

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





THE DROUGHT CYCLE, ADAPTATION AND STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE

Key considerations at different points in the
drought cycle

Jacki Schirmer

DISTINCTIVE BY DESIGN

HEALTH



UNIVERSITY OF
CANBERRA



HEALTH RESEARCH
INSTITUTE

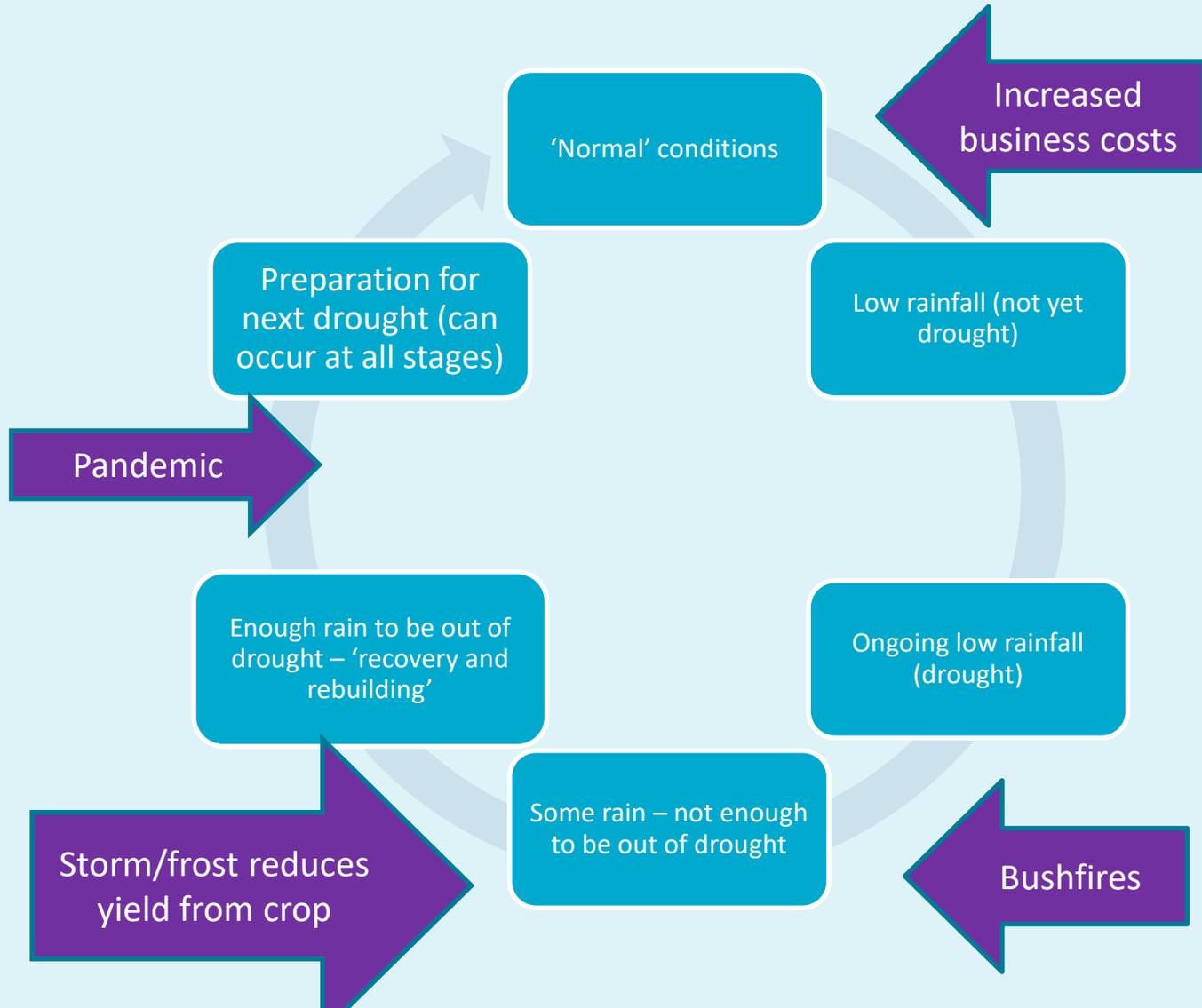
WELLBEING and RESILIENCE – what are we talking about?

Individual wellbeing: *“Mental health is a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community ...”* – **World Health Organization, 2013**

Resilience: *the ability of a person, household or community to successfully adapt to adversity and to capitalise on opportunities* (Luthar et al. 2003, Magis 2010).

Resilience in this sense is built longer term and helps you maintain your wellbeing over time.

WHAT IS THE 'DROUGHT CYCLE?'



At different points in the drought cycle, people and communities have different wellbeing and resilience challenges and needs.

The impacts of drought mix with impacts of other events going on at the same time. Effective support requires recognising this.

POLICY AND PUBLIC RESPONSES VARY THROUGH THE DROUGHT CYCLE

These reactions sometimes help, sometimes hinder wellbeing and resilience

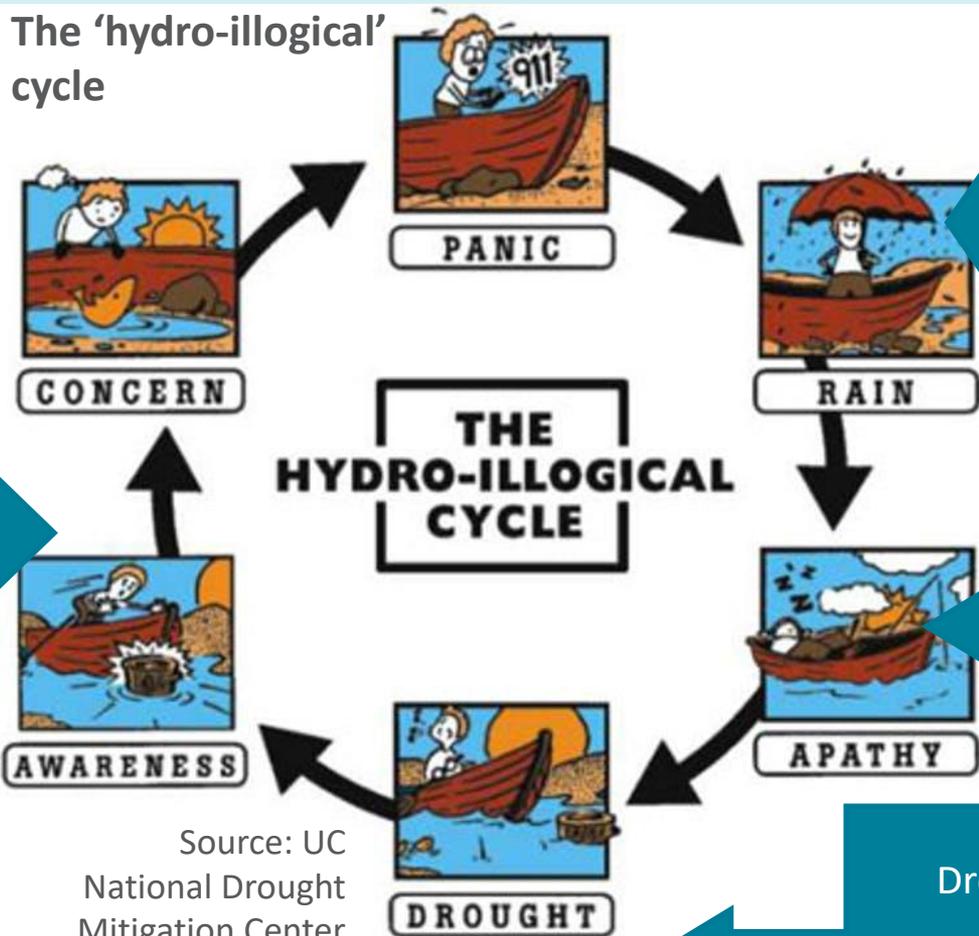
High public concern; donations; support programs emerge.

Support can help and make you feel less alone.

Not all support helps the people it is intended to.

Media stories about drought can reinforce negative feelings, helplessness

The 'hydro-illogical' cycle

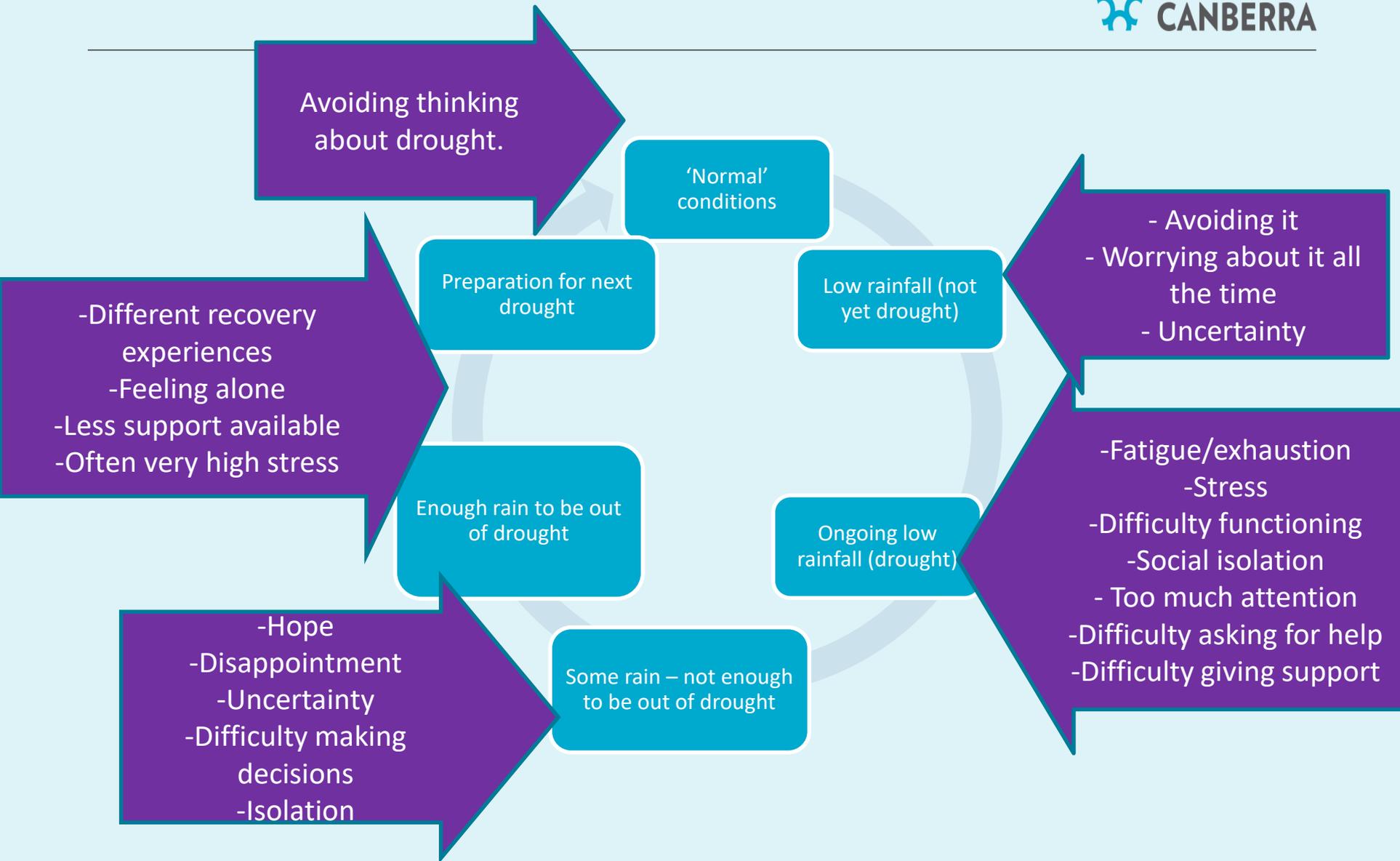


Effects of drought going. Drought-affected communities can feel forgotten/ isolated as attention to drought & support falls.

Little public attention to drought. Limited support to plan ahead for future droughts, or invest to reduce impacts.

Drought often a 'hidden' problem at first. Difficulty/stigma in asking for help. Fear about the future.

COMMON WELLBEING/RESILIENCE CHALLENGES AT DIFFERENT POINTS IN DROUGHT CYCLE



Drought has many effects – not just economic

How has the drought affected the following aspects of your life: Non-farmers

■ Reduced ■ Stayed the same ■ Increased ■ Don't know

Attractiveness/pleasantness of the local landscape



Your income



Your workload



Time spent socialising with family and friends



Your involvement in community organisations



How much people in your community support each other



Data source: 2018 RWS

SUPPORTING WELLBEING AND RESILIENCE

Drought cycle stages

'Normal' conditions

Low rainfall (not yet drought)

Ongoing low rainfall (drought)

Some rain (not enough to be out of drought)

Enough rain to be out of drought (recovery and rebuilding phase)

Preparation for next drought

Investment in planning, preparation.

Support programs available & accessible

- Financial support
- Planning/decision making support
- Reduce risk of isolation
- Support those providing support
- Don't wait for people to ask for support.

Keep support going – impacts of drought aren't over!

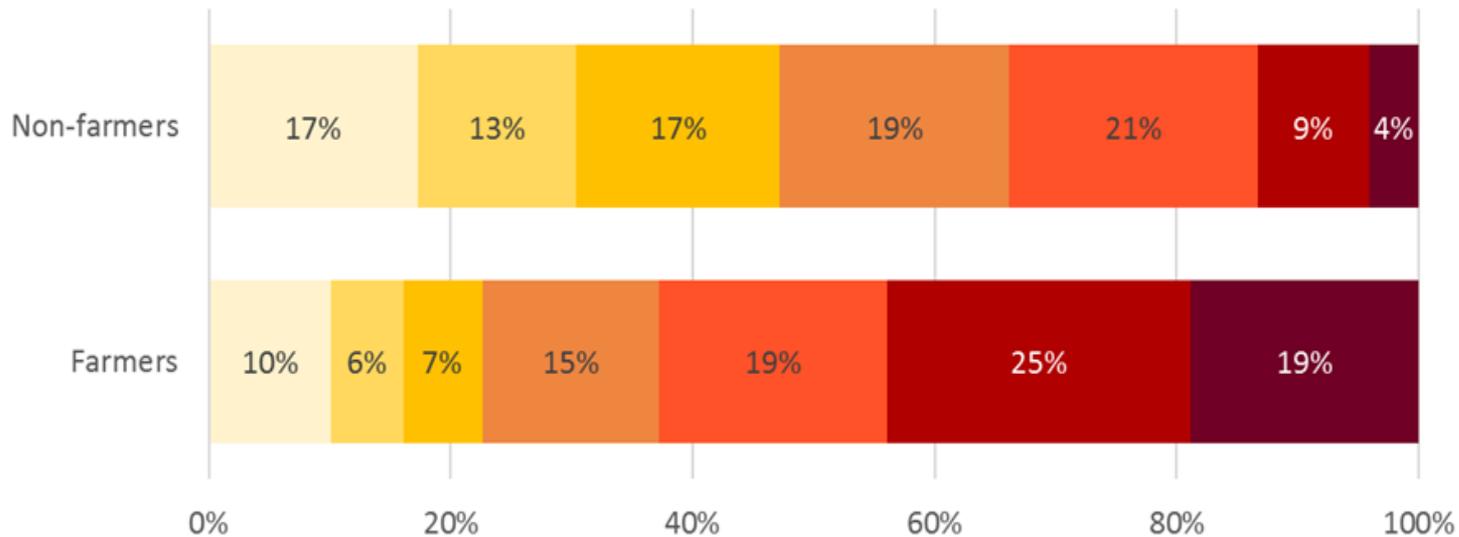
- Planning/decision making support often critical

Constructive reflection and planning
Identify actions to prepare for next drought
Provide support for those actions

Not everyone is experiencing the same things in drought-affected regions

Of those living in regions that have experience drought at some point since 2014, how many have been personally impacted by that drought?

Not at all impacted (1) 2 3 Moderately impacted (4) 5 6 Very severely impacted (7)



Data source: 2018 Regional Wellbeing Survey

Ensure support doesn't bypass local businesses, groups & organisations

Work to support social networks, community groups so communities can continue to support each other

Supporting drought affected people and communities through the drought cycle

- Both short-term (coping) and long-term (resilience) support are important
- Key challenges include stigma/fear around...
 - ... asking for help
 - ...taking action in less dry times
 - ...doing different things to others
 - ...trying things that might fail

We need healthy resilience cultures that recognise it's normal to find it difficult to cope, normal to fail sometimes, and there's no one 'right' way to cope with or respond to drought.

Prolonged Stress: Strengthening Resilience Through Adaptability & Self-Care

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

Supporting Those Living & Working in Affected Communities – 1 July 2020

David Younger, Clinical Psychologist & Independent Consultant

Consultant to Emergency Management Sector



David Younger
Psychology

1. The Psychology of Adaptation

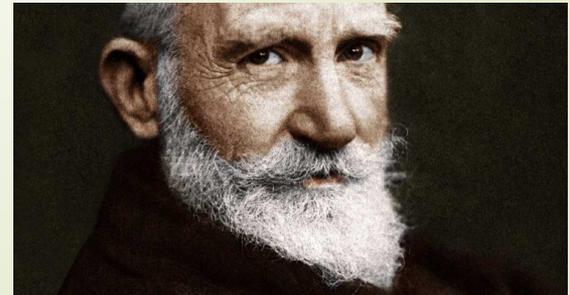
- David: an individual focus & the '101' of adaptability, prolonged stress & self-care, to strengthen resilience when working through tough times

Biological Adaptation: *'Evolutionary adaptation is the adjustment of organisms to their environment in order to improve their chances of survival in that environment.'*

Psychological Adaptation: *'...is the process by which humans sustain a balance in their mental & emotional states of being & in their interactions with their social & cultural environments.'*

Quotes About Adapting

- *'Every success story is a tale of constant adaptation, revision & change.'* Richard Branson - Entrepreneur
- *'The wise adapt themselves to circumstances as water molds itself to the pitcher.'* Chinese Proverb
- *'Those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.'* George Bernard Shaw - Playwright



Examples of Psychological Adaptation

- **An Unexpected Event:** a person needs to be able to manage emotions of surprise so they can focus their attention = stop, orient, assess, manage emotions, adapt, implement actions
- **Significant Loss, Material or Other:** onset of varying emotions (sadness, anger) that must be worked through vs leading to overwhelm = recognise, understand, feel, re-evaluate, adapt, implement actions
- Adaptation is supported by having access to adequate mental & emotional resources
- Prolonged stress prevents access to these resources



Three Resilience Considerations

Achieving better than expected outcomes in high risk groups of people/communities

Maintaining effective functioning (adaptability) under highly adverse conditions

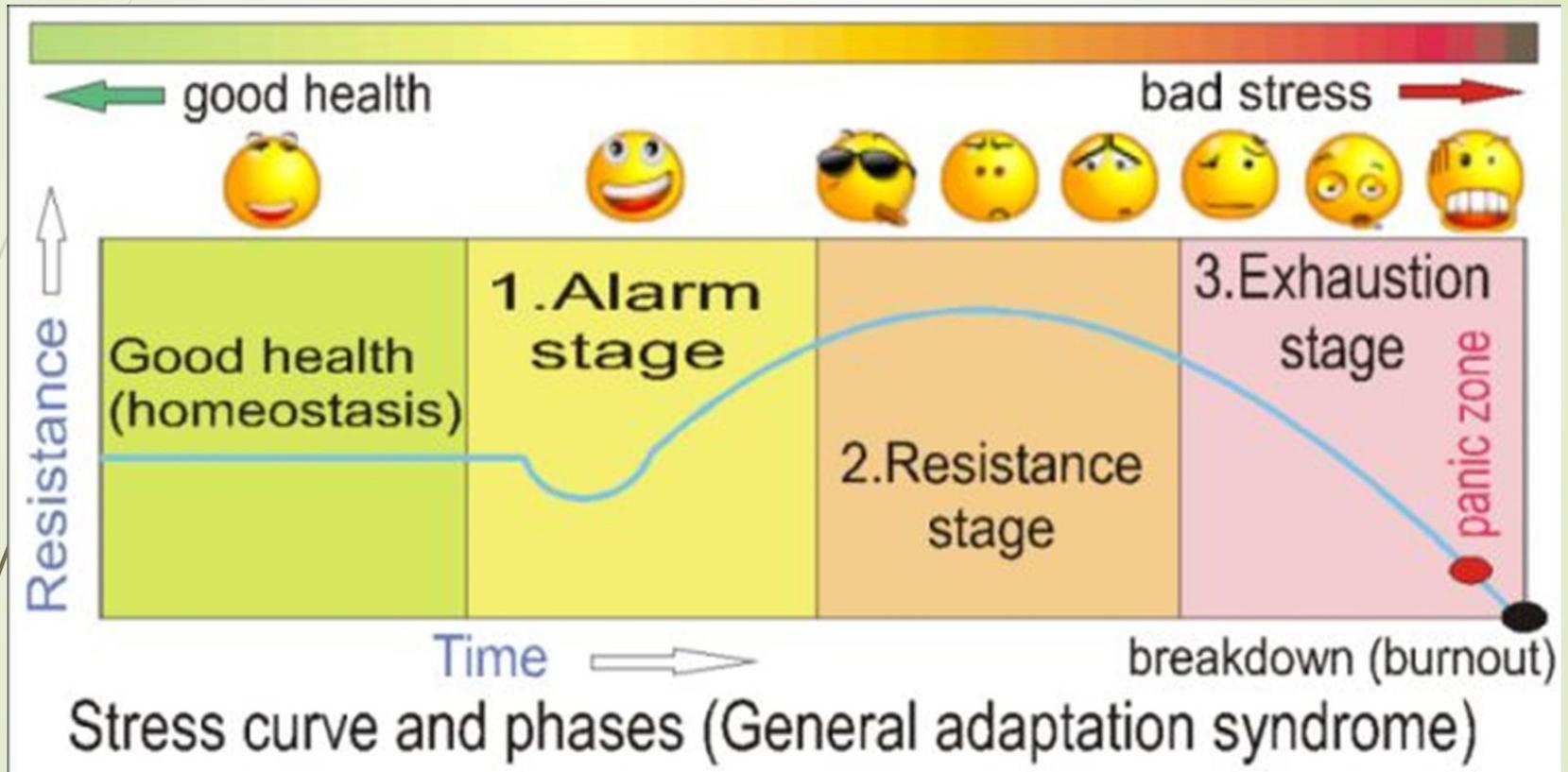
Regaining or attaining effective functioning (adaptability) under adverse conditions

What Does This Mean?

- Human adaptation requires change
- Psychological adaptation is supported by access to adequate mental & emotional resources
- Prolonged stress prevents access to adaptive resources
- Adaptation is an inherent feature of resilient responding
- Self-care ('Leisure & Pleasure') preserves & replenishes resources

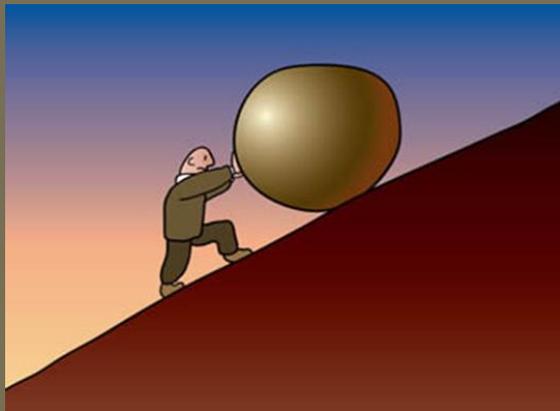


2. Adapting to Stress (GAS)



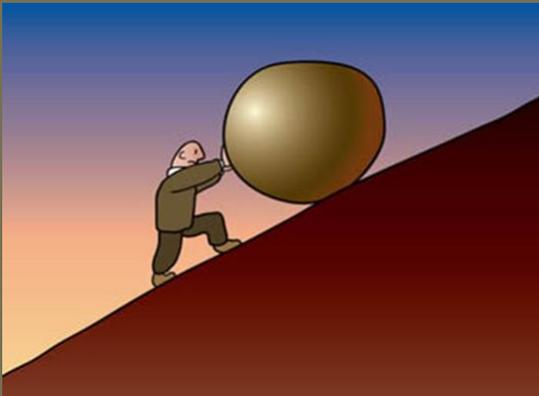
Stage 2: Prolonged Stress

- After alarm stage (drought, fire, COVID-19) the body will aim to re-establish balance
- That is, to return a person 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 prolonged threats & demands of a situation
- Eg, the fires are out but the drought continues



Stage 2: Prolonged Stress

- Resistance is driven by cortisol, a stress hormone that gives access to energy reserves
- Resistance is a 'protracted stress' state & 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





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
- Personal relationships suffer
- Significantly reduced ability to adapt in tough times



3. 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'*



Relevance to Prolonged Stress & Adaptability

- Self-care skills must be learnt & strengthened over time
- Leisure & Pleasure creates opportunities to rest & recover
- Self-care practices aim to limit prolonged periods of high stress
- Increased ability to remain in or return to comfort zone
- Improved adaptive capabilities
- Able to preserve healthy balanced functioning for the duration



Personalised Approach to Self-Care

Evidence shows that certain
strategies contribute to stress
tolerance



Types of Self-Care:

Physical

Emotional

Social

Community



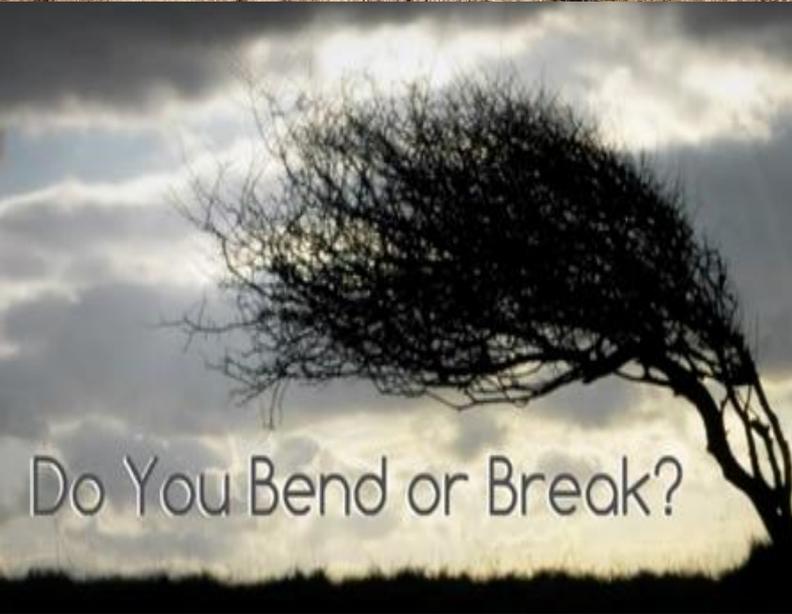
Types of Self-Care

Physical: non work based physical activity that is enjoyable; leisure & pleasure; good quality sleep

Emotional: stress management; optimistic attitude; gratitude

Social: strong connections with others; feeling supported; not alone

Community: involvement in community initiatives & activities; sense of belonging



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
- Next Webinar: **Wellbeing After The Rains** (Wed 15 July)

