

OFFICE OF THE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT COORDINATOR

Emotional Responses to Disasters

When we experience a disaster or other stressful life event, we can have a variety of reactions, all of which can be common responses to difficult situations.

These reactions can include:

- Feeling physically and mentally drained
- Having difficulty making decisions or staying focused on topics
- Becoming easily frustrated on a more frequent basis
- Arguing more with family and friends
- Feeling tired, sad, numb, lonely or worried
- Experiencing changes in appetite or sleep patterns

Most of these reactions are temporary and will go away over time. Try to accept whatever reactions you may have. Look for ways to take one step at a time and focus on taking care of your disaster-related needs and those of your family.

Keep a particularly close eye on the children in your family. When disaster strikes, a child's view of the world as a safe and predictable place is temporarily lost. Children of different ages react in different ways to trauma, but how parents and other adults react following any traumatic event can help children recover more quickly and more completely. [Your local Red Cross](#) can give you information about helping children cope with disaster and trauma.

Recovery Takes Time

Getting ourselves and our lives back in a routine that is comfortable for us takes time.

- Take care of your safety. Find a safe place to stay and make sure your physical health needs and those of your family are addressed. Seek medical attention if necessary.
- Limit your exposure to the sights and sounds of disaster, especially on television, the radio and in the newspapers.
- Eat healthy. During times of stress, it is important that you maintain a balanced diet and drink plenty of water.
- Get some rest. With so much to do, it may be difficult to have enough time to rest or get adequate sleep. Giving your body and mind a break can boost your ability to cope with the stress you may be experiencing.
- Stay connected with family and friends. Giving and getting support is one of the most important things you can do. Try to do something as a family that you have all enjoyed in the past.
- Be patient with yourself and with those around you. Recognize that everyone is stressed and may need some time to put their feelings and thoughts in order. That includes you!
- Set priorities. Tackle tasks in small steps.

- Gather information about assistance and resources that will help you and your family members meet your disaster-related needs.
- Stay positive. Remind yourself of how you've successfully gotten through difficult times in the past. Reach out when you need support, and help others when they need it.

When the Challenges Are Ongoing

Many people have experience coping with stressful life events and typically feel better after a few days. Others find that their stress does not go away as quickly as they would like and it influences their relationships with their family, friends and others.

If you find yourself or a loved one experiencing some of the feelings and reactions listed below for two weeks or longer, this may be a sign that you need to reach out for additional assistance.

- Crying spells or bursts of anger
- Difficulty eating
- Difficulty sleeping
- Losing interest in things
- Increased physical symptoms such as headaches or stomachaches
- Fatigue
- Feeling guilty, helpless or hopeless
- Avoiding family and friends