

# FARMER HEALTH FACT SHEET

## SOUTHERN REGION

### BUILDING EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

Emotional resilience is the willingness and capacity to accept that there will be good and bad times ahead, and to understand your reactions to these experiences and have strategies to manage them.

#### KEY POINTS

- ▶ Accept where you are in life and what life is throwing your way.
- ▶ Listen to your inner voice and, if negative, change your 'self-talk'.
- ▶ Look for ways to be connected within the community.
- ▶ Learn to get comfortable with feelings and be able to express them openly.
- ▶ Surround yourself with positive people.
- ▶ Look after your health.
- ▶ Resilience can be planned for, developed and practised.

#### The facts up front:

- ▶ One in five Australians will experience a mental illness.
- ▶ 13 per cent of Australians will experience some form of anxiety disorder.
- ▶ 20 per cent of Australians will experience depression at some time.
- ▶ Stress-related illnesses are estimated to cost Australian businesses around \$30 billion per year.
- ▶ Suicide and attempted suicide rates in Australia are the highest in the world.
- ▶ An estimated 31.1 million prescriptions for anti-depressive drugs were issued in Australia in 2009-10.

Resilience is a process, not a trait of an individual or an event. It takes preparation, and even practice, to develop and maintain emotional resilience.

Being resilient does not exclude you from experiencing difficulty or stress. However, it means you will have a tendency to cope as a result of processes, behaviours, thoughts and actions that 'bounce you forward' to a more normal state of functioning in the midst of adversity.

Emotional resilience is your ability to:

- ▶ recognise and accept challenging times in life;
- ▶ recognise your own reactions and symptoms to challenging situations; and
- ▶ have strategies to enjoy life's ups and downs so you stay well, in control and feel energised.

Seasons will be volatile; good things and unfortunate things will happen; change and challenges will occur. It is not *whether* these things will happen or to what extent, it is just a matter of *when*.

If you lack resilience or strategies to respond appropriately, you may display flight, fight or freeze behaviours.

- ▶ **Flight:** Avoidance behaviours where individuals do not talk about the situation, deny the nature of it and even lie about its seriousness.
- ▶ **Fight:** Individuals get annoyed or angry and often 'shoot the messenger' rather than addressing the message.
- ▶ **Freeze:** Individuals feel overwhelmed and don't know what to do.

The way individuals react, and what they need to do to manage their reaction in a positive way, will vary from person to person.

**FIGURE 1** Five key strategies to help experience emotional resilience.



## Five key strategies to build resilience

### 1 Positive self-talk and listening to your inner voice

Your self-talk reflects how you feel and think about yourself. When challenged, what is your self-talk? What do you hear yourself saying when you are facing a tough situation? If you have a negative self-talk, does it influence your actions and how other people interact with you?

Work at changing your self-talk so it is positive. Try and describe the situation in another way. Simply reframing your self-talk won't make the problem or challenge go away, but a change in self-talk may move you away from the flight-fight-freeze responses and into problem-solving behaviour.

During difficult times it can be hard to remember all the skills it takes to run a farm business. Rather than focusing on the negatives, consider the vast array of attributes and skills you have that contribute to your business and family life. They might include advanced negotiation, practical problem-solving, high work ethic, technology skills and so on.

### 2 Focus on the things you can control

Sometimes it can be difficult to know the difference between things that can and can't be controlled.

Become adept at knowing what you can control, as opposed to wasting energy on the things you can't. Be realistic and ask yourself, 'what can be done about this, or at least part of this?' It might be overwhelming but consider if there are parts that can be addressed to get some positive return.

### 3 Planning

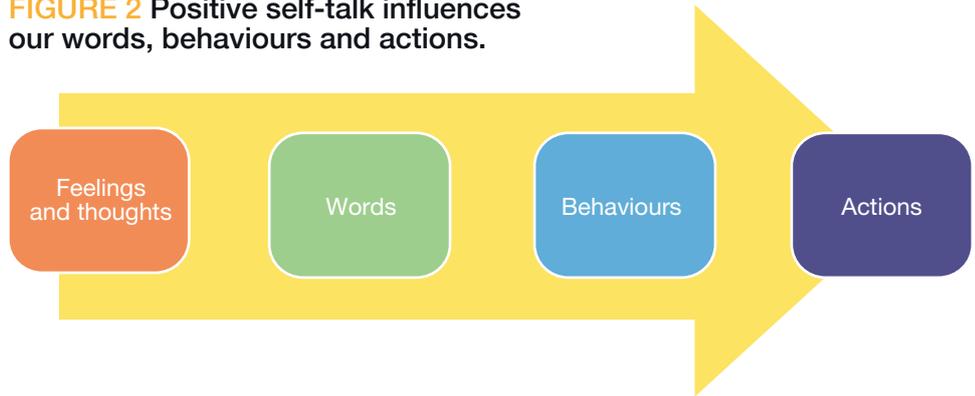
It is important to plan and have mechanisms in place to apply in difficult times.

Begin by understanding what 'pushes your buttons' and might threaten your resilience. Knowing what reaction you have when your 'buttons are pushed' enables you to make a plan to counter any adverse reactions and adopt a different strategy or reaction.

Find out what works for you, create a plan and build on it continually.

Time management is also important to help create a stable and certain environment

FIGURE 2 Positive self-talk influences our words, behaviours and actions.



so you can better handle any surprises. Having a plan, even a simple to-do list, will remind you of the steps you are taking and the progress being made.

### 4 Look after yourself

By looking after yourself you increase your capacity to handle the challenges around you.

- **Physical health:** Exercise, a balanced diet and rest are crucial. Make it a priority to see a doctor and dentist. This may be difficult in some rural areas, but schedule them at least twice a year, every year.
- **Mental health:** De-stress and maintain quality of sleep. Think about whether you get a good night's sleep, are able to wind down and de-stress. If not, consider why.
- **Connectivity and social networks:** Stay connected with your friends, family and your community through local groups, clubs and online social networks.
- **Spirituality:** We each have a spiritual dimension. Try to connect with it by spending time in nature, meditating appreciating music or art, or prayer.

Feeling good doesn't just happen. Living a balanced life requires taking the time to renew yourself and improve your personal wellbeing. Remember: every day provides a new opportunity to recharge and look after yourself.

Give yourself a break. Taking time away from the farm can be a source of stress and potential conflict among family members. Even during busy times, consider taking a break of up to four days to recharge and increase your effectiveness when back at work. During 'down time' you should take a break for at least four days.

*Tip: If you can't look after yourself, you can't look after your family, your mates or the business.*

### 5 Connecting with community

It is essential to stay involved with family, work and the community for many positive reasons, including being able to contribute, being valued and to maintain perspective. The more people you interact with, the greater the likelihood that you will meet people who have experienced, survived and grown through similar experiences.

Look for ways to connect with the community through work, volunteering, sporting clubs or charity clubs, and get your friends involved in the activities as well. There is scope for positive engagement through the virtual community. Social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, is a valuable tool to stay connected and engaged both locally and further afield.

Make the choice to be positive. Positive people attract positive people and all the benefits that come with that. Negative people attract negative people and everything that goes with that. Surround yourself with positive people and reap the benefits.

### What type of self-talk do you have?

*Think of a major change you would like to achieve or a challenge you will face in the future. When you think about the change or challenge, what do you hear yourself say?*

- *Is it positive? 'I can do this.'*
- *Is it negative? 'No I can't.'*
- *If it is negative, is it realistic?*
- *If it is negative, can it be reframed?*

## What is depression?

Depression is a mood disorder that is characterised by an **unusually persistent** sad mood that does not go away, a loss of enjoyment and interest in once pleasurable activities and a lack of energy and tiredness.

It is helpful for people to understand what depression is and what it isn't.

It is not something to be ashamed of or to feel guilty about. It is not a character flaw or a sign of weakness, or a lack of discipline or personal strength. It is not just a mood that someone can 'snap

out of'. More importantly, depression is not permanent and the chances for recovery are very good.

Some risk factors for depression include:

- ▶ loneliness;
- ▶ lack of social support;
- ▶ recent stressful life experiences;
- ▶ family history of depression;
- ▶ marital or relationship problems;
- ▶ financial strain;
- ▶ early childhood trauma or abuse;
- ▶ alcohol or drug abuse;
- ▶ unemployment or underemployment; and
- ▶ health problems or chronic pain.

Why are farmers more vulnerable?

Reasons include:

- ▶ intense periods of work;
- ▶ lack of sleep;
- ▶ isolation;
- ▶ lower exercise levels;
- ▶ services not readily available;
- ▶ self-sufficiency and independent attitude;
- ▶ 'just get on with it' attitude; and
- ▶ the stigma around mental illness and a general reluctance to seek help.

## Spotting the early warning signs

**"Mental health is a state of wellbeing. It refers to our emotional, psychological and spiritual health, and how we feel about ourselves and the world around us"** Dennis Hoiberg, Lessons Learnt Consulting.

Emotions and feelings can get out of balance. If they remain so for an extended period of time they can cause significant impairment, affecting your ability to function, and can become a clinical condition.

It is important to be able to recognise the signs and symptoms that indicate your resilience is slipping. They can be different for each individual.

Some signs resilience may be slipping include:

- ▶ declined productivity, quality of work;
- ▶ increased tardiness, lateness;
- ▶ missed deadlines, incomplete tasks, carelessness, mistakes;
- ▶ lack of cooperation;
- ▶ withdrawal from activities;
- ▶ increased irritability and frustration with minor events;

- ▶ increased sensitivity to criticism;
- ▶ increased alcohol consumption or abuse;
- ▶ complaints of aches and pains;
- ▶ constant lethargy; and
- ▶ individuals appearing ill at ease and not themselves.

**Tip: As a guide, if someone experiences these symptoms for more than two consecutive weeks with no explanation and it is affecting their ability to function, they should seek professional help.**

## How to build a resilient lifestyle

Maintaining resilience is an ongoing exercise. Having a plan and looking at it once is not enough, it needs to be part of your life.

- ▶ Get comfortable with feelings. Have the courage to ask the question, 'How are you going?' and follow up with 'I am concerned for you,' and 'I am here for you if you need.'
- ▶ Care for your mates, colleagues and families. Keep connected in the community and talk yourself, and your mates, up.

**TABLE 1** Symptoms of reducing resilience.

Emotions
Sadness
Anxiety
Guilt
Anger
Overwhelmed
Irritable
Mood swings
Lack of emotions
Helplessness
Hopelessness
Lacking confidence
Indecisive
Thoughts
Frequent self-criticism
Self-blame
Pessimism
Impaired memory and concentration
Indecisiveness and confusion
Tendency to believe others see you in a negative light
Thoughts of death and suicide
Behaviours
Crying spells
Withdrawal from others
Worrying
Neglecting responsibilities
Loss of interest in personal appearance
Loss of motivation
Not doing usual enjoyable activities
Unable to concentrate
Physical symptoms
Chronic fatigue
Lack of energy
Sleeping too much or too little
Overeating, loss or change of appetite
Constipation
Weight loss or gain
Irregular menstrual cycle
Loss of sexual desire
Unexplained aches and pains

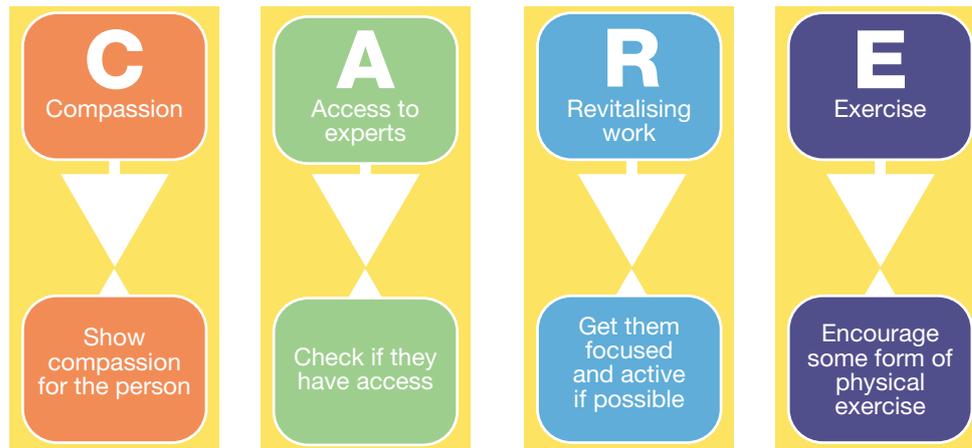
SOURCE: LESSONS LEARNT CONSULTING.

## Watch the kids

Children hear and interpret far more than most of us realise. In times of adversity or stress, communicate clearly with your children and reassure them. Be conscious of the conversations you have with your spouse, business partners or others when your children are around.



**FIGURE 3** If you are worried about someone you CARE for, remember these points.



- Give yourself a break, take some time out and get away. Get good quality sleep.
- Don't suffer from the 'I wish I had a...' syndrome.

Remember, a resilient mindset and dealing with everyday life issues in a calm and balanced manner consists of:

- **accepting** yourself for who you are and accept responsibility for looking after yourself;
- listening to your inner voice and having **positive self-talk**;
- understanding what 'pushes your buttons', how you respond and what

you can do to change your response – it's our **reactions** that cause the stress;

- **empathy** and viewing life through the eyes of others;
- communicating **effectively**;
- robust **decision-making mechanisms**;
- dealing with **mistakes**;
- dealing well with **success** and knowing what you're good at;
- being **reinforced** in the environment that you are in; and
- **following through** in order to maintain a resilient life.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### We know how important it is to look after ourselves, but why aren't we doing more about it?

Sometimes it is difficult to know where to start because there are so many messages out there. Small and regular changes to habits can have a positive impact over time. You don't need to go overboard, but remember to be patient and allow time to look after yourself.

Looking after yourself first doesn't mean you are less focused on your business. In fact, being healthy and looking after your wellbeing will mean you are more effective with your time and energy so you actually get more done in less time or achieve the goals you set out to.

### Am I going to be perceived as weak if I work on building my emotional resilience?

No. You are more likely to be admired for focusing on this skill and with experience and over time you are likely to attract others who are managing adversity.

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## USEFUL RESOURCES

### Beyondblue

(depression and anxiety)  
1300 22 4636  
[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

### Black Dog Institute

[www.blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au)

### Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health

[www.crrmh.com.au](http://www.crrmh.com.au)

### Clinical Research Unit for Anxiety and Depression (CRUFAD)

02 8382 1408  
[www.crufad.com](http://www.crufad.com)

### Lifeline (crisis support and suicide prevention)

13 11 14  
[www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

### National Centre for Farmer Health

[www.farmerhealth.org.au](http://www.farmerhealth.org.au)

## MORE INFORMATION

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