

LIFE AFTER THE STORM

How To Cope After A Disaster



STRONG FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS ARE NORMAL

For many people, a scary or life threatening event such as a hurricane or tornado can bring on strong feelings and mixed emotions. This is normal for anyone who has seen, heard about or lived through, a natural disaster or other distressing events.

OTHER REACTIONS:

- *Avoidance and Withdrawal*
- *Increased Vigilance*
- *Anxiety and Fear*
- *Aggressive, mean, or even violent*
- *Re-experiencing the traumatic event*

Not all people that experience disaster-related trauma react in the same way or at the same time. Some people are able to deal with the events of the disaster and go on with their lives. Some have reactions right away and others may seem fine for months, then suddenly break down in emotion.

Crying, anger, guilt, headaches, stomach aches, trouble concentrating, flashbacks or disturbing thoughts are all common feelings and emotions you may have after a traumatic ordeal.



PTSD

If these reactions/stress-related symptoms last for several months and you are not feeling better you may have what is called Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD is a set of symptoms that occur after a person as seen, heard about, or lived through a frightening event.



PTSD IS TREATABLE

Approximately eight million people get diagnosed with PTSD a given year. For most, these stress reactions go away after a few weeks but if they do not, you should see a doctor. Only a mental health professional or doctor can determine if you have PTSD. PTSD is treated with Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy. Some may receive a combination of medication and therapy to treat their PTSD.

HOW TO COPE

It is 'normal' to have difficulty managing your feelings after major traumatic events. However, if you don't deal with the stress, it can be harmful to your mental and physical health. Here are some tips for coping in these difficult times:

- *Talk about it. By talking with others about the event, you can relieve stress and realize that others share your feelings.*
- *Spend time with friends and family. They can help you through this tough time. If your family lives outside the area, stay in touch by phone. If you have any children, encourage them to share their concerns and feelings about the disaster with you.*
- *Take care of yourself. Get plenty of rest and exercise, and eat properly. If you smoke or drink coffee, try to limit your intake, since nicotine and caffeine can also add to your stress.*
- *Limit exposure to images of the disaster. Watching or reading news about the event over and over again will only increase your stress.*
- *Find time for activities you enjoy. Read a book, go for a walk, catch a movie or do something else you find enjoyable.*
- *Take one thing at a time. For people under stress, an ordinary workload can sometimes seem unbearable. Pick one urgent task and work on it. Once you accomplish that task, choose the next one. "Checking off" tasks will give you a sense of accomplishment and make things feel less overwhelming.*
- *Do something positive. Give blood, prepare "care packages" for people who have lost relatives or their homes or jobs, or volunteer in a rebuilding effort. Helping other people can give you a sense of purpose in a situation that feels 'out of your control.'*
- *Avoid drugs and excessive drinking.*
- *Ask for help when you need it. 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. Being unable to manage your responses to the disaster and resume your regular activities may be symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Help is available. Make an appointment with a mental health professional to discuss how well you are coping with the recent events. You could also join a support group. Don't try to cope alone. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness.*