

Coping with Disaster

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.

Understand 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 “second hand” through exposure to extensive media coverage can be affected.

Contact local faith-based organizations, voluntary agencies or professional counselors for counseling.

Additionally, FEMA and state and local governments of the affected area may provide crisis counseling assistance.

Easing 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 post-disaster 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 by 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 institutions.
- Ensure you are ready for future events by restocking your disaster supplies kits and updating your family disaster plan. Doing these positive actions can be comforting.

Helping Children Cope with Disaster

Disasters can leave children feeling frightened, confused, and insecure. Whether a child has personally experienced trauma, has merely seen the event on television, or has heard it discussed by adults, it is important for parents and teachers to be informed and ready to help if reactions to stress begin to occur.

Suggestions to help reassure children include the following:

- Personal contact is reassuring. Hug and touch your children.
- Calmly provide factual information about the recent disaster and current plans for insuring their safety along with recovery plans.
- Encourage your children to talk about their feelings.
- Spend extra time with your children such as at bedtime.
- Re-establish your daily routine for work, school, play, meals, and rest.
- Involve your children by giving them specific chores to help them feel they are helping to restore family and community life.
- Praise and recognize responsible behavior.
- Understand that your children will have a range of reactions to disasters.
- Encourage your children to help update your family disaster plan.

If you have tried to create a reassuring environment by following the steps above, but your child continues to exhibit stress, if the reactions worsen over time, or if they cause interference with daily behavior at school, at home, or with other relationships, it may be appropriate to talk to a professional. You can get professional help from the child's primary care physician, a mental health provider specializing in children's needs, or a member of the clergy.

Involve your child in your family's emergency planning. The Federal Emergency Management Administration has more information [here](#).

Helping Others

1. Volunteer! Check with local organizations or listen to local news reports for information about where volunteers are needed. Note: Until volunteers are specifically requested, stay away from disaster areas.

2. Bring your own food, water and emergency supplies to a disaster area if you are needed there. This is especially important in cases where a large area has been affected and emergency items are in short supply.
3. Give a check or money order to a recognized disaster relief organization. These groups are organized to process checks, purchase what is needed, and get it to the people who need it most.
4. Do not drop off food, clothing or any other item to a government agency or disaster relief organization unless a particular item has been requested. Normally, these organizations do not have the resources to sort through the donated items.
5. Donate a quantity of a given item or class of items (such as nonperishable food) rather than a mix of different items. Determine where your donation is going, how it's going to get there, who is going to unload it and how it is going to be distributed. Without sufficient planning, much needed supplies will be left unused.

Additional Resources

- Find more Water and Food preparedness tips from the CDC [HERE](#).
- Find more Food tips from FEMA [HERE](#) and more water tips [HERE](#).
- Learn how to [make water safe](#) in an emergency and [how to find other water sources](#).

Supporting Documents

Coping with Disaster 124.47 KB

Be Red Cross Ready 305.98 KB