

- **Hold your child.** Touching provides extra reassurance that someone is there for him or her.
- **Spend extra time with your child,** especially at bedtime.
- **Recognize and praise responsible behavior.**
- **Explain how the disaster has affected your child to his or her teachers, day-care staff, baby-sitters and others.**
- **If you are staying in a place where everyone is a stranger to your child, do not leave the facility and leave your child there alone, even to run short errands.** This can lead to feelings of abandonment and increased fear of loss for your child.

HELP FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

- **Listen when you can to those who are having problems.**
- **Share your own feelings about the disaster.**
- **Be tolerant of the irritability and short tempers others show — everyone is stressed at this time.**
- **Share information about assistance being offered and possible resources available.**

Sometimes following disasters with an extended recovery time, domestic violence and substance abuse occur as people find themselves unable to cope. If this happens in your family, or if any of your disaster responses are severe or continue for an extended period, we encourage you to contact a professional mental health provider for help for yourself, your child or other family member. Your Red Cross chapter may be able to help you with this referral.



Disaster Services

COPING WITH DISASTER



**Emotional Health Issues
For
Victims of Disasters**



Disasters affect people in many ways. In some disaster situations it may mean loss of loved ones, including relatives, friends, neighbors, or family pets. In others, it may mean the loss of home and property, furnishings, and important or cherished belongings. Sometimes it means starting over with a new home or business. The emotional effects of loss and disruption may show up immediately or may appear many months later.

GRIEVING

It is very important to understand that grieving is natural and can last for an extended period following any loss. When the loss is a life, this may take a minimum of a year.

REACTIONS

A disaster of any size will cause unusual and unwanted stress as people work to reconstruct their lives.

COMMON INITIAL REACTIONS

**Shock
Fears
Grief
Disbelief
Anger
Feeling overwhelmed
Feeling numb
Difficulty making decisions
Inability to think clearly
Temporary memory loss
Reluctance to abandon property
Need to contact family members
Need for information**

SOME LATER REACTIONS

- **Appetite changes and/or digestion problems**
- **Sleeping problems**
- **Headaches**
- **Increased allergies, colds, and flu**
- **Increased anger and/or suspicion of others**
- **Depression**
- **Crying for no apparent reason**
- **Frustration and feelings of powerlessness**
- **Moodiness and irritability**
- **Anxiety**
- **Disappointment with, and rejection of, outside help**
- **Isolating yourself from your family and friends and/or social activities**
- **Guilt**

COMMON REACTIONS OF YOUNG CHILDREN

- **Return to earlier behavior, such as thumb sucking or bed wetting**
- **Needing to be near parents**
- **Not wanting to leave parents to go to school**
- **Anxious about going to bed**
- **Nightmares**
- **Fantasies that the disaster never happened**
- **Increased crying**
- **Withdrawal and an inability to be motivated**
- **Problems at school and with concentration**

HELP FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY

- **Recognize your own feelings.**
- **Talk to others about your feelings; this will help relieve your stress and help you realize that other victims share your feelings.**
- **Accept help from others.**
- **Whenever possible, take time off and do something you enjoy.**
- **Get enough rest.**
- **Get as much recreational physical activity as possible.**
- **Give a family member a hug; touching can be very important.**
- **Stay connected with your usual support systems; your religious/spiritual leader, social groups, neighbors, family and friends.**

HELP FOR YOUR CHILD

- **Actively encourage your child to talk about his or her feelings and let your child know that sometimes adults have the same feelings. You may find that you have many shared feelings, regardless of your child's age.**
- **Encourage your child to draw pictures of the disaster. This may help you understand how s/he views what happened.**
- **Talk to your child about the disaster event. Give factual information that she or he can understand.**
- **Reassure your child that you and he or she are safe. Repeat this assurance as often as necessary.**