

Emotional Challenges After a Disaster

The way you respond in the aftermath of a natural disaster may be different from what others are experiencing. As with any trauma, there is no right or wrong way to feel. Here are some of the reactions you or loved ones may be experiencing:

- ▶ **Vulnerability and insecurity.** Humans need to know that they are safe and have some stability. When this is taken away, they feel susceptible, unguarded, and may lack confidence in their ability to cope.
- ▶ **Fear of the unknown.** The unpredictability of the situation may leave you feeling anxious about your safety as well as the safety of those you love.
- ▶ **Variable emotions.** You may feel anger, fear, guilt, frustration, and sadness. Your emotions may change from moment to moment. You may feel the need to focus on the disaster and talk about it with others, or a need to block it all out.
- ▶ **Confusion and distraction.** You may be confused, have problems concentrating, or be unable to think clearly at times.
- ▶ **Hypervigilance.** You may feel intensely aware of everything around you and any perceived dangers. This includes possible strong reactions

to loud noises or changes in weather. It could also include being in a state of constant, uncontrollable worry.

How to Help Yourself

- ▶ **Control what you can.** Focus on finding shelter and safe sources of food and water. Become aware of available resources through helping agencies like the Red Cross, Salvation Army, and FEMA.
- ▶ **Be patient and accepting.** Do this for yourself and others. Don't judge emotional responses as right or wrong.
- ▶ **Tell others what you need.** Family, friends, and others need to know what is helpful and what is not. Let them offer their support and comfort. Share your thoughts.
- ▶ **Limit media coverage.** Stay abreast of how emergency officials are safeguarding the community and the status of recovery efforts and health and sanitation conditions. Avoid disaster footage and images that may upset you.

When to Seek Help

- ▶ If you have difficulty understanding your emotions.
- ▶ If your feelings seem overwhelming and your coping skills are insufficient.
- ▶ If you have thoughts of wanting to harm yourself or another person.
- ▶ If you need to talk.

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