

Resilience and NDIS Staff: a guide



Resources for NDIS
Emergency and Disaster
Management

How to mentally prepare your staff for emergencies and disasters

Having capable and confident staff is key to successful emergency and disaster preparation, response and recovery for NDIS Providers and Participants.

Support workers play a vital role in guiding NDIS Participants through emergency events. Whether it is knowing and practising your organisation's policies and procedures, role modelling healthy coping behaviours or carrying out the actions of individual emergency plans, support workers are the people NDIS Participants rely on to support them safely through these times.

While it is important to prepare NDIS Participants for emergencies and disasters, priority should also be given to ensuring support workers and other staff have the resources necessary to first prepare themselves, before supporting others.

This training guide is designed to support you to prepare your staff mentally for emergency events through building a culture of resilience.

The topics that will be covered include:

- 1 Exercises and discussion points for team meetings**
- 2 Implications for staff supervision sessions**
- 3 Psychological first aid for staff**
- 4 The role of a support worker in organisational recovery**

Complementary to this guide is the *Resilience and NDIS Participants* guide, which steps support workers through supporting people to complete the *Flagstaff resilience module* guide for supporting NDIS Participants to maintain good mental health throughout emergencies and disasters.

You can find the *Resilience and NDIS Participants* guide on the R4NED website by following this link and scrolling to *Support your NDIS Participants* - [Recover together – R4NED](#)

1 Team Meetings

Team Meetings are a great opportunity to bring your staff together to make sure they are on the same page regarding practical and organisational matters. Team Meetings also provide the chance to promote team bonding through the sharing of personal experiences.

Support workers juggle many responsibilities, and the role can sometimes be quite stressful. Talking explicitly about healthy coping strategies, self care and resilience are often lesser priorities when it comes to team meetings. It is crucial however that these are addressed, and especially in the context of emergency and disaster management.

Remember to model behaviours as a leader that you would like to see in your staff. This means showing that you value your own health and happiness by having a genuine work-life balance and effectively managing your own stress levels.

Below you will find a series of short exercises for use during team meetings, as well as suggested discussion points around resilience.

Facilitating rounds of professional and personal successes

Staff meetings often focus on resolving challenges and points of action.

Celebrating successes together is an important part of staff morale and resilience that is often missed.

At the start of your next staff meeting, take ten minutes to go around the room and ask people to reflect on and share a recent event in their professional life that went well; something they were they pleased about.

Ask for a volunteer to share their story first. The rest of the group should sit quietly and listen, without offering verbal feedback. If no one volunteers to start the round, it is a good idea for you to go first and to model what is expected.

At the completion of this round, facilitate another round, but this time ask your staff to share a recent success from their personal life. Again, if there is no volunteer to go first, you can start things off.

If your staff enjoy this activity, you could consider working it into your regular staff meetings, even if it is every other meeting, or once a quarter.

Self Care Activity

Creating an inventory of one's individual self care preferences is a great way to bring more regular self care practises into daily life. As a leader, it is important for you to model your own self care regimen for your staff, just as it is important for them to model theirs for the NDIS Participants they support.

Using the Self Care Activity template at the end of this guide, support your staff to reflect on the positive and negative elements of their self care regimen.

Be aware that some people will be unaware that they have self care practices, or they may know them by a different name. Additionally, note that not all self care practices are considered healthy or effective, and discretion may be needed to address this with individual staff.

Source and share resources on self care, wellness, and resilience

Sharing information and resources with your staff on self care, wellness and resilience is a useful way to promote practises in these areas and to motivate and support your staff to feel resilient.

This can be as simple as finding an article or even a short YouTube video that you relate to and sharing this with your team for reflection and discussion. The simple act of bringing these topics into conversation is helpful for creating awareness and encouraging practice.

Facilitate a deep breathing or meditation exercise

Embedding a regular deep breathing or meditation exercise into your staff meetings is a great way to practise self care as a group. You might choose to end the meeting with this, or if there is tension or stress in the room it might be a useful way to start the meeting.

Having time to practise exercises like this will also build your staff's confidence in being able to facilitate these exercises with the NDIS Participants they support.

Start by reminding your staff that slowing our breathing is the most helpful thing we can do when feeling stressed or overwhelmed by a situation. Slowing our breathing ensures we get enough oxygen to our brain, helping us to feel calm and in control. This is especially important for people in caring and supporting roles, where others look to them for a gauge of how to feel and act in an emergency situation.

Below is a series of short videos to support you with facilitating your staff to practise slow, deep breaths. Each video has a different focus which is noted below each link. Click on the links to watch the videos.

Breathe exercise

This one-minute Headspace video is a brief, instructional introduction to deep breathing.

Let go of stress exercise

This one-minute Headspace video is a brief, instructional introduction to meditation.

Leaves on a stream exercise

This five-minute video is a guided exercise that focuses on slowing breathing and managing negative thoughts.

Guided meditation for relaxation

This ten-minute video can be used for practising deep breathing, de-stressing, and inducing a full state of relaxation.

Suggested support practice topics for discussion at team meetings

- **What is resilience?**

Resilience can look like different things to different people. It can be useful to talk through this as a team and to identify what resilience means to the group.

- **Sharing self care strategies.**

Invite one or two people to share about their individualised self care practises or to bring along a new resource to share at each staff meeting.

- **A-I-M-E: steps for mental preparation.**

Ask your staff to read this guide from the Australian Psychological Society - Preparing for natural disasters. Discuss the A-I-M-E steps and how they can be applied in your workplace.

- **How to support NDIS Participants.**

Talk through strategies you can use to support your NDIS Participants to practise effective self care, both individually and in groups.

- **Questions about emergency and disaster management.**

Run a dedicated session in your next staff meeting where staff can anonymously write questions on post-it notes for you to address with them as a group.

Review and discuss your organisation's emergency management policies, procedures, and plans as a regular agenda item at team meetings.

2 Individual Supervision Sessions

Individual supervisions are an important part of fostering a support worker's development. They are a great opportunity for individuals to raise their concerns and questions about their role and to build on discussions held at team meetings.

When facilitated well, they also provide an opportunity for professional and personal growth.

Use the exercises and discussion topics, or even small sections of them, from the previous Team Meeting section to facilitate meaningful conversations during supervision.

3 Psychological First Aid

Supporting others to deal effectively with emergency events while coping with our own reactions to the situation can be a difficult undertaking. There is some truth in the saying that one should apply their own oxygen mask before assisting others, as our own functionality is necessary for supporting others, especially in times of emergency and stress. Conveying this message to support workers in practical terms is important.

Support workers need to know how to manage themselves in emergency events, in addition to ensuring the safety of the people they support and following organisational policies and procedures.

In the event of an emergency event whilst on shift, support workers could be expected to experience a stress response just like the people they are supporting. It is even normal for stress reactions to continue in the weeks after a traumatic event, such as a bushfire or flood.

Remember, support workers who experience an emergency event at work may also have to deal with the repercussions of the event at home. It is also important to consider that support workers may have experienced emergency or disaster events in the past – the memory and trauma of which could be triggered by the current situation.

Research tells us that psychological debriefing straight after an emergency or disaster – that is, being given information and talking to someone like a counsellor about your experience – is no longer a good idea. In fact, it may do more harm than good.

Instead, we now know people need to be supported in a natural and practical way to feel safe and in control after an emergency or disaster.

Providing reassurance to your staff can be incredibly helpful. While you may not be able to assist them with resources including food, shelter, money and communication, there are other practical ways you can provide safety and comfort. Sometimes we call this process *Psychological First Aid*.

Psychological First Aid is:

- **NOT debriefing**
- **NOT talking about traumatic experiences**
- **NOT counselling or something only professionals can do**

This guide from the Australian Psychological Society and the Australian Red Cross provides useful information for supporting your staff with Psychological First Aid following an emergency or disaster: [Psychological first aid: an Australian guide](#)

If you have concerns about the mental health of any of your staff members, as a result of an emergency event or not, support them to seek help from one of the services below:

[Lifeline](#) Call 13 11 14 for crisis support.

[13YARN](#) Call 13 92 76 for crisis support for Indigenous Australians.

[Kids Helpline](#) Call 1800 55 1800 for crisis support for children and young people.

[Mensline](#) Call 1300 789 978

[Beyond Blue](#) Call 1300 224 636

For information on receiving bulk-billed counselling sessions from a psychologist, direct your staff to the Services Australia website: [Mental health care and Medicare](#).

4 The role of a support worker in organisational recovery

Following an emergency and disaster, it is important to remind your staff of the balance between completing paperwork and providing the right amount of support to NDIS Participants.

This is not an invitation to forget about paperwork altogether, but an important reminder that there are times when paperwork can wait, but people in need cannot.

Equally, there will be times when your staff's support needs will take priority over other managerial or organisational tasks.

It is the staff of an organisation that keep it moving. All staff may need support after an emergency or disaster, including non-frontline staff such as administration and management teams.

During emergencies and disasters, ensuring the continuity of support for NDIS Participants is paramount. Ensuring that support workers and other staff are themselves supported to do their jobs is essential to making this happen.

Self Care Activity

	Physically (to do with my body)	Emotionally (to do with my feelings)	Mentally (to do with my thoughts)	Spiritually (to do with my being or self)
What activities give me energy and make me feel good?				
What activities take away my energy and make me feel low?				
What might give me more energy?				
What stops me from doing activities that give me energy?				
Next steps: What changes do I want to make from what I have learned here?				

Source: Adapted from Hewson's *Self Care Activity* (2011)

Some examples that you might put into each column:

Physical energy: Eating; Drinking; Sleeping; Exercise; Breaks; Relaxation.

Emotional energy: Talking to others; Hugs; Talking about your feelings; Feeling safe; Having down-time (relaxing).

Mental energy: Making a plan; Doing something creative; Doing a puzzle or an activity that challenges your brain; Getting mentally prepared; Thinking about something that's happened (reflecting).

Spiritual energy: Prayer or meditation; Practising deep breathing; Being kind to others; Spending time connecting with nature; Being quiet and still.