

Coping With Disaster

A disaster of any size will cause unusual stress in people who have been directly and indirectly impacted by it. Each person will react differently, and a range of responses to a disaster are normal and to be expected. Emotional responses to disasters can appear immediately, or sometimes months later.

The terrorist attacks in New York and Washington have had a profound impact on all Americans nationwide. Understanding what you're feeling and taking positive steps can help you cope with this disaster.

Here are some possible responses to disasters:

- Disbelief and shock
- Fear and anxiety about the future
- Disorientation, apathy and emotional numbing
- Irritability and anger
- Sadness and depression
- Feeling powerless
- Extreme hunger or lack of appetite
- Difficulty making decisions
- Crying for "no apparent reason"
- Headaches and stomach problems
- Difficulty sleeping
- Excessive alcohol or drug use

Most of these reactions will decrease as time passes and you focus attention on daily activities. Everyone experiences stress differently.

What You Can Do

- Talk about it. Not expressing your feelings will keep you from being able to work through what happened. By talking with others, you will relieve stress and realize that other people share your feelings.
- Get plenty of rest and exercise. Remember to eat well. Avoid excessive drinking and risk-taking activities.
- Spend time with your family. If you have any children, encourage them to discuss their concerns and feelings with you.
- Do things that you find relaxing and soothing.
- Recall other times you have experienced strong emotions and how they were resolved.
- Do something positive that will help you gain a greater sense of control (for example, give blood, take a first aid class or donate food or clothing).
- If you feel overwhelmed by the disaster, ask for help. It's not a sign of weakness. Talk with a trusted relative, friend, social worker, minister or rabbi.

If you have strong feelings that won't go away or if you are troubled for longer than four to six weeks, you may want to seek professional help. People who have existing mental health problems and those who have survived past trauma may also want to check in with a mental health care professional.

Employee Service Program professional counselors are available for confidential assistance to state employees and their families, free of charge, and can be contacted at 1-800-521-1377, Monday through Friday 8:00am – 5:00pm. For more information, visit the ESP web page at www.michigan.gov/esp.

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