

# Recovering From Disaster: Coping

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.

## Understanding 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 secondhand through exposure to extensive media coverage can be affected.

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

## 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 or alcohol
- Limited attention span

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- Poor work performance
- Headaches or stomach problems
- Tunnel vision or 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 Disaster-Related 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 postdisaster 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 through 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 or community institutions.
- Ensure you are ready for future events by restocking your disaster supply kits and updating your family disaster plan. Doing these positive actions can be comforting.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). (Revised 2010, August 11). Recovering from disaster. In *Are you ready? An in-depth guide to citizen preparedness*. Retrieved May 9, 2011, from <http://www.fema.gov/>

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