



NATIONAL

Varroa Mite Management

PROGRAM



Wellbeing and Mental Health Support

A guide for beekeepers

Information provided in this publication is not intended as a substitute for professional advice, always seek the guidance of your doctor or a qualified health professional regarding any questions around your health.



Forward

During times of change, it's common to face situations beyond your control. It's completely natural to feel worried, anxious, or even angry when things get difficult. However, it's crucial to prioritise your mental health and wellbeing and to reach out for help if needed. Maintaining good mental health and taking care of your social and emotional wellbeing is an essential part of building resilience and aiding in recovery. Since the introduction of Varroa to Australia beekeepers may be experiencing varying levels of trauma and distress.

You may relate to one of the following:

1. Pre-Varroa arrival

Beekeepers are aware of the potential consequences of Varroa. They may have participated in workshops, webinars, and talks from Varroa Development Officers (VDOS), or agency apiary staff, but still feel unsure about handling Varroa once it reaches their apiary. This uncertainty stems from the emotional toll of anticipating the arrival of Varroa.

2. Managing Varroa

Beekeepers are now actively dealing with Varroa mite in their hives, learning how to manage this new pest. These beekeepers may also have participated in workshops, webinars, and talks from the VDOs or agency apiary staff and are now putting into practice what they have learnt. Some beekeepers are confident, some unsure and feel overwhelmed by the decisions they need to make to manage Varroa and some feel they are unable to cope with this new situation.

3. Post-Varroa eradication

Beekeepers have experiences linked to the emergency response phase. It could involve the emotional impact of the loss of control of managing their hives during the response, the frequent changes to requirements on beekeepers during this time through to trauma of having hives euthanised.

This publication has been created to guide beekeepers through the various aspects of trauma related to hive management and Varroa, focusing on how to support themselves and others who may be struggling with these changes. Taking care of your own wellbeing during times of transition is just as important as managing hive health.

If you are finding it hard to cope, or if your wellbeing is being affected in ways that feel overwhelming, please reach out to a trusted health professional such as your doctor, a psychologist, or a counsellor. Professional support can make a real difference in helping you navigate challenges and maintain your health.

Author

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Contents

What is Mental Health?	6
Physical health vs mental health	6
Recognising the signs	6
Keeping yourself well	7
Identifying and managing stress	8
Techniques for managing stress	8
Self-care	8
Assessing your self-care needs	8
Types of self-care	9
Feelings of anxiety	10
Understanding and minimising impacts of anxiety	10
Quick steps to reduce feelings of anxiety	10
Taking time out to relax	11
Breathing	12
Make it count	12
Techniques	12
Sleep	13
Exercise	15
Eight Minutes of Care: Small Moments, Big Difference	16
Negative thought patterns	18
Managing your thoughts	18
Practical steps to begin	19
Understanding and Managing Trauma	20
Supporting others experiencing trauma	22
Healthy relationships	23
Benefits of a healthy relationship	23
Professional relationships	24
How to manage conflict	25
How to stay resilient during times of transition	26
When you decide to exit the industry	27
How to navigate through moving on	29



Grief and loss	29
Supporting others in grief	30
Supporting yourself through grief	30
Wellbeing and health for family	30
Supporting someone experiencing thoughts of suicide	31
What to look for:	31
How to respond:	31
Caring for yourself	31
Network and online support	32
Wellbeing and Financial Services	32
Wellbeing Services	32
Financial advice support services	33



What is Mental Health?

Mental health refers to your emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing. It affects how you think, feel, and behave in daily life, how you manage stress, relate to others, and make decisions. It is not just the absence of mental illness it also means having the ability to work productively, cope with day-to-day challenges, and live your life in the best way possible.

Good mental health means feeling well and being able to function effectively. At various stages of life, it is normal to experience highs and lows. It becomes a concern when feelings of low mood, stress, or anxiety persist for too long or start interfering with everyday life.

Everyone faces difficult situations at times. When these challenges begin to disrupt your daily routine or wellbeing, steps should be taken to protect and support your mental health.

Physical health vs mental health

Physical health is about how well your body functions, including fitness, nutrition, sleep, and the absence of illness. Mental health is about your emotional and psychological wellbeing how you think, feel, and cope with life's challenges. Both are connected and important for overall wellbeing.

Many people feel, "Everyone manages; I should be able to cope." Too often, this belief prevents people from admitting they are struggling or reaching out for support, because they don't want to burden others. In Australia, one in five people will experience a mental health issue in any given year. In rural and remote regions, there is less access to mental health care, so it is especially important to seek help early. Everyone struggles at some point in their life, and asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

Early intervention means recognising and addressing mental health concerns as soon as possible, before they become more severe. Seeking help early can prevent problems from escalating, improve recovery outcomes, and reduce the impact on daily life, work, and relationships.

Early intervention can include talking to a doctor, counsellor, or mental health professional, accessing support services, or using self-care strategies to manage stress and emotions. The earlier support is sought, the easier it often is to manage symptoms, develop coping strategies, and maintain overall wellbeing.

Recognising the signs

It's a proactive step towards maintaining mental health.

Things to look out for in yourself and others include:

- Change in appetite
- Continuous negative thoughts such as 'I am not good enough' or 'I can't do this anymore'
- Trouble concentrating
- Always distracted
- Changes to sleep patterns
- Changes in mood – anger, irritability, tearful, edgy
- Lack of motivation or loss of interest in day-to-day activities and hobbies
- Feeling physically unwell
- Poor self-care
- Increased drug or alcohol use
- Isolation from family and friends
- Thoughts of self-harm
- Thoughts of harming others



If you or someone you know is experiencing these signs, reaching out to a GP, counsellor, or support service can make a big difference. Talking early helps recovery and prevents issues from worsening.

Keeping yourself well

Keeping yourself physically well is important, but implementing activities to boost your mental health is essential.

Not every activity is suitable for everyone, trying different things to see what best suits you will increase your ability to cope with challenges as they arise.

Wellbeing involves caring for both physical and mental health. By developing strategies that support both, you strengthen your ability to manage challenges and maintain balance in your daily life.

The purpose of this section is to provide a range of practical tools and strategies that can be applied and adapted to suit individual needs.

The following topics are covered in detail on the pages ahead:

- Identifying and managing stress
- Self-care
- Anxiety
- Breathing
- Sleep
- Exercise
- Eight minutes of care

This section is designed to be used as a guide. You may choose to explore all areas or focus on those most relevant to you. Even small, consistent actions can build resilience and contribute to long-term wellbeing.

Healing and recovery is a process and depends on individual preferences. Your mental health recovery journey is your own and a plan should be developed to suit your situation and needs.



Identifying and managing stress

Stress is a natural response to challenging or demanding situations. It can trigger both physical and emotional reactions, such as increased heart rate, tension, anxiety, or irritability. While stress is a normal part of life, prolonged or unmanaged stress can negatively impact your health and wellbeing. It often arises from external pressures, such as work, relationships, or life changes, but can also come from internal factors like self-expectations or negative thinking. How stress affects you can vary, and managing it is important to maintain balance.

Techniques for managing stress

Identify stressors

Reflect on what's causing your stress. Where are you? What are you doing? Who are you with? Even if you can't change certain situations, small adjustments — like altering your routine, seeking advice, or getting help — can make a difference. Focus on what's within your control (e.g., time management) and let go of what isn't (e.g., unavoidable deadlines).

Prioritise health & wellbeing

Regular exercise can reduce stress and help release built-up adrenaline. Also, make sure to get enough sleep and eat nourishing foods to support overall health.

Stay connected & take breaks

Spending time with people who provide positive support is vital for mental wellbeing. Don't forget to engage in enjoyable activities or hobbies to help recharge and create a sense of balance in stressful times.

Problem-solving techniques

Brainstorm solutions to your stressors, then weigh the pros and cons of each. Choosing a practical option to act on can help clarify the situation and reduce anxiety.

Relaxation techniques

Practice deep breathing, meditation, or progressive muscle relaxation to calm your body and mind. Regular practice, even in non-stressful moments, can help you use these techniques more effectively when stress rises.

Challenge negative thinking

Identify whether negative thoughts are fueling your stress. Ask yourself: What am I reacting to? Is this fact or opinion? What's the worst that could happen? By challenging these thoughts, you can reduce stress and create more positive momentum.

Self-care

Self-care involves intentional practices and habits that support overall wellbeing, helping to recharge, reduce stress, and stay connected to the inner self. Too often the needs of others are put first. Focusing on the needs of family, friends, property and business, can put your own health further down the list of proprieties when life gets hectic.

Looking after yourself is not selfish, its essential. Self-care is a key contributor to good mental health and making it a daily habit even in small ways supports wellbeing and can help protect against more serious challenges over time. Just like any other priority in your day, self-care deserves attention.

Assessing your self-care needs

Everyone has individual self-care needs, these needs will change over time, even day to day. Taking the time to consider your needs or making the time to fit self-care into your day can be difficult but can contribute to improved mental health.



Remember, if you can't take care of yourself, it may become difficult to be supportive to others or function properly in your work, at home, in your social life or business.

Types of self-care

Sensory

Sensory self-care focuses on engaging and nurturing the senses sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch to create a calming and rejuvenating experience for the mind and body. It could be as simple as listening to soothing music, lighting a favourite candle, enjoying a warm cup of tea, or even taking a walk in nature to stimulate the senses in a peaceful way.

Interpersonal

Interpersonal self-care involves nurturing our relationships and maintaining healthy connections with others. It's about creating boundaries, seeking support when needed, and engaging in positive, meaningful interactions with friends, family, or colleagues. Taking time to communicate openly, show appreciation, and spend quality time with loved ones can strengthen emotional well-being and help reduce stress.

Creative

Creative self-care taps into the power of creativity to express emotions, reduce stress, and cultivate joy. Whether it's through painting, writing, dancing, crafting, or even cooking, engaging in creative activities can be incredibly healing and help you connect with your inner self. It's less about the end result and more about the process of creating, which can be therapeutic.

Physical

Physical self-care focuses on taking care of the body to enhance overall health and well-being. This can include regular exercise, eating nourishing foods, getting enough rest, staying hydrated, and managing

stress through relaxation techniques. It's all about maintaining a balanced lifestyle that supports your body's needs.

Spiritual and emotional

Spiritual and emotional self-care involves nurturing your inner world and fostering a sense of peace, purpose, and connection. This could include practices like meditation, prayer, journaling, mindfulness, or simply spending time in nature to reflect and recharge. It also means tending to your emotional health by processing feelings, seeking support, or practicing gratitude and self-compassion.



Photo: NSW DPI © State of New South Wales



Feelings of anxiety

Anxiety is a natural response to stress or uncertainty, characterised by feelings of worry, fear, or nervousness. It's the body's way of reacting to perceived threats or challenges but it can be helpful in situations that require you to be alert or take action. Anxiety can be triggered by many factors including stress, genetics, life events or medical conditions, however, it can be managed through lifestyle changes, therapy, medication or a combination of these.

Understanding and minimising impacts of anxiety

Identify Triggers

What situations or times tend to make you feel anxious? By recognising these patterns, you may be able to address the triggers and respond more effectively in the future.

Gradual Exposure

Taking small steps toward doing something you've been avoiding can be an effective way to manage discomfort. Over time, you'll build confidence and reduce anxiety.

Try New Approaches

Facing anxiety can be uncomfortable at first but confronting it can help you regain control and improve how you feel in the long run. Planning to slowly tackle the things you usually avoid can show you that it's possible to still enjoy these activities, and that anxious feelings will eventually subside.

Reducing Safety Behaviours

If you rely on safety behaviours to cope with anxiety, try listing them in order of importance. Gradually let go of the least essential ones, working your way up at a pace that feels manageable. This approach can help you slowly overcome your anxiety.

Quick steps to reduce feelings of anxiety

Acknowledge what's happening

Acknowledging what's happening means recognising and accepting your anxiety without judgment. Instead of avoiding it, you notice what you're feeling and thinking in the moment. This awareness helps you respond thoughtfully, rather than reacting impulsively.

Take deep, calming breaths

Take deep, calming breaths to help centre yourself. Inhale slowly through your nose, hold for a few seconds, and then exhale gently through your mouth. Repeat this process to calm your mind and body.

Have compassion for yourself and what you are going through

Having compassion for yourself means acknowledging your struggles without

self-criticism. It's about recognising that it's okay to feel anxious and treating yourself with kindness and understanding during difficult moments. Be gentle with yourself, just as you would with a friend.

Focus on reducing your symptoms and reconnecting to yourself

Focus on calming your symptoms and grounding yourself in the present moment. Take small steps to reconnect with what feels right for you, whether it's through breathing, relaxation, or self-care. This helps restore a sense of balance and control.

Take action to reconnect with yourself

Take small, intentional steps to reconnect with yourself. Whether it's through a calming activity, a favorite hobby, or simply taking a moment for mindfulness, these actions can help you feel more centred and grounded.



Taking time out to relax

The old-time question lingers ‘*How do I take the time out to relax when I am constantly flat out?*’

The common misconception is that relaxation means taking time off, or going on holidays, but the reality is this is not always possible. It is possible to create the same feeling of relaxation into your day-to-day life, even while facing stressful times.

When you’re feeling completely flat out, finding ways to relax is key to avoiding burnout. Below are some small, quick strategies to help recharge:

Deep breathing or mindfulness

Just a few minutes of focused breathing can help calm your mind and reset your energy levels.

Short breaks

Step away for 5-10 minutes, even if it’s just a quick walk around the room or stretching your body. This time creates a mental refresh.

Listening to soothing music

Put on something calming to shift your mood or drown out stress.

Grounding exercises

Focus on your senses — notice what you can see, hear, and feel around you. This will bring you back to the present moment.

Even during hectic times, carving out just a few moments for yourself can help prevent feelings of exhaustion taking over.

Take a power nap

If you’re really worn out, a 15–20 minute nap can work wonders without leaving you feeling groggy.



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Breathing

Make it count

Breathing is one of the most powerful relaxation tools we have.

Controlled breathing can calm down your nervous system, reduce heart rate and blood pressure and return a sense of calm and order to your mind and body. Breathing techniques can even be used to support yourself or someone who is experiencing a panic attack, taking slow, deep breaths can help regulate breathing, distract from the panic, and shift focus back to the present. It is a simple yet effective tool that anyone can use during overwhelming moments.

Techniques

Find a quiet space, where you feel comfortable enough to sit, lie or stand. Relax your body and breathe naturally through your nose.

Place your hand on your belly.

Centre your focus on your breath as it moves in and out of your body, through your nose.

Focus on drawing your breath into your body, letting it fill up with air.

Over time gradually increase the length of your exhalations until they are twice as long as your inhalations. Example: inhale for 4 seconds and exhale for 8 seconds.

Focus on your inhalations and exhalations, making them the same length. Example: inhale for 4 seconds, exhale for 4 seconds.

Consciously exhale and focus on your breath as it rises up through your body and back and slowly out through your nose.



Photo: Daniel Martin 2025



Sleep

Sleep plays a vital role in maintaining health and well-being. Experts, including scientists and healthcare professionals, view it as just as important as proper nutrition and physical activity when it comes to supporting overall health. It is considered a key foundation for both physical and mental wellness.

Sleep is crucial for emotional health because it helps regulate mood, stress levels, and cognitive function. During sleep, the brain processes emotions and experiences, helping to consolidate memories and manage emotional reactions. Lack of sleep can lead to irritability, heightened stress, and difficulty managing emotions, making it harder to cope with challenges. Chronic sleep deprivation can also increase the risk of mental health issues like anxiety and depression. By getting sufficient rest, the brain can reset, improve emotional resilience, and better handle daily emotional ups and downs.

The amount of sleep you need can vary depending on your age, lifestyle, and individual factors, but general guidelines suggest:

- Newborns (0-3 months): 14-17 hours
- Infants (4-11 months): 12-15 hours
- Toddlers (1-2 years): 11-14 hours
- Preschoolers (3-5 years): 10-13 hours
- School-age children (6-13 years): 9-11 hours
- Teens (14-17 years): 8-10 hours
- Adults (18-64 years): 7-9 hours
- Older adults (65+ years): 7-8 hours

While these are general recommendations, individual needs may vary. Some people might feel fully rested with 6 hours, while others might require 10 hours to function at their best. Quality of sleep matters as much as quantity, so it's important to focus on both.

Improving your sleep quality can make a huge difference in how you feel during the day. Here are some tips to help you sleep better:

Create a consistent sleep schedule

Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, even on weekends, to regulate your body's internal clock.

Optimize your sleep environment

Make your bedroom as comfortable as possible. Keep it cool, dark, and quiet. Consider using blackout curtains, earplugs, or a white noise machine if needed.

Limit screen time before bed

Avoid electronics like phones, tablets, and computers at least 30 minutes to an hour before sleep, as the blue light can interfere with your body's ability to produce melatonin (a hormone that helps regulate sleep).

Relax before bed

Establish a calming pre-sleep routine, such as reading, taking a warm bath, or practicing meditation or deep breathing exercises.

Watch your diet and caffeine intake

Avoid large meals, caffeine, and alcohol close to bedtime. Caffeine and alcohol can disrupt your sleep, while eating large meals can cause discomfort.

Stay active during the day

Regular physical activity can help you fall asleep faster and enjoy deeper sleep. Just make sure to avoid vigorous exercise right before bed.



Limit naps

While short naps can be refreshing, long or late naps can interfere with nighttime sleep.

Manage stress and anxiety

Practice relaxation techniques, such as mindfulness or journaling, to clear your mind and reduce stress before bedtime.

Expose yourself to natural light

Exposure to natural sunlight during the day can help regulate your sleep-wake cycle, making it easier to fall asleep at night.

Seek professional help if necessary

If you continue to have trouble sleeping despite trying these tips, consider speaking with a healthcare provider to rule out sleep disorders like insomnia or sleep apnea.



Photo: Daniel Martin



Exercise

Exercise is one of the most effective ways to support your mental health. Regular physical activity can reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, while boosting mood, focus, and sleep quality. It also encourages social connection and overall emotional wellbeing.

Benefits of exercise for mental health include:

- Reducing stress
- Improving mood
- Enhancing sleep quality
- Supporting cognitive function

Exercise doesn't mean you need to join a gym. There are many ways to move your body that benefit both mind and body.

Tips to get started:

- **Set achievable goals:** Aim for around 30 minutes of activity most days, starting with something realistic, like a daily walk.
- **Stay accountable:** Share your plan with a friend or family member they can help keep you on track.
- **Explore options:** Online videos, classes, or local groups can provide variety and motivation.
- **Make it enjoyable:** Choose activities you enjoy, so exercise becomes a positive part of your routine, not a chore.



Eight Minutes of Care: Small Moments, Big Difference

Breaking the silence

When you're working the land or caring for animals, tough days come with the territory. But when the weight feels too heavy, reaching out can feel impossible. That's where the 8 Minute Rule comes in.

It's a simple way to say "I need a hand" when words are hard. Just send a message to someone you trust: "Got 8 minutes?" That's it. No big explanation needed.

When you get that message, you don't have to fix anything — just listen. Be there.

Because even 8 minutes of connection can make a difference. It can help steady emotions, break the spiral of negative thoughts, and remind us, we're not alone.

Let's make looking out for each other part of how we care for our land, our animals, and ourselves.

What is the 8 Minute Rule?

It's a code. A signal. A way to say "I need you" when you can't find the right words.

If you're finding it hard to cope — feeling down, numb, anxious, or just not yourself — send a message to someone you trust:

"Got 8 minutes?"

That's all. No pressure. No long explanations. Just an invitation to connect.

And if you get that message from someone? You don't need to fix them. You don't need magic words. Just give them your time and attention for 8 minutes.

Why we go quiet

When things are tough, we often retreat for reasons that make perfect sense in the moment:

- We worry about being a burden
- We feel embarrassed or ashamed
- We think others are too busy
- We can't find the words



The 8 Minute Rule breaks through those barriers.
It offers a small, manageable step towards connection.

What 8 Minutes can do

It might seem like nothing, but studies and real-life experience show that even brief moments of human connection can:

- Help regulate emotions
- Ease anxiety
- Foster a sense of belonging
- Break negative thought spirals
- Remind us, we're not alone

Sometimes just hearing a friendly voice or receiving a message that says “I’m here” is enough to change the course of someone’s day.

How to use it

- **If you’re struggling:** Send “Got 8 minutes?” to someone you trust. Text, message, whatever works.
- **If you receive the message:** Answer. Listen. Offer your presence.
- **If you’re supporting others:** Let them know about the rule ahead of time: “If you need me, just say ‘8 minutes.’ No questions asked.”

Connection makes a difference

Let’s open the door to connection. Let’s create spaces where it’s safe to ask for help. Let’s show each other that 8 minutes of kindness can truly change a life.

Share the 8 Minute Rule. Start the conversation. For you. For them. For all of us.



Negative thought patterns

We all tend to think in recurring patterns but some of these thoughts can be quite harmful to our mental wellbeing.

Thinking traps can escalate from confusion with online searches and misinformation, other people's opinions, over stimulation of training for new practices and methods, or an overwhelming sense of feeling no longer in control.

Here are a few ways repetitive thinking can harm our physical and mental health:

Ruminating

Constantly revisiting negative thoughts or experiences, often focusing on what went wrong or what could have been done differently. This can keep you stuck and prevent you from moving forward, leading to anxiety, depression, and feelings of helplessness.

Negative self-talk

Continuously telling yourself things like "I can't do this" or "I'll never succeed." This kind of thinking reinforces low self-esteem and can make it harder to recognize your strengths and accomplishments.

Overthinking

Trying to anticipate every possible outcome or worrying excessively about what might happen. This can lead to paralysing anxiety and difficulty making decisions, even about small, everyday things.

Catastrophising

Always expecting the worst-case scenario. Repeating thoughts like "This will be a disaster" or "I'll never be able to handle it" can escalate anxiety and make challenges feel insurmountable.

All-or-nothing thinking

Viewing situations as either a total success or a total failure, with no middle ground. This can set you up for disappointment and frustration, as most things in life are nuanced and involve both successes and setbacks.

Blaming yourself

Taking on too much responsibility for things that go wrong, often without considering other factors. This can lead to guilt, shame, and a sense of inadequacy.

Comparing yourself to others

Consistently measuring your worth against others' successes or appearances. This can cause feelings of jealousy, inadequacy, and the belief that you're falling short.

Managing your thoughts

We all get caught up in the cycle of unhealthy thinking, the key is to be able to separate yourself from your thoughts. You hold the driver's seat, not the thoughts. Mentally healthy people know how to manage these thoughts.

Starting to change your mindset:

Warning signs

Often, we don't notice the constant inner chatter, and it becomes a regular part of our daily routine. It's important to remember that you are a person, and your thoughts do not define who you are.

For example, if you have a thought "I am not going to understand the new procedures and will stuff it up" it does not mean that you will stuff it up.



Don't accept every thought you have as truth

Not all thoughts are truthful and helpful, many are just passing ideas, not reflections of reality. Just because you may think you can't do or achieve something doesn't make it true.

Questioning and challenging our thoughts

It's okay to question your thoughts, questioning and challenging your thoughts will help to break free from automatic, negative patterns and gain a more balanced perspective. By evaluating whether your thoughts are accurate or helpful, you can choose more constructive ways of thinking.

Supporting yourself through tough times is about treating yourself with kindness, patience, and understanding.

Practical steps to begin

1. Show yourself compassion. Your journey is yours alone, and it doesn't need to mirror anyone else's. Your progress is personal and doesn't need to match or fit someone else's timeline.

2. Acknowledge the struggle. Recognise that challenges and negative thoughts are a part of life, but they don't define you. It's okay to feel bad or have tough moments.

3. Challenge yourself. Question your thoughts for accuracy, are they based on facts, or are they assumptions and exaggerations? Reframe them to be more balanced.

4. Use grounding techniques. When negative thoughts become overwhelming, use breathing techniques to bring yourself back to the present moment.

5. Emotional regulation. Let yourself feel, but don't let the negative emotions take control. Allow yourself time for the feelings to pass naturally or seek support to help you through the emotions.

Releasing your thoughts

Releasing your thoughts means letting go of the need to cling to every idea or worry that pops into your mind. It's about acknowledging your thoughts without letting them control you and allowing them to pass without judgment or attachment. This can bring a sense of peace and clarity.

Switch off the struggle

By switching off the struggle, you can embrace the present moment without unnecessary tension. Switching off helps create space for clarity, and a more relaxed approach to challenges, it allows you to take control and trust the process.

6. Focus on what you can control. In the face of overwhelming challenges, identify what you can do, even if it one small task.

7. Seek support when needed. Whether through friends, family or professionals, reaching out for support can make a huge difference when facing tough times.



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Understanding and Managing Trauma

Trauma can surpass your capacity to manage or handle things.

Traumatic events are likely going to impact your wellbeing at some point.

Trauma can completely overwhelm your ability to cope, and its effects can be deep and long-lasting. When we're faced with unexpected or difficult circumstances that push us beyond our emotional limits, it's normal to feel like we're not equipped to handle it, no matter how much experience we have.

Whether it's personal trauma, the trauma of the changes you're facing, or even the compounded stress of everything going on in the world, it can feel like there's just too much to carry. Sometimes, the weight of trauma can cloud everything, making it hard to think clearly or make decisions that you usually trust yourself to make.

In situations like this, it can be helpful to reach out for support, even when it feels like you're supposed to have it all together. Talking to someone — whether it's a professional, a close friend, or even just someone who understands the challenges you're facing — can be a huge relief. Taking small, manageable steps to address what's in front of you, rather than trying to tackle everything at once, can also help break that overwhelming feeling.

Reactions to trauma can vary widely depending on the individual, the nature of the trauma, and other personal factors such as support systems and coping mechanisms. However, certain emotional, physical, and behavioural reactions are commonly observed in people who experience trauma. These reactions can be short-term or long-term, and they might manifest in different ways. Here's an overview of common reactions to trauma:

Emotional reactions Trauma can lead to shock, sadness, fear, anger, guilt, and depression, with individuals often feeling numb, fearful, or hopeless, especially if there is a loss or a sense of helplessness.	Physical reactions Trauma can cause fatigue, sleep disturbances, physical tension, and increased heart rate, as the body responds to emotional and psychological stress.	Cognitive reactions Trauma can trigger intrusive thoughts, memory difficulties, negative self-beliefs, and decision-making challenges, making it hard to concentrate or trust oneself and others.
Behavioural reactions Trauma can lead to avoidance, substance use, risk-taking behaviours, and disrupted routines as individuals try to cope with emotional pain and distress.	Relational reactions Trauma can cause withdrawal from others, difficulty trusting, and relationship conflicts due to emotional reactions like fear or irritability.	Long term effects (if unresolved): <i>Untreated trauma can lead to PTSD, chronic anxiety or depression, and difficulty coping with future challenges due to emotional overwhelm.</i>



After experiencing trauma, some individuals undergo post-traumatic growth, discovering new strengths, perspectives, or a renewed sense of purpose. Over time, many seek help through therapy, support groups, or trusted individuals to process the trauma and begin healing. Additionally, they often develop healthy coping strategies, such as mindfulness, physical activity, or creative expression, which help them regain control, rebuild their stability, and foster resilience in the face of future challenges.

Building resilience and recovering from trauma is a gradual process that requires patience, support, and self-compassion. Here are some steps that can help guide someone toward healing:

Acknowledge the trauma Acknowledge the trauma's impact, allow yourself to feel your emotions, and understand that experiencing them is a vital part of healing.	Seek professional support Therapy, support groups, and medication (if needed) can provide essential guidance, validation, and symptom management during trauma recovery.	Create a safe environment Create a stable, safe environment and set boundaries to protect your emotional well-being during recovery.
Develop healthy coping mechanisms Mindfulness, physical activity, and creative expression, like journaling or art, can help reduce stress, improve mood, and aid in processing trauma.	Challenge negative thoughts Challenge negative thoughts and practice self-compassion to shift your perspective and treat yourself with care during recovery.	Build a support system Reach out to supportive loved ones and connect with communities that understand and respect your journey to feel emotionally safe and encouraged.
Set small, achievable goals Take recovery one step at a time, setting small daily goals, and celebrate every achievement, no matter how small.	Rebuild a sense of purpose Take recovery one step at a time, celebrate each achievement, and embrace the growth, strength, and resilience gained through adversity.	Practice patience and persistence Be patient with your healing process, stay committed to your recovery practices, and remember that persistence is key, even on tough days.

Look forward to the future: Look toward the future with hope, re-engage with joyful activities and relationships, and embrace new possibilities for growth and balance.

Trauma affects everyone differently. Taking things one step at a time, seeking support, and being gentle with yourself are key to building resilience and moving toward long-term wellbeing.



Supporting others experiencing trauma

Trauma has the potential to evoke a wide range of unpredictable emotional responses, leaving both the person affected and their loved ones uncertain about how to navigate the situation. It can be difficult to know the right approach to offer support, as everyone may react in unique and sometimes surprising ways. Understanding how to be there for someone experiencing trauma requires patience, empathy, and the willingness to adapt to their needs as they process their emotions.

Here are some suggestions for supporting someone both immediately after trauma and throughout their ongoing recovery.

Immediate Support:

Ensure their safety

Make sure the person is in a safe environment, away from any immediate threat. If they're in shock, help them feel secure.

Stay calm and be present

Your calmness can help create a sense of stability for the person. Be there for them without forcing them to speak if they're not ready.

Listen with compassion

If they want to talk, offer a listening ear without interrupting. Sometimes, just being heard can be incredibly comforting.

Acknowledge their emotions

Validate their feelings, whether they're feeling anger, fear, confusion, or sadness.

Ongoing Support:

Allow healing at their own pace

Recovery takes time, so be patient and let the person move through the process as they need, whether that means taking time alone or seeking company.

Suggest professional help

Encourage them to reach out to a therapist or counsellor trained in trauma. Professional support can help them manage their emotions in a healthy way.

Be understanding of mood swings

Healing isn't linear, and they may have emotional ups and downs. Offer reassurance and be patient with their changing moods.

Let them know their emotions are normal responses to trauma.

Provide comfort and reassurance

Offer physical comfort, such as a gentle touch, or simply reassure them that you're there for them.

Encourage relaxation

If they're feeling overwhelmed, guide them through deep breathing or grounding exercises to help them regain calm.

Avoid pressuring for details

They may not be ready to talk about their experience. Let them open up at their own pace, without any pressure.

Be supportive of their healing process

Everyone heals in their own way, and it's important to remain nonjudgmental as they cope with trauma in their own manner.

Check in frequently

Even if they seem to be doing well, continue to check in with them to show your ongoing support and let them know you're there.

Sometimes the most powerful thing you can do for someone is simply be there, listen, and let them know they are not alone.



Healthy relationships

Healthy relationships are more than relationships at home; it includes family, friends, colleagues, customers, and suppliers. Healthy relationships are vital to your mental health.

Benefits of a healthy relationship

Our wellbeing and emotional health benefits when we are connected and supporting each other through good times and challenging times. Clubs and fellow beekeepers are a great starting point; many have a wealth of information and research behind them and are willing to share. Others may be in the same mindset with the introduction of Varroa, supporting each other with ideas and practical methods may in turn reduce your stress levels to a point where you can support yourself to thrive in the face of Varroa.

A healthy relationship is built on mutual respect, trust, and open communication. Here are a few key elements:

Respect Both partners value each other's opinions, boundaries, and feelings. They treat each other with kindness and understanding, even when they disagree.	Trust There's a strong sense of trust, where both people feel safe being vulnerable and confident that the other person has their best interests at heart.	Communication Open and honest communication is essential. Both individuals feel heard and understood, and they are able to discuss concerns without fear of judgment or escalation.
Support In a healthy relationship, partners uplift and encourage each other, offering emotional, mental, and physical support during both good times and challenges.		Independence Each person has the space and freedom to pursue their own interests, goals, and friendships without feeling controlled or neglected.
Conflict resolution Disagreements are handled respectfully, with a focus on finding solutions rather than assigning blame. Both partners listen actively and work together to address issues.	Affection and appreciation Showing love, affection, and appreciation regularly helps strengthen the bond and ensures both people feel valued.	Equality Both partners share responsibility in the relationship, whether it's making decisions, supporting each other's growth, or managing responsibilities.



Professional relationships

Unhealthy relationships may include the following behaviours:

Controlling behaviour

There are changes that are out of your control, changes you may not agree with or believe in.

Disrespect

Actions can be seen as disrespectful as you no longer feel like you have control over the changes and feel like you have not been heard.

Lack of communication

Communication breakdown could come from two avenues, you may feel like you are not getting enough information and support on the current situation, or your communication with the stakeholder may feel one sided and you are not being heard.

Manipulation

Change in procedure of care can sometimes be seen as manipulation when the control has been removed from the beekeeper, when new rules and laws are introduced which, you have no control over.

Isolation

When you feel like you have not been heard, you can feel isolated and withdrawn.

Financial impact

Impacts on changes, new rules and procedures can come at a financial cost bringing with it added stress to your mental health. Changes that are out of your control which come at a cost can cause conflict between parties.

These can deeply affect our physical and mental health; every person has the right to be respected and heard. All too often there is too much misinformation posted on the internet, which can cause confusion and anxiety. Strengthening relationships is key to fostering trust and collaboration. Here are some effective steps to achieve this:

Understand needs: Take the time to learn about each stakeholder's priorities, goals, and concerns. This shows that you value their perspective and helps tailor your approach.

Communicate regularly and transparently: Keep stakeholders informed about key developments, challenges, and progress. Regular, open communication builds trust and keeps everyone aligned.

Engage actively: Involve stakeholders in decision-making processes and seek their input. This can help ensure their buy-in and make them feel valued in the process.

Build trust through consistency: Deliver on promises and commitments consistently. Reliability is key to establishing and maintaining trust over time.

Be responsive: Address concerns or questions from stakeholders promptly. Showing that you are available and responsive builds a stronger relationship.

Offer solutions, not just problems: When issues arise, focus on finding solutions and working collaboratively to overcome challenges. This demonstrates problem-solving and proactive thinking.

Recognise and appreciate their contributions: Acknowledge the value stakeholders bring to the table and express appreciation for their involvement. Feeling recognized helps to strengthen the relationship.

Foster mutual respect: Treat all stakeholders with respect, regardless of their level of involvement or influence. Respect forms the foundation for long-lasting, positive relationships.



Anticipate needs and prepare for changes: Stay ahead of potential issues by anticipating stakeholder needs and being adaptable to changes. Proactively addressing concerns can prevent friction.

Maintain long-term focus: Keep a focus on long-term success rather than just short-term wins. Strengthening stakeholder relationships is about creating sustainable, ongoing collaboration.

How to manage conflict

Conflict is a normal part of life and can arise in beekeeping from differences in opinions, practices, or beliefs especially around sensitive topics like Varroa management. While conflict can feel stressful or challenging, how we approach it can make a big difference to our wellbeing and relationships.

Effective conflict management is about staying calm, open listening, and communicating respectfully. By approaching disagreements with empathy and understanding, we can reduce stress, maintain positive connections, and even strengthen relationships. Conflict doesn't have to be harmful; by handling it thoughtfully and openly, it can lead to mutual respect, collaboration, and better outcomes for everyone involved.

A practical way to navigate conflict is the **6 C's of Conflict Resolution**:

1. Clarification Identify the issue.	2. Conversation The first few minutes of the conversation is crucial to resolving conflict, stay calm, stick to the facts and listen to each other.	3. Collaboration Consider all options objectively, without attacking. Every person has a right to be heard without criticism or accusation.
4. Consensus Agree on a solution, a difference of opinion, may not necessarily mean all parties do not want the same result, just a different path due to our views and methodology.	5. Continuation Communication is the key to resolution, helping each other through the conflict, continual monitoring and support.	6. Compassion The main element to compassion is understanding everyone's perspectives without judgement. Conflicts ignite from differences of opinions, values and beliefs. Every person has a right to be heard; it is through listening we begin to understand how to best support each other through the journey.

Approaching conflict with calm, clarity, and empathy protects your mental health while fostering stronger connections with others.



How to stay resilient during times of transition

Changes come with their own set of unique challenges. It can often feel like one disaster after another.

Natural disasters, tragedies and loss of life, are all traumatic events that can affect you for years to come. Similarly, changes in the way you have to manage your hives due to the introduction of Varroa, can affect your mental wellbeing. Experiencing multiple challenges doesn't necessarily mean you should be expected to handle them easily.

Acknowledge your feelings

It's natural to feel uncertain, frustrated, or even fearful during transitions. Give yourself permission to feel those emotions without judgment. Recognizing how you feel can be the first step in processing it all and finding a way forward.

Focus on what you can control

In times of change, it's easy to feel like everything is spiraling out of your control. But focusing on the small things you can control — your actions, your responses, your self-care — can help ground you and reduce anxiety.

Create a support system

Reach out to people who can offer emotional support, whether it's friends, family, or peers who understand what you're going through. Sometimes just having someone to talk to can make a world of difference.

Learn from the experience

Every challenging moment can teach us something. Try to view difficulties as opportunities to learn and grow. This mindset shift can turn tough times into valuable lessons.

Embrace patience

Resilience often requires patience — both with yourself and the process. Transitions take time, and progress may be slow or non-linear. Allow yourself the space to move at your own pace and recognize that it's okay not to have everything figured out right away.

Seek Inspiration

Look for stories or examples of others who have gone through similar transitions successfully. Sometimes hearing about how others overcame challenges can offer hope and spark new ideas for handling your own situation.

Re-frame setbacks as growth

Instead of viewing challenges or setbacks as failures, try to see them as part of the learning process. Every step, even the tough ones, is an opportunity to grow stronger and wiser for the next challenge.

Trust the process

Sometimes, the most resilient thing you can do is trust that things will fall into place in their own time. Letting go of the need to control every outcome can free you to be more flexible and adaptive during the transition.



Photo: Daniel Martin



Celebrate small wins

It's easy to get caught up in what still needs to be done, but celebrating small successes along the way can provide much-needed motivation and a reminder that progress is happening — even if it feels slow.

Take time for reflection

Make space to reflect on what's working, what isn't, and how you're feeling throughout the transition. Journaling, talking things through, or just taking a quiet moment to think can help you process and gain clarity on what's important.



Photo: Dave Sommers

When you decide to exit the industry

The decision to retire from the industry, is a difficult decision. Your investment and time in beekeeping is part of your identity, and part of your family.

The impacts of Varroa mite on Australia's beekeeping industries are still being determined. Many beekeepers may not want to face the possible impacts and costs of managing an apiary now it is present. Setting aside the emotional aspects and taking the time to map out the reasons behind your decision can help you gain a clearer understanding of your choice and guide your exit strategy.

Remember that choosing to exit the beekeeping industry, whatever your 'why', is not a sign of failure but a testament to your adaptability. It reflects a thoughtful assessment of your personal circumstances, values, and the well-being of your family. It's natural to experience a range of emotions during this period, including guilt over leaving behind a cherished practice and concern for the broader implications on the beekeeping community.

Common concerns can include:

- The wellbeing of bees and family: Concerns about chemical use and its effects are understandable. Decades of overseas experience provide reassurance, and Australian research is growing every day.
- Feeling overwhelmed by hive numbers: Scaling back can ease stress and help you adapt at your own pace.
- Uncertainty around pollination contracts: Demand for hives remains high, but contracts are evolving.
- Financial strain: Developing a personalised Varroa Treatment Plan helps you compare costs, time, and income so you can make an informed choice.

If these concerns sound familiar, know that you are not alone — many beekeepers are navigating the same challenges.

See 'Planning to exit the industry?' factsheet for more information.



Taking Care of Yourself in Times of Change

Stepping away from something you've invested passion, time, and identity into is not easy. This process can bring up grief, loss, and uncertainty about the future. Taking care of your wellbeing during this time is just as important as managing the practical side of things.

Give yourself permission to feel your emotions and be patient with your own pace of adjustment. Seek support from friends, family, or professional services to help you navigate this period with resilience and clarity.

Look after your mental health:

- Give yourself permission to feel whether that's sadness, frustration, or even relief.
- Talk openly with trusted family, friends, or peers about your decision. Sharing reduces isolation.
- Stay connected with the beekeeping community if it feels right. Mentoring, advocacy, or research can provide purpose and continuity.
- Consider professional support. Speaking with a counsellor or your GP can help you work through emotions and plan for the future.

Practical steps that can also support peace of mind:

- **Legal obligations:** Update your registration and check state rules around selling or disposing of equipment.
- **Clean and prepare equipment:** Sterilise and record treatment history before selling or transferring.
- **Responsible selling:** Price items fairly, be honest about condition, and use trusted networks such as associations or online beekeeping groups.

Taking care of these details not only supports biosecurity but also allows you to step away with dignity and confidence.

Moving forward with confidence

- **Prioritise self-care**
Maintain healthy routines, rest, and make time for activities that restore energy.
- **Stay connected**
Others are going through similar changes sharing experiences can help everyone feel supported.
- **Explore new roles**
Even if you exit, you may wish to remain linked to bees and the industry in new ways.
- **Give yourself space**
Major transitions take time. It's okay if your feelings shift along the way.

Whether you stay, scale back, or leave, your work has contributed to the strength of the beekeeping community. Change can be painful, but it also opens the door to new possibilities. Be gentle with yourself, seek support when you need it, and remember: **this decision is about protecting both your wellbeing and your future.**



How to navigate through moving on

Deciding to step away from beekeeping is more than a practical choice, it's an emotional journey. Moving on can stir feelings of loss, relief, uncertainty, or even guilt. These are natural reactions to change. What matters most is finding a way forward that protects your wellbeing and helps you transition with confidence.

Taking time to plan, talk openly and care for yourself will make the process smoother. Whether you're discussing your decision with family, exploring support from peers, or seeking professional guidance, every step you take helps build a healthier path forward.

Plan and reflect

Give yourself space to think about your reasons, your concerns, and your hopes for the future. Exiting may not be simple, and you may discover the support you need along the way. Writing down your thoughts or talking them through with someone you trust can help.

Explore all options

Keep an open mind. Consider whether reducing hives, shifting roles or exiting entirely feels right for you. There is a wealth of support available, industry bodies, local clubs and online resources can provide information to help weigh up your choices.

Keep communication open

Talk with your family, friends, or support networks about your decision. Share how you're feeling as plans unfold. Honest conversations help others understand your needs and ensure your mental health is supported through the process.

Moving on doesn't erase what you have contributed, it's about protecting your wellbeing and making space for new possibilities.

Grief and loss

Grief is the emotional reaction to losing something or someone, grief is the way we cope with and feel the impact of loss. Beekeeping losses can affect us in the same way as the loss of someone.

Grief has no pattern or timeframe; it will vary from person to person and there is no limit on the length we grieve.

Grief can stir up a range of emotions, from sadness and shock to anger, fear, and frustration.

The emotions that come with grief can be complex, including sadness, shock, anger, fear, and irritability.

When grieving, you may experience a mix of feelings, like sadness, shock, anger, fear, and even irritability.

Seek guidance

Talk with your family, friends, or support networks about your decision. Share how you're feeling as plans unfold. Honest conversations help others understand your needs and ensure your mental health is supported through the process.

Look after yourself

Times of transition can be draining. Practice self-care: eat well, rest, and make time for activities you enjoy. Stay connected with your community and seek open conversations with people you trust. These habits can help you manage stress and navigate emotions as you move forward.



Supporting others in grief

1. Be supportive, listen to their concerns and feelings without judgement or personal advice.
2. Never assume what they need, ask them.
3. Monitor their wellbeing, if can identify changes in their habits like self-care and eating, express your concerns and even offer to support them when seeking help from a doctor or counsellor.
4. Try not to focus wholly on the subject, adding conversations about everyday life and current events as well.
5. It's okay to admit that you don't have all the answers; sometimes just listening is incredibly valuable and simply knowing you're there can make all the difference.

Supporting yourself through grief

1. Grief is an individual journey, may require different ideas to see what suits best to your situation. It can be frustrating going through the steps to the correct path for you.
2. Allow yourself time to heal, and space, acknowledge your loss and validate your feelings.
3. Do not underestimate your loss or compare it to others going through the same situation.
4. Talk, speak to those close to you, allow them to support you through your journey.
5. Do one task at a time, take your journey step by step, address issues and problems when you are ready.

Seek professional guidance if you feel you are struggling, simple things like a loss of appetite can seriously compromise your path to recovery.



Image by A. Clemson, NSW DPI © State of New South Wales

Wellbeing and health for family

Just as individuals can be affected by stress and change, families also feel the impact of emergency responses and shifts within an industry. When a loved one is experiencing low mood, anxiety, or depression, these challenges can unintentionally affect the wellbeing of the whole household. Not every sign of struggle points to a crisis but recognising changes early can help you provide the right support and encourage your family member to seek help if needed. Approaching the situation with patience, care, and open communication is key.

This section outlines practical guidance for noticing when a family member may be struggling. Refer to page 6 for signs of mental distress.



Supporting someone experiencing thoughts of suicide

Sometimes, when someone is struggling with stress, depression, or anxiety, they may have thoughts of self-harm or suicide. This can feel overwhelming for both the person and their family, but timely support can save lives.

Being there for your loved one by listening without judgment, encouraging them to talk about how they are feeling, and helping them connect with professional support can make a real difference. You don't need to have all the answers; showing that you care and are willing to support them is often the most powerful first step.

What to look for:

- Talking about wanting to die or hurt themselves
- Expressing hopelessness or feeling trapped
- Withdrawing from friends, family, or activities they once enjoyed
- Sudden calm after a period of deep distress
- Talking about feeling like a burden

How to respond:

- Take any mention of self-harm or suicide seriously never assume it's "just attention-seeking."
- Ask directly, in a calm manner: "Are you thinking about suicide?"
- Listen without judgment and reassure them: "You don't have to go through this alone."
- Encourage professional support: call Lifeline or other service together, take them to a hospital if necessary, or stay with them if they are at immediate risk.

You do not need to fix everything simply being present, listening, and showing care can make a difference.

Caring for yourself

Whether you've had suicidal thoughts, supported someone in crisis, or been affected by suicide, your own wellbeing matters. Take time to:

- Talk to a mental health professional
- Decompress with trusted people
- Acknowledge your feelings
- Take breaks and reduce exposure to distressing situations

Grief, guilt, and exhaustion are normal. You are not failing. You are human.

Even small gestures can help someone feel supported:

"Hey, I've been thinking about you recently and wanted to check in. If there's anything you want to share or talk about, I'm here for you."



Photo: Emma Gosper



NATIONAL
Varroa Mite Management
PROGRAM

Varroa Mite Management

Network and online support

The National Varroa Management program website is full of information with online training, links to program support staff and other valuable information.

[Resources — National Varroa Mite Management Program](#)

AHBIC: [Home - Australian Honey Bee Industry Council](#)

Bee Aware: [Beekeeping associations « Bee Aware](#)

Amateur Beekeeping Australia clubs:
www.beekeepers.asn.au/find-a-club/

State associations

Wellbeing and Financial Services

Wellbeing Services

[Rural or remote mental health | healthdirect](#)

[Help Sheet: Rural Mental Health Services – National Rural Health Alliance](#)

[Mental health resources | healthdirect](#)

Lifeline Phone: 13 11 14

Anyone across Australia experiencing a personal crisis or thinking about suicide can contact Lifeline's confidential crisis support service. Trained volunteers are available 24/7 to listen and provide support and referrals.

[Kids Helpline | Phone Counselling Service | 1800 55 1800](#)

State Mental Health Hotlines

New South Wales	Mental Health Line 1800 011 511
Victoria	SuicideLine Victoria 1300 651 251
Queensland	Mental Health Access Line 1300 642 255 (1300 MH CALL)
South Australia	Mental Health Assessment and Crisis Intervention Services 13 14 65
Western Australia	Mental Health Emergency Response Line Metro: 1300 555 788; Peel: 1800 676 822
Tasmania	Access Mental Health Phonenumber 1800 332 388
Northern Territory	Top End mental health services 1800 682 288
Australian Capital Territory	Access Mental Health Line 1800 629 354 (02 6205 1065)

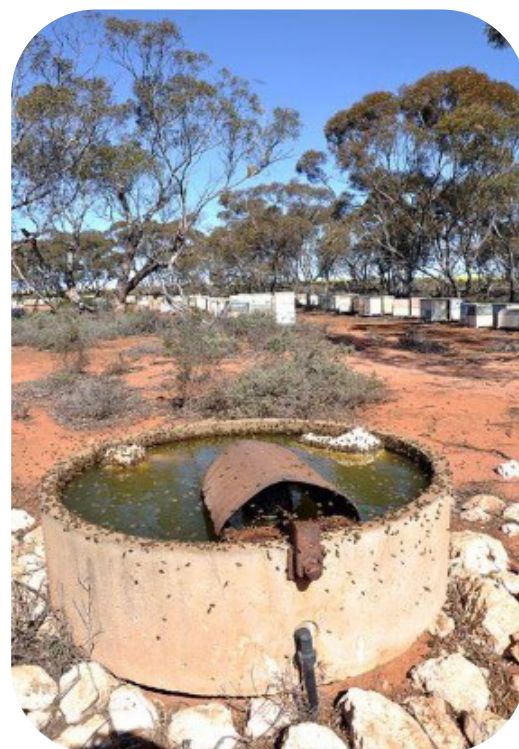


Photo: Daniel Martin



Women's Information & Referral Service Phone: 1300 888 529

A free and confidential telephone service for women in NSW. The WIRS can help find information that you, your family or friends may need including information on many organisations and services available to women. The service operates Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.

Mensline Phone: 1300 789 978

Mensline Australia is a 24/7 telephone and online support, information and referral service for men with family and relationship concerns. The service is staffed by professional counsellors, experienced in men's issues.

ifarmwell – www.ifarmwell.org.au: Growing farmers' wellbeing

ifarmwell is a free online tool kit to help farmers cope effectively with life's challenges and get the most out of every day, regardless of the circumstances they face.

Rural Agribusiness Wellbeing plan - www.droughthub.nsw.gov.au/Wellbeing/rural-agribusiness-wellbeing-plan

This wellbeing plan can help you maintain your mental health and manage day-to-day stresses of your work, as well as challenging times like your busy season or adverse events like drought, bushfires or floods.

Financial advice support services

RAMPH - <http://www.ramhp.com.au/map/>

RAMHP is a NSW service focused on supporting people and communities who depend on primary production and agriculture, alongside other priority populations at greater risk of mental health support.

Rural Financial Counselling Services - [Rural Financial Counselling Network](http://www.ruralaid.org.au)

The RFCS is available to all states, supporting primary producers and small businesses in finding financial stability, by providing confidential and professional advice on a range of issues.

Rural aid- www.ruralaid.org.au

Rural Aid is dedicated to supporting a stable future for our farmers to ensure they can keep providing food and fibre for all Australians.



Photo: Dave Sommers



NATIONAL
Varroa Mite Management
PROGRAM

The National Varroa mite Management Program is overseen by the Consultative Committee on Emergency Plant Pests (CCEPP) and the National Management Group (NMG). The NMG is made up of representatives from the Federal Government, every state and territory department and executives from relevant peak industry bodies and Plant Health Australia.