

TIP SHEET: COPING WITH DISASTER

Disasters are upsetting experiences for everyone involved. The emotional toll that disaster brings can sometimes be even more devastating than the financial strains of damage and loss of home, business or personal property.

Children, senior citizens, people with access or functional needs and people for whom English is not their first language are especially at risk. Children may become afraid and some elderly people may seem disoriented at first. People with access or functional needs may require additional assistance. Seek crisis counseling if you or someone in your family is experiencing issues with disaster-related stress.

UNDERSTAND DISASTER EVENTS

Everyone who sees or experiences a disaster is affected by it in some way.

- It is normal to feel anxious about your own safety and that of your family and close friends.
- Profound sadness, grief and anger are normal reactions to an abnormal event.
- Acknowledging your feelings helps you recover.
- Focusing on your strengths and abilities helps you heal.
- Accepting help from community programs and resources is healthy.
- Everyone has different needs and different ways of coping.
- It is common to want to strike back at people who have caused great pain.

Children and older adults are of special concern in the aftermath of disasters. Even individuals who experience a disaster “second hand” through exposure to extensive media coverage can be affected.

Contact local faith-based organizations, voluntary agencies or professional counselors for counseling. Additionally, FEMA and state and local governments of the affected area may provide crisis counseling assistance.

As you recover, it is a good idea to make sure that you have updated your family disaster plan and replenished essential disaster supplies just in case a disaster happens again. You will always feel better knowing that you are prepared and ready for anything.

SIGNS OF DISASTER-RELATED STRESS

Seek counseling if you or a family member are experiencing disaster-related stress.

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RECOGNIZE SIGNS OF DISASTER-RELATED STRESS

When adults have the following signs, they might need crisis counseling or stress management assistance:

- Difficulty communicating thoughts
- Difficulty sleeping
- Difficulty maintaining balance in their lives
- Low threshold of frustration
- Increased use of drugs/alcohol
- Limited attention span
- Poor work performance
- Headaches/stomach problems
- Tunnel vision/muffled hearing
- Colds or flu-like symptoms
- Disorientation or confusion
- Difficulty concentrating
- Reluctance to leave home
- Depression, sadness
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Mood-swings and easy bouts of crying
- Overwhelming guilt and self-doubt
- Fear of crowds, strangers or being alone

EASING STRESS

The following are ways to ease disaster-related stress:

- Talk with someone about your feelings - anger, sorrow and other emotions - even though it may be difficult.
- Seek help from professional counselors who deal with post-disaster stress.
- Do not hold yourself responsible for the disastrous event or be frustrated because you feel you cannot help directly in the rescue work.
- Take steps to promote your own physical and emotional healing by healthy eating, rest, exercise, relaxation and meditation.
- Maintain a normal family and daily routine, limiting demanding responsibilities on yourself and your family.
- Spend time with family and friends.
- Participate in memorials.
- Use existing support groups of family, friends and religious institutions.

Ensure you are ready for future events by restocking your disaster supplies kits and updating your family disaster plan. Doing these positive actions can be comforting.

Source: <https://www.ready.gov/coping-with-disaster>