

# Prepare for flooding to reduce impacts on mental health

Experiencing damage caused by extreme weather such as storms or flooding can increase the chance of facing mental health problems such as stress and depression by 50% while a quarter of people who have been flooded still live with these issues at least two years after the event.

This is according to research highlighted by the Environment Agency this Flood Action Week as it urges people to be better prepared for the potentially devastating impacts of flooding.

Flooding can have a negative impact on mental health for several reasons – from the financial repercussions of fixing extensive damage to the loss of sentimental items and the stress it places on victims' relationships. It often results in people having to move out of their homes, displacing them from their community for many months.

But taking action to prepare for a flood can reduce damages by around 40% as well as reducing the likelihood of suffering from mental health impacts in the future, which is why the Environment Agency is calling on those at risk to familiarise themselves with its ['Prepare, Act, Survive' guidance](#) – a simple set of instructions to help keep people and their possessions safe in a flood. The guidance includes simple but effective advice such as preparing a bag with medication and important documents and moving valuable and sentimental items upstairs or to higher ground.

Worryingly, low income households are eight times more likely to live in tidal floodplains than more affluent households, but 61% of low-income renters do not have home contents insurance, meaning they're more susceptible to a financial shock as a result. According to data from insurance company Aviva, most low-income renters would struggle to meet typical insurable losses with nearly three quarters (73%) unable to meet an unexpected bill of £500 without help. In addition to meeting the financial costs, flooding can cause heart-breaking sentimental loss with the likes of photographs, keepsakes and ornaments among some of the most common non-replaceable items to suffer from water damage.

Worcester resident and flood resilience campaigner Mary Dhonau, 58, has seen her house flooded on many occasions, with the worst bringing a torrent of waist-height sewage into her family home in 2000. It had a devastating impact on her family and their neighbours.

Mary Dhonau said:

When my street flooded in 2000, we had just found out my youngest son was severely autistic. The bewilderment when he realised the flood had ruined his toys was devastating. One of my neighbours who

is severely agoraphobic had to move out of her house, and another who had been recently widowed found all her wedding photographs had been ruined by the floodwater. Living through a flood is the most appalling experience and really does compound issues you are already dealing with.

I campaign to raise awareness of flooding because I know – first-hand and through thousands of people’s stories I’ve heard through my work – what the true impact of a flood can be. Check whether you are at risk, sign up for flood alerts and make the necessary preparations. You will need all the mental strength you have if the worst should happen.

Caroline Douglass, Director of Incident Management & Resilience at the Environment Agency, said:

Anyone who has experienced a flood will know just how extensive the impact can be on their lives – it’s not just the financial stress, it’s the loss of irreplaceable sentimental belongings and the strain it can have on those affected.

We are already seeing more frequent and intense flooding as a result of climate change, so we would urge everyone to know the simple steps to take – such as moving possessions upstairs and preparing a grab bag with medicines and important documents – to help reduce the damage and keep yourself and your family safe.

To support its campaign this year, the Environment Agency has created a short film showing the devastating impacts that flooding has on a home and family. The film, narrated from a child’s perspective shows a dolls house with mouldy walls and carpets, ruined family photographs and toys, simulating the real damage that flooding causes. The film will be shown throughout flood action week to encourage people to think about taking action to prepare for flooding.

Click [this link](#) to view the short film.