



Volunteering during a disaster

Many people want to volunteer their time to help those who have been affected by a disaster or traumatic event. The support volunteers provide makes an enormous contribution in getting communities back on track as quickly as possible.

When volunteering during a disaster it is important to recognise that everyone will be affected in different ways. Here are a few practical tips about how you can help others and also take care of yourself.

Assisting someone with their property and possessions

- Gain consent before entering any property.
- Introduce yourself, let the owner know you are a volunteer and ask if they want assistance.
- Have a discussion about how and where you can best help.
- Respect the owner's possessions, even if damaged as you would at any other time. These may still be valuable to the owner. The owner determines what to keep and what to dispose of.
- If the owner no longer wants your assistance it is not a reflection of your efforts. Respect their wishes.
- When leaving or taking a break let the owner know.

Supporting people experiencing loss and change

- People vary in how they respond to a traumatic event or disaster.
- Don't assume that someone affected is ready for your offer of assistance.
- Talk to those affected as you normally would to bring some normalcy to the situation.

- Ask if you are not sure about anything.
- The first thing to do if you see someone's stress level or emotions increasing is give them some space. Then you may consider directing them to professional advice or family and neighbour support.
- It is common for some people to feel annoyed, frustrated and even angry when they start to recover from a traumatic event or disaster. It is important to stay calm yourself and give them some space.

Taking care of yourself

- Be aware of the risks and dangers associated with the environment.
- Consider your own health and safety requirements before assisting others.
- Follow any advice provided by authorities.
- As a volunteer you may experience different emotions in response to the disaster and witness traumatic events. Take care of your emotional needs as well as your physical needs.

Further information

- Lifeline provides 24 hour telephone and online counselling and many online resources. **13 11 44** or www.lifeline.org.au
- Community health advice is available at <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/healthierou/disaster/default.asp>
- For more information about volunteering during a disaster visit Volunteering Queensland's website www.volunteeringqld.org.au

