

How to support people in drought



This is a tough time for your community. Farming families and the communities that rely on them are struggling with financial pressures and isolation, and all the hidden impacts that follow on. These can lead to serious mental health and wellbeing issues, including depression, anxiety, relationship breakdown, and suicide.

You can support people affected by drought by doing a few simple things – whether it is just listening or letting them know where to get help. These tips are based on Psychological First Aid principles: **look**, **listen** and **link**.



Look

Keep an eye out for people you know who might be doing it tough. They may not be around town as much, or coming along to events. Changes in the way people act or look may also indicate that people are doing it tough.

Listen

People are facing a range of different issues. Some of the things they might talk about are:

- How tired they are
- Their physical health
- Money concerns
- Concern about family members
- Issues with their relationship
- Missing out on things
- Feeling responsible for what's happening to their farm or business
- Feeling frustrated about drought relief

If people start talking about these things, you can show your concern by giving them the time and space to talk.

Listening is very important, but it can sometimes be hard to know what to say.

Things you could say

Acknowledge their situation e.g. “It’s really tough to go through something like this”, “This is such a tough time for you”

Try to put yourself in their shoes. Don’t interrupt, don’t offer examples from your own life, and don’t talk about yourself.

Avoid simple reassurances like “I know how you feel”, “You’ll be OK”, “You just need to get on with it” or “Others are doing hard too”.

Ask leading questions like, “You’ve had a rough time, how are you going?” You might ask how the drought is impacting others... “How’s xx going?”

Show you understand by feeding back what they are saying. Try starting with something like “You seem really..”, “It sounds like..”, “No wonder you feel..”



Talk to them about the things that might help:

- Try to keep healthy
- Be with people you like being with
- Do things that you like doing
- Take extra care with things like driving, machinery operation
- Watch if your alcohol, smoking or drug use has changed.

If they don’t want to talk, you can still show your support by spending time with them, talking about other things, and doing practical things to help.

Link

Communities are about sharing resources and solving problems together. Reassuring someone that they aren’t alone and that asking for help isn’t a sign of weakness, can go a long way. You can also suggest accessing services, they might be unaware of.

“Have you thought about talking to someone about what’s going on?”

“It might be worth going to the doctor to get a bit of check up”

“There is quite a bit of help out there, the xxx website has a list of the assistance and services.”



Look up the Government Drought Relief in your state.

The Red Cross Appeal: distributed through the CWA, can help with household expenses of farming families: redcross.org.au/drought

Lifeline: 13 11 14

Additional resources: Lifeline’s [toolkit](#) to help people living in drought, Red Cross’ “Coping with a major personal crisis” [booklet](#).