



# RECOVERING EMOTIONALLY FROM DISASTER OR TRAUMA

Understanding responses to distressing events can help you cope effectively with your feelings, thoughts and behaviors, and help you along the path to recovery.

## COMMON REACTIONS AND RESPONSES

- **Intense or unpredictable feelings.** You may be anxious, nervous, overwhelmed or grief-stricken. You may also feel more irritable or moody than usual.
- **Changes to thoughts and behavior patterns.** You might have repeated and vivid memories of the event. These memories may occur for no apparent reason and may lead to physical reactions such as rapid heartbeat or sweating. It may be difficult to concentrate or make decisions. Sleep and eating patterns also can be disrupted.
- **Sensitivity to environmental factors.** Sirens, loud noises, burning smells or other environmental sensations may stimulate memories of the event creating heightened anxiety.
- **Strained interpersonal relationships.** Increased conflict, such as more frequent disagreements with family members and co-workers, can occur. You might also become withdrawn, isolated or disengaged from your usual social activities.
- **Stress-related physical symptoms.** Headaches, nausea and chest pain may occur and could require medical attention. Pre-existing medical conditions could be affected by trauma-related stress.

## HOW TO COPE

- **Give yourself time to adjust.** Allow yourself to mourn the losses you have experienced and try to be patient with changes in your emotional state.
- **Ask for support from people who care about you and who will listen and empathize with your situation.** Family and friends can be an important resource. You can find support and common ground from those who've also survived the disaster or

trauma. You may also want to reach out to others not involved who may be able to provide greater support and objectivity.

- **Communicate your experience.** Express what you are feeling in whatever ways feel comfortable to you. Find a local support group led by appropriately trained and experienced professionals.
- **Engage in healthy behaviors to enhance your ability to cope with excessive stress.** Eat well-balanced meals and get plenty of rest. If you experience ongoing difficulties with sleep, you may be able to find relief through relaxation techniques. Avoid alcohol and drugs because they can be a numbing diversion that could detract from as well as delay active coping and moving forward from the event.
- **Establish or re-establish routines.** This can include eating meals at regular times, sleeping and waking on a regular cycle, or following an exercise program. Build in positive routines to have something to look forward to during these distressing times, like pursuing a hobby or reading.
- **Avoid making major life decisions.** Switching careers or jobs and other important decisions tend to be highly stressful in their own right and even harder to take on when you're recovering from a disaster or trauma.

## WHEN SHOULD I SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP?

If you notice persistent feelings of distress or hopelessness and you feel like you are barely able to get through your daily responsibilities and activities, consult with a licensed mental health professional.

Source: American Psychological Association