There has been more than one disaster & for some this has also caused an oscillation between adrenalin & cortisol
- Healthy functioning has been compromised without an awareness that this has occurred
- Establishing a connection based on trust is essential to providing wrap around psychosocial supports



# Psychological First Aid (PFA)<sup>(2)</sup>

- An early intervention/support approach provided in the acute phase & early aftermath
- Centred around arousal (stress) reduction, human compassion & linking to services/supports
  - Provide comfort & care, establish a connection
  - Remove sense of threat, create safety
  - Stabilise emotions, restore self-control
  - Normalise reactions



# Psychological First Aid (PFA)

- Provide information from factual sources
  - Offer practical assistance
  - Invite into the recovery community
  - Link with support services
  - Make support services accessible & meaningful
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# Help Seeking <sup>(3)</sup>

- What influences community members' help seeking in regard to support services?
  - **Self-awareness of distress** ie, presence of symptoms
    - does not guarantee awareness of distress
  - **Social influence processes** in the post disaster environment

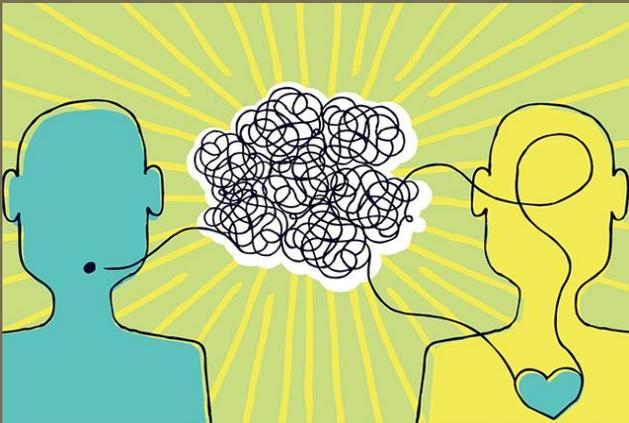


# Help Seeking

- In general, awareness of distress can be improved by application of PFA techniques
  - Social processes include stigma, equating effect with material loss, comparing self with others, requested & un-requested information from family/friends
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# Communication Principles

- Let people talk before trying to problem solve
- 2. Listen and empathise
- 3. Help them clarify what it is they are trying to say
- 4. Talk at a slower pace they can understand you
- 5. Explain why you are making suggestions
- 6. Don't use jargon, big words, complex ideas
- 7. Allow for pauses in conversation
- 8. Reflect back to them to show you are listening
- 9. Don't enter a power struggle, empathy - agree





### **3. STRENGTHENING SELF-CARE SKILLS & PROMOTING WELLBEING**

#### **Supporting Communities in Tough Times**

- The nature of the work is inherently demanding & stressful
- Repeated contact with people in high stress state
- Direct & indirect exposure to traumatic information
- Chance of personal/professional boundaries being penetrated
- This applies to everyone, not just those in formal supporting roles



# Defining Self-Care & Wellbeing

- *Well being is... 'a state in which every individual realises their potential, can cope with normal stressors, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to their community'*
- *It involves... 'being cognitively, emotionally and socially healthy...and not merely the absence of a mental health condition'*
- *Self-care... 'involves the practice, strategies, habits, routines, that assist in creating & maintaining a state of wellbeing'*



# Acquiring a Skills Set to Promote Self-Care & Wellbeing

- Self-care skills must be learnt & strengthened over time
  - Self-care practices aim to limit prolonged periods of high stress
  - The creation of regular opportunities to rest & recover
  - Increased ability to remain in or return to 'comfort zone'
  - Able to preserve healthy balanced functioning for the duration
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**Evidence shows that certain strategies contribute to stress tolerance**



**Personalised Approach to Self-Care**

**Today, four key strategies:**

**Cognitive re-appraisal & optimism**

**Relaxation techniques & mindfulness**

**Healthy living**

**Grounded & supported**

## Individual & Organisational Responsibility



Self-care practices won't magically appear without effort



And wellbeing will not occur without self-care



A decision to adopt a preventive & health promotion approach must be made



Both individuals & organisations must accept responsibility & take action consistently for this to occur



If not, we will continue to see the occurrence of health problems, emotional & physical

## Top Tips for Self-Care



Set realistic achievable goals, start small



Ensure there is a clearly identifiable positive 'reward'



Make a commitment to yourself, others



Be prepared to adjust existing routines, adapt



Set realistic timeframes, not 21 days ☹️



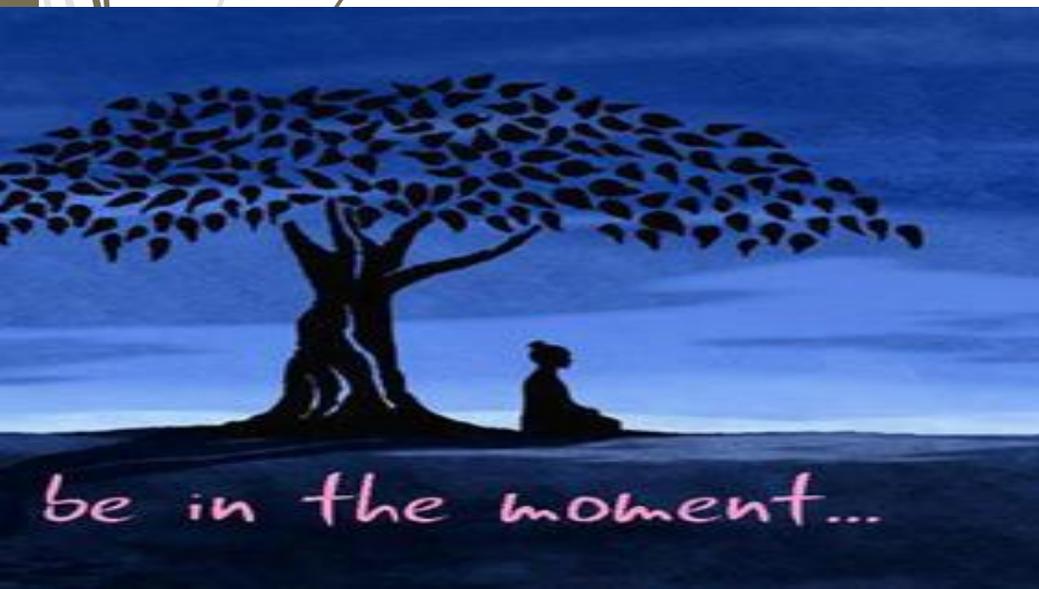
More likely 2 – 8 months (40)



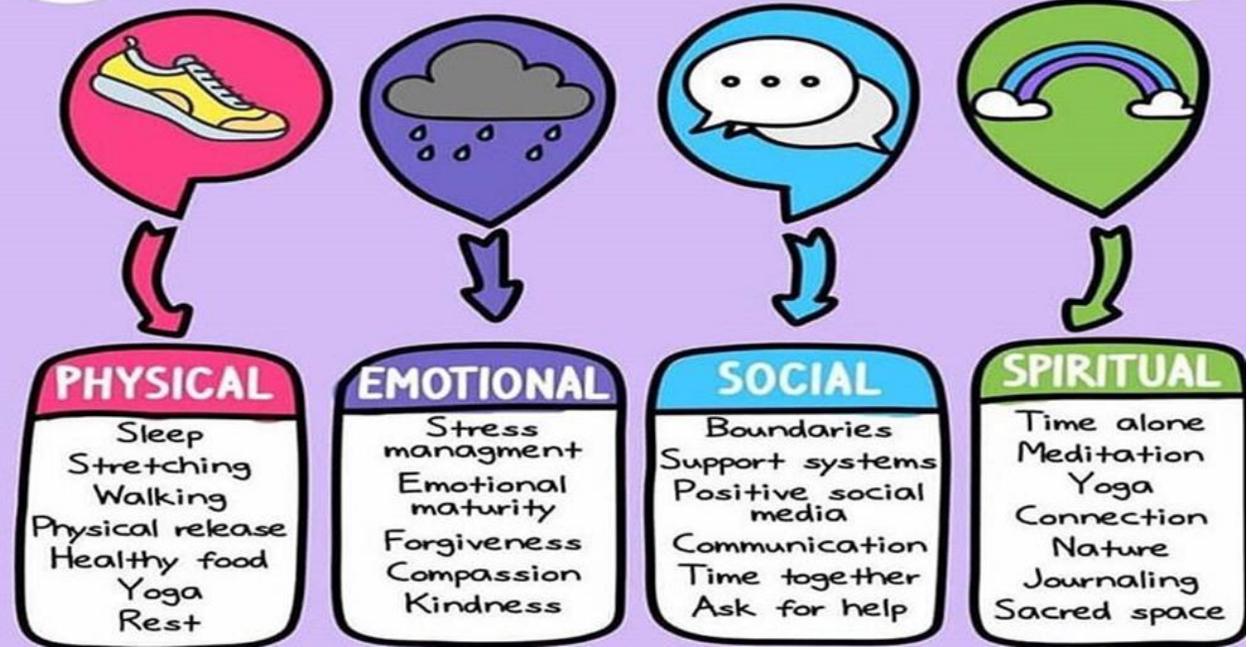
Perfection is not necessary, mistakes are ok 😊



Leisure and pleasure is the aim!



# TYPES OF SELF-CARE





## Good Practice Framework

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**Protection:** protecting mental health by reducing work related risk factors for mental health conditions & increasing protective factors

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**Promotion:** promoting mental health & wellbeing by developing the positive aspects of work as well as workers strengths & capabilities

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**Prevention:** addressing mental health conditions and difficulties among workers, regardless of whether the workplace was a contributing factor

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*Heads Up – Beyond Blue: Good practice framework for mental health & wellbeing in first responder organisations*

# Discussion & Questions

- General discussion and questions
- Where to from here?
- Self-care & wellbeing resources

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**KEEP  
CALM**

**AND**

**MAKE  
THE CONCLUSION**

# ARC Drought Resilience Program

- Support the Supporter
- Psychological First Aid
- Resilient Leaders
- Mentor Program
- Farm First Aid
- Outreach
- Expert advice
- Wellbeing resources



# Thankyou!

- Recordings and Registering: <https://bit.ly/2MqY7ez>
- Questions: [drought@redcross.org.au](mailto:drought@redcross.org.au)
- Next Webinar: **The drought cycle; adaptation and strengthening resilience** (Wed 1 July)

