

TAKING CARE OF YOUR EMOTIONAL HEALTH

After a Disaster



Each positive action you take can help you feel better and more in control

Disasters can bring about significant stress. This is especially true if you have experienced a previous disaster. The good news is that many people have experience coping with stressful life events and are naturally resilient—meaning we are designed to “bounce back” from difficult times. In the days following a disaster, it is common for you, your family and friends to experience a variety of reactions. Feelings of exhaustion, worry, and anger can surface, especially if you’ve had to leave your home or have had to contend with the frustrations of having no electricity, have had to clean up disaster debris, or have had to wait in long lines for disaster assistance... Here is some information on how to recognize your current feelings and tips for taking care of the emotional health of you, your family and friends.

What You May Be Feeling Now

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

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

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.

Taking Action

Getting ourselves and our lives back in a routine that is comfortable for us takes time. Each positive action you take can help you feel better and more in control. Here are some helpful tips that may help put your priorities in place and help you take care of yourself and your loved ones:

- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- Finally, **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.

If You Still Don’t Feel Better

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 more, this may be a sign that you need to reach out for additional assistance.

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

For additional resources, contact your local Red Cross Disaster Mental Health or community mental health professional.

Please seek **immediate** help if you or someone you know is feeling that life isn’t worth living or if you are having thoughts of harming yourself or others. You can also call the national suicide hotline at **1-800-273-8255**.