



# PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

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# Home

- Safety
- Security
- Refuge
- Togetherness





Work



Play and rest



Identity



# Overview

- Hazards & disasters – types, exposure and vulnerabilities
- Reactions & mental health impacts
- Principles of psychosocial support



# The NZ Hazardscape

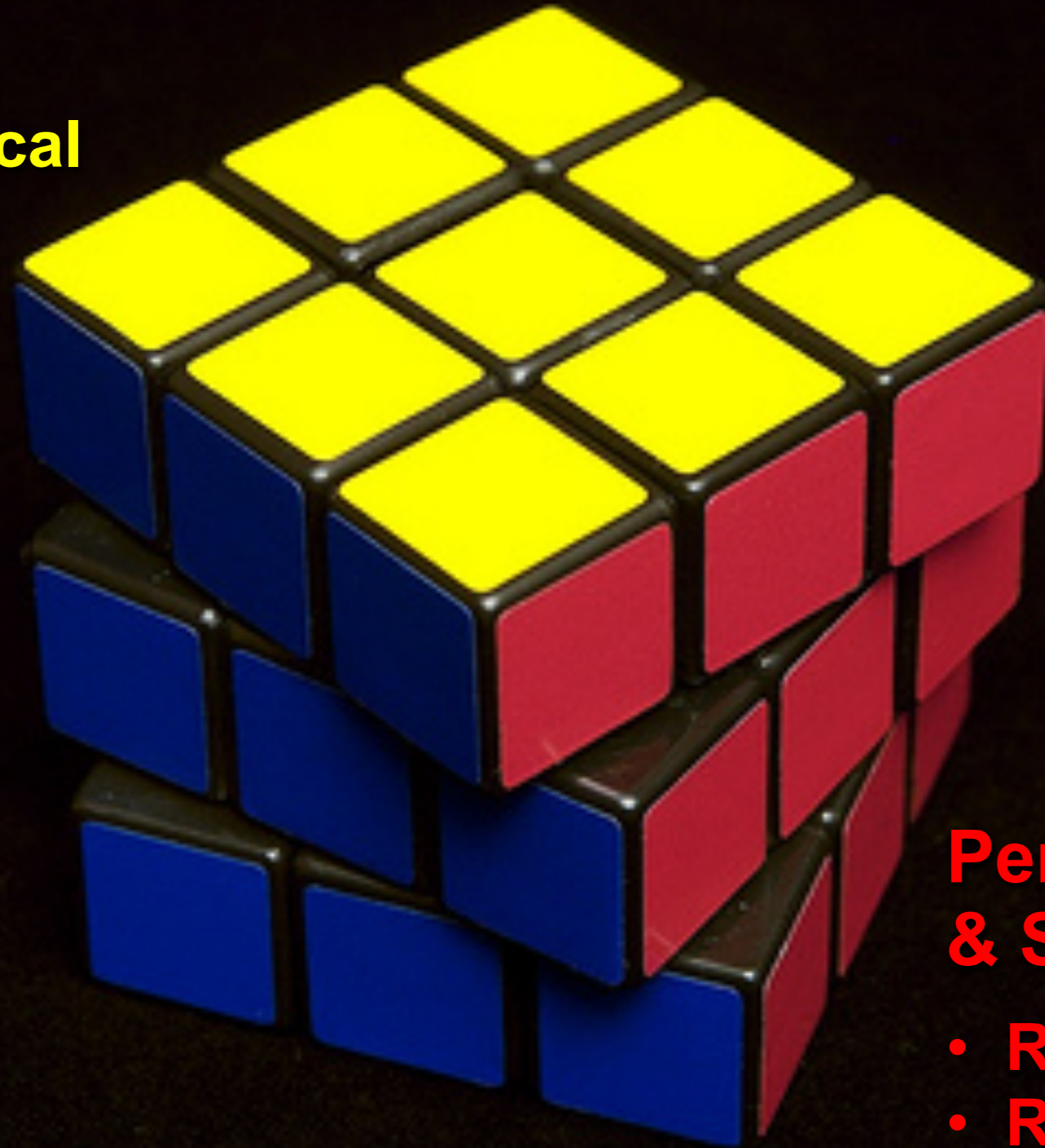
- Earthquakes
- Volcanoes
- Landslides
- Tsunamis
- Coastal Hazards
- Floods
- Severe Winds
- Snow
- Droughts
- Wildfires
- Animal and plant pests and disease
- Infectious human disease pandemics
- Infrastructure failures
- Hazardous substance incidents
- Major transport accidents
- Terrorism
- Food safety

## Type

- Natural
- Technological
- Malicious

## Exposure

- Warning ?
- Intensity
- Proximity
- Duration
- Intent



## Personal & Social

- Risk
- Resilience





# Types of major incidents

- **Forewarned:** anticipation, anxiety, planning
  - war
  - some natural disasters (flood, cyclone, pandemics)
- **Unexpected:** shock, fear, uncertainty, confusion
  - natural disasters
  - “man-made” disasters - e.g. transport accidents
  - terrorism (‘conventional, CBRN)



# Exposures & mental health outcomes

More severe mental health impacts likely when:

- More severe events
- Greater losses - deaths, destruction ► resource loss
- Natural disaster similar to 'technological' disaster
- Terrorism more than both (2:1 ratio)

# Disasters: Mental health impacts

## Key Stressors

- Severity, Proximity
  - Injury
  - Life threat
  - Deaths
  - Type
- Dose – response effect
  - “I thought I was going to die”
  - multiple, mutilating
  - Intentional (Norris, 2005)

## Reactive processes

- Anxiety, fear, shock, somatic, organic (heart rate)
  1. Hyper-arousal: Scanning for threat
  2. Intrusive thoughts / re-experiencing
  3. Avoidance re events – Dissociation, Numbing

# Impact of various disaster types

- Personal threat → Traumatic stress reactions
- Loss of loved one → Grief/depressive reactions
- Separation from family → Anxiety reactions

But real life is not so simply categorised...

- Works stress, 'presenteeism', survivor guilt, feeling unrecognised, alcohol and drug use issues
- For all survivors including responders



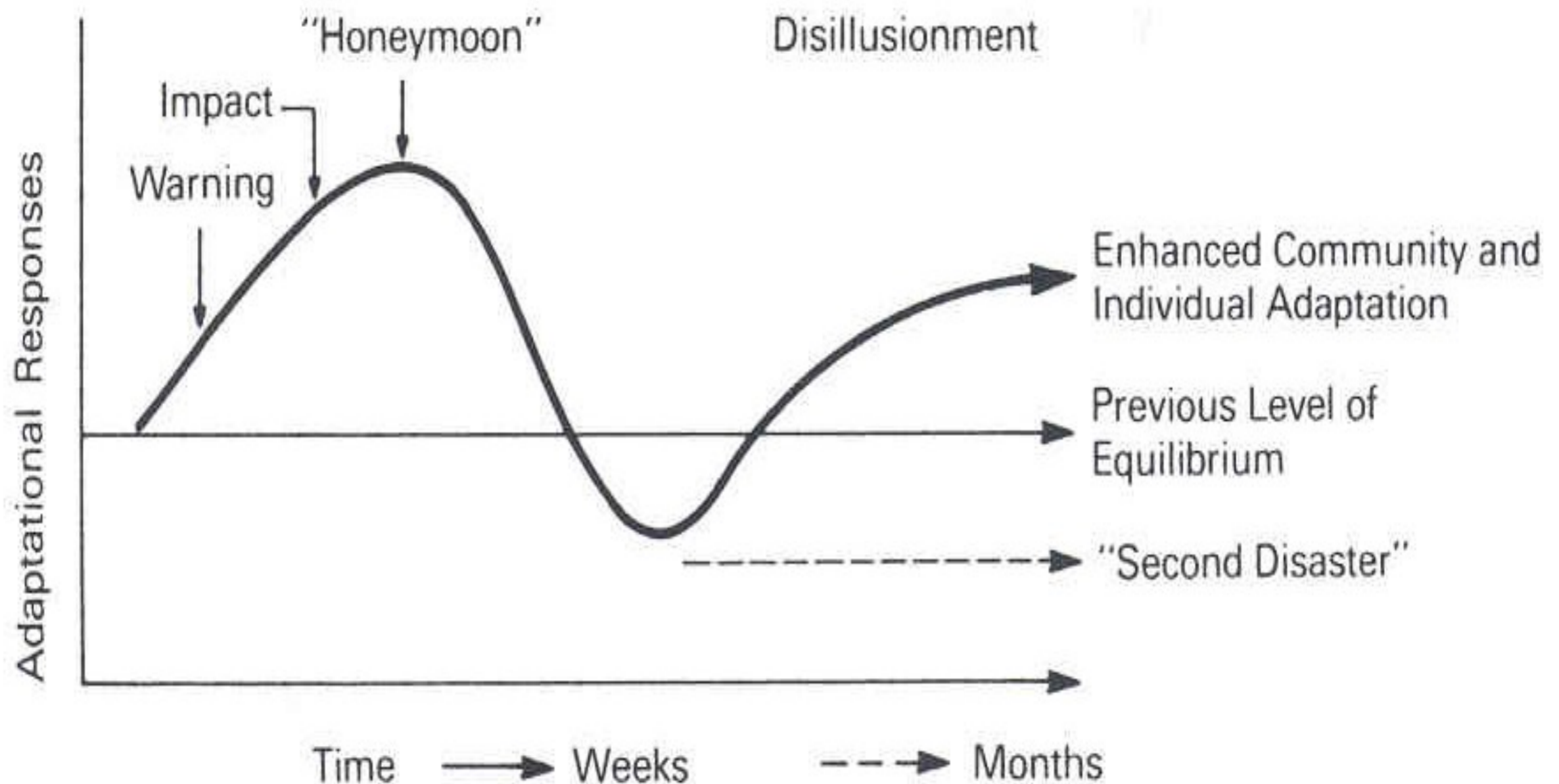
# Resilience and Recovery

- Recovery implies a trajectory in which normal functioning gives way to clinical level of symptoms, e.g. PTSD or depression
- Resilience – ability to maintain a relatively stable equilibrium – stable in terms of psychological and physical functioning, though some transient disturbance
- Resilience is more than an absence of symptoms
- Capacity for generative and positive experiences
- Evidence bases does not really distinguish between these two groups of people – can lead to confusion
- Though PTSD is a genuine risk, resilience is common
- Endurance vs resilience

# Time and Progress: The phases of response to disaster (Raphael, 1986)



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# What is psychosocial support?

Psychosocial support aims to improve well-being for individuals and communities across three different domains:

- **Supporting human capacity** to improve mental health and well-being
- **Improving social ecology** by focusing on the network of relationships linking individuals to each other, within and between communities
- **Considering culture and values** by being mindful of the value and meaning given to behaviour and experience as reflected by individuals and communities

# Principles of psychosocial support and recovery

- Expect psychosocial reactions within an appropriate range for most, although some people may exhibit short-term reactions
- Most people will recover from an emergency event with time and basic support
- **Time helps** – but recovery may not be a simple linear path – and some need greater assistance



# Principles of psychosocial support and recovery

- There is a relationship between the psychosocial element of recovery and other elements of recovery, e.g. economic infrastructure, buildings
- Self-help to more intensive forms of support should be operationalised through a well-supported triage process, immediately post-event and onwards

# Principles of psychosocial support and recovery



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- Outreach, screening and intervention programmes for trauma or related problems should conform to current professional practice and ethical standards
- Operational effectiveness in psychosocial recovery from an emergency event stems from effective readiness phase actions



## However, not just mental health...

- Mid and long-term effects of large-scale disasters can include:
  - Alcoholism
  - Suicide
  - Cardiovascular and other stress-related physical diseases
  - Family and vocational problems
  - And these may be **NEW** problems for these people



## Greater degree of disturbance if:

1. There is a change in the entire physical and organisational structure of a community
2. The impact consists of more than the impact of the physical event and persists for a long time
3. There are additional subsequent impacts and disruptions that require further coping

(Green, 1982)



# Tensions and dilemmas

- Local and national narratives and experience
- How does this affect understanding and recovery?
- What does resilience mean to those who hear that message?
- Truncation of time vs strategic information processing
- What are the effects of complete immersion and uncertainty?
- Fight, flight, freeze and fornication