

Tips on Coping with Disasters and Other Stressful and Traumatic Events



Experiencing traumatic events such as emergencies and disasters can be stressful, even overwhelming. The stress caused by these events can have a negative effect on how you feel, think and act.

The following tips will help you to reduce stress and cope better.

KNOW HOW TO RECOGNIZE NORMAL STRESS REACTIONS

Most people exposed to stressful and traumatic events will show some signs of distress – but there is no right or wrong way to react. Everyone experiences stress in their own way. The following are examples of normal reactions to stressful and traumatic events:

Physical Reactions

Exhaustion, headaches, dizziness, chills and sweating chest pains, breathing difficulties, rapid heartbeat, sweating and gastrointestinal problems. Stress can also worsen existing medical conditions.

Emotional Reactions

Disbelief, shock, fear, anxiety, anger, agitation, irritability, helplessness, loss of interest in activities, guilt and self-doubt, sadness, and grief, loneliness and isolation. Some people may experience depression.

Behavioral Reactions

Not acting “like yourself”; restlessness and argumentativeness; hyperactivity or withdrawal; changes in eating and sleeping habits; crying; emotional outbursts; conflicts at home and at work; smoking; drugs, or alcohol use and abuse.

Cognitive Reactions

Confusion, forgetfulness, difficulties concentrating and making decisions, nightmares and flash backs.

Spiritual Reactions

Questioning basic beliefs and values, withdrawal from or sudden turn towards spiritual support.

After experiencing a stressful or traumatic event:

Be patient with yourself and those around you.

Give everyone time to cope, adapt and heal.

The information in this tip sheet will help you understand what you can do to reduce stress and be better prepared to cope with traumatic events.

KNOW THE SIGNS THAT INDICATE YOU MIGHT NEED HELP

Most reactions to stress are transient, and most people will recover with time and support. Stress reactions can appear immediately after the event or may not appear for weeks or even months; memories of previous traumatic experiences may also re-surface. Those directly affected are more likely to have stronger reactions. If the **symptoms persist**, or if they **worsen** or **interfere with daily functioning**, you should consider seeking professional help. If left untreated, these symptoms can affect your health and quality of life for many years.

KNOW WHERE YOU CAN FIND HELP

If you feel overwhelmed or are concerned about yourself or someone else, you can find help by calling **1-800 LIFENET**, a free, confidential helpline for New York City residents, available 24/7, with trained staff ready to take your calls.

KNOW HOW TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Take Care OF Your Body

- 🌀 Get enough sleep.
- 🌀 Eat regular, healthy meals and remain physically active.
- 🌀 Avoid drinking alcohol excessively or using drugs or tobacco to help you cope.

Take Care of Your Emotional Health

- 🌀 Do things that help you recharge and feel in control of your life.
- 🌀 Set realistic goals for the future.
- 🌀 Focus on your strengths and previous accomplishments.
- 🌀 Try to remain positive and be patient with yourself.
- 🌀 Make time to reflect, meditate or pray.
- 🌀 Save time for the activities you enjoy.

Reach Out

- 🌀 Do not be afraid to express your feelings or to talk about your experiences. You may find that others are experiencing similar things, and you can understand and support each other.
- 🌀 Do not hesitate to ask for help if you feel overwhelmed or discouraged.
- 🌀 Stay connected to friends and family.
- 🌀 Accept support - people do care!

Reduce Your Stress

- 🌀 Try to stick to your daily routine as much as possible. This will give your life structure.
- 🌀 Do things you find comforting such as reading, listening to music, exercising.
- 🌀 During a disaster, keep yourself informed by obtaining information from reliable resources, but do not become preoccupied with the news. Watching too much media coverage of the event can be upsetting to you and those others around you, including your children. Do not listen to or act upon rumors.

Manage Your Workload

- 🌀 Maintain a healthy balance between work and rest.
- 🌀 Take frequent breaks and give your body and mind enough time to rest and recharge.
- 🌀 As you try to cope, do not let work take over your life.
- 🌀 Remember to make time for your family and friends, as well as your own hobbies and interests.

If you or anyone you know feels overwhelmed – reach out.

Help is available!

1-800-LifeNet
1-800-543-3638
(English)

1-877-Ayudese
1-877-298-3373
(Spanish)

1-877-990-8585
(Chinese)

1-212-982-5284
(TTY)