



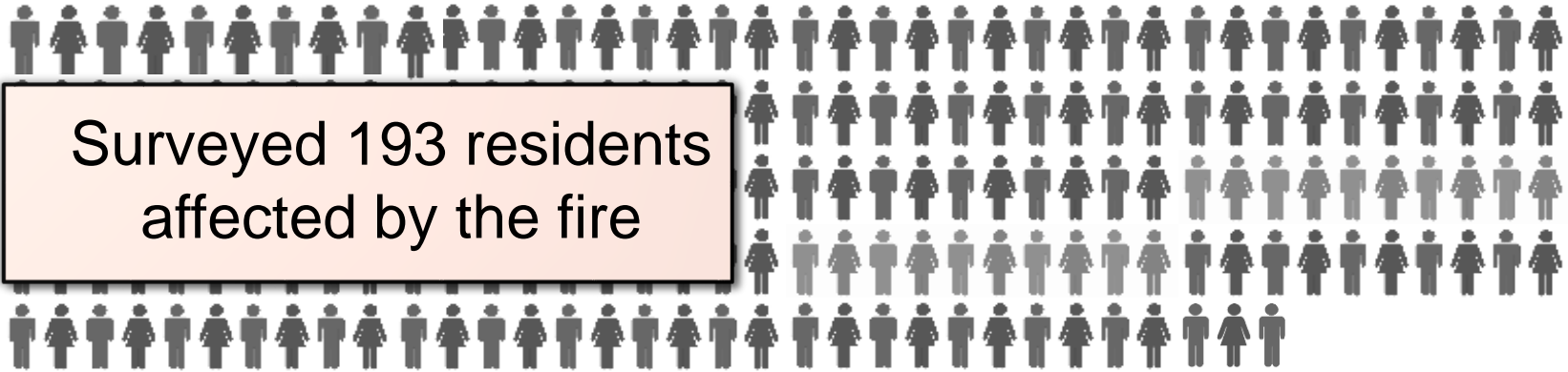
# I'm going to be frightened out of my wits

Insights on psychological preparedness from the Sampson Flat Fire

*Danielle Every, Larissa Clarkson, Amy Reynolds, Chris Bearman, Peta O'Donohue*  
CQUniversity & SA CFS





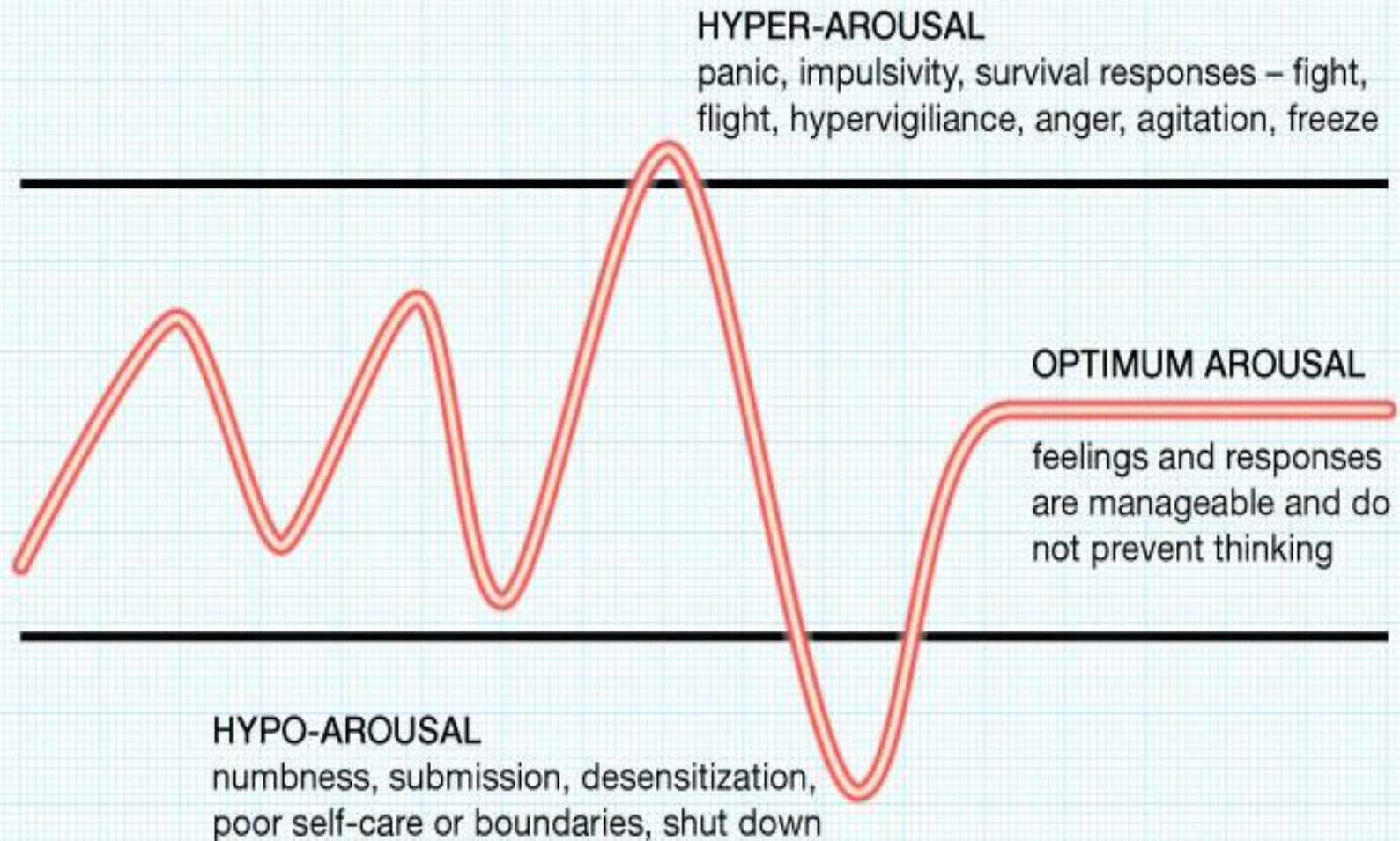


# Being overcome by high arousal led to...

- Not able to manage anxiety and feeling out of control
  - A last minute change in plan, particularly leaving late
  - Unsafe driving - speeding
  - Forgetting important items (e.g. medication)
  - Not acting until too late
  - Ignoring the threat (e.g. sleeping)
  - Doing unrelated tasks that take up precious time



# Window of Affective Tolerance



# Out of your wits: The effects of stressful events on the brain

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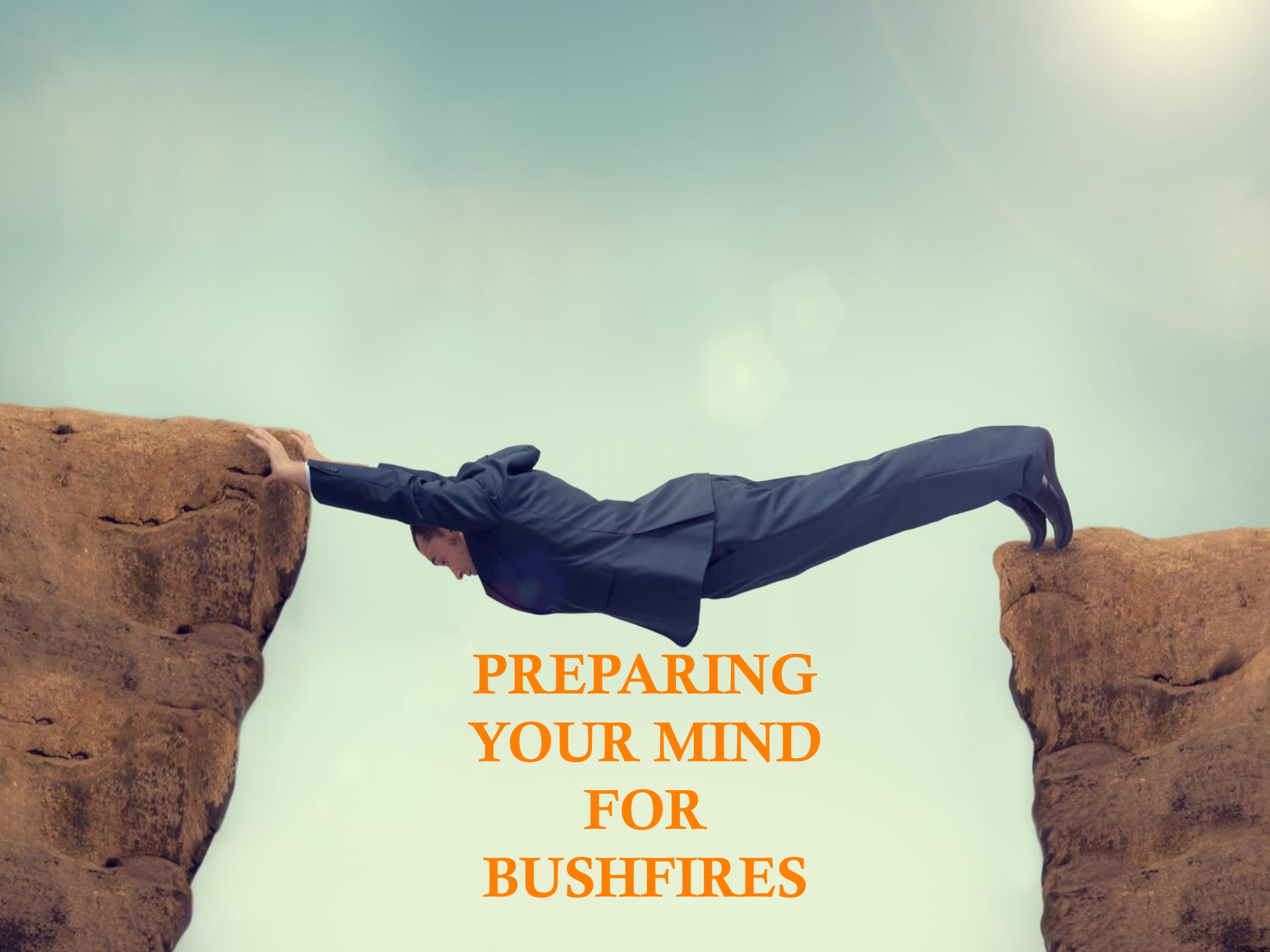


Mentally

**PREPARE. ACT. SURVIVE.**

	Included word/phrase relating to mental preparedness	Included an assessment question/s on psych prep	Information on expected conditions	Information on expected feelings and thoughts	Information on how to manage this
1					
2	✓				
3	✓				
4	✓	✓	✓		
5	✓	✓	✓		
6	✓	✓	✓		
7	✓	✓	✓	✓	
8	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
US					
CAN					





**PREPARING  
YOUR MIND  
FOR  
BUSHFIRES**

# Psychological Preparedness

The capacity to inhibit an automatic response that does not work, and to choose an innovative one that does.



# What does psychological preparedness include?

**ANTICIPATE:** Expecting the brain's and body's response in an emergency (and knowing these are normal)

**IDENTIFY:** An awareness that this response is occurring

**MANAGE:** Strategies for switching mind sets and re-establishing the brain loop

*Reser & Morrissey, 2009*



"It was the classic fight or flight response.  
Next time, try flight."

# Increasing psychological preparedness

- Previous experience in bushfires
- Understanding bushfire risk and bushfire safety
- Preparedness groups
- Gender: men more likely to feel emotionally prepared



# Physical and psychological preparedness

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- ‘Doing something’ increases psychological preparedness for those who leave
  - For those who leave, even cleaning their gutters increased emotional preparedness
- High level preparations increases psychological preparedness for those who stay
  - Those who stay are more likely to feel emotionally prepared, and those who stay with significant high level preparations are most likely to be emotionally prepared

# Challenge 1: What's our role?

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- What's our role:
  - *“Our focus has to be what they're going to do when the smoke and flames are there”* being clear on the difference between preparing for an event and for recovery
  - *“We mustn't pretend to be psychologists”* Managing expectations and responsibility
  - *“Because we can't prepare them”* Language 'awareness' versus 'preparedness'

# Challenge: How do we do it?

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- How do we do it: *“Its not like it’s a tick and flick”*
  - Observability, measurability and techniques

# Some ways to do it

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- Awareness, Endurance, Recovery (Morrissey & Reser) – a 6 hour community leader course/printed guide
  - A modified trial in Cairns pre and post Cyclone Justin using just a booklet
  - Increased physical preparedness and confidence
  - Increased ability to anticipate and identify feelings
  - Did not effect personal control and managing feelings
- Red Cross “Psychological Preparedness for Disasters” based on AIM
- Firey Women and some Community Fire Safe Groups, SA CFS

the  
power of  
humanity





# Challenge 3: Vulnerability

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- *“Everyone’s got a different bucket”* Applying it across vulnerability differences
- Lower psychological (and physical) preparedness
  - Moderate to high chronic anxiety
  - Avoidant coping styles
  - Prior traumatic disaster experience

=> the self-instruction guide did not increase preparedness and may heighten anxiety

- Other vulnerable community members?

# A tentative framework

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- Collaborating with psychologists
- Include it as an assessment question/s that are concrete rather than abstract (e.g. *How would you rate your ability to make decisions under the stress of defending your property from a bush fire for several hours* )



# Next Steps

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- Further research
  - What do people understand by 'mental fitness' - i.e. what language might work?
  - Evaluating existing materials - what is working already?
  - Psych preparedness for vulnerable persons - how can we tailor messages?
  - Psychological preparedness and gender - how can we speak to men and women

LETS CONTINUE THE  
CONVERSATION ABOUT  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
PREPAREDNESS