

# Emotional Well-Being



## Emotional Well-Being After a Disaster

Well-being refers to the holistic state of physical, emotional, mental, social, and spiritual health. A traumatic experience like a natural disaster or emergency may threaten emotional well-being and cause stress and anxiety, and impact other areas of health as a result. The emotional toll caused by a traumatic event may be even more devastating than the property damage or financial strains resulting from a disaster. Be sure you are aware of disaster-related distress if you have previously experienced a disaster and seek assistance to improve your emotional well-being and ease anxiety.

## Disaster-Related Distress

Everyone who has experienced or witnessed a disaster is affected in some way. Traumatic events will cause normal emotional reactions, and it is important to recognize and address disaster-related distress to find healthy coping mechanisms and begin the process of recovery. The following signs and symptoms may indicate disaster-related distress:

- **Emotional:** Depression, grief, anxiety, fear, stress, mood swings, irritability, frustration, guilt, feelings of hopelessness, feelings of being overwhelmed
- **Physical:** Headaches, stomachaches, nausea, flu-like symptoms, tunnel vision, muffled hearing, rapid heartbeat, chest pain, weight changes
- **Cognitive:** Confusion, disorientation, difficulty concentrating, limited attention span, difficulty communicating, vivid memories of the event
- **Behavioral:** Disrupted sleeping or eating patterns, increased use of drugs or alcohol, poor work performance
- **Social:** Fear of crowds or strangers, difficulty maintaining life balance, reluctance to leave home, fear of being alone, strained relationships with family or friends, isolation, sensitivity to environmental "triggers" (i.e., loud noises, burning smells, sirens)



### Secondhand Exposure to Disasters

You may struggle with emotional well-being even though you may not directly experience a disaster or traumatic event yourself. Seeing disasters on the news or being exposed to extensive media coverage of a disaster may cause related distress and anxiety.

# Reducing Disaster-Related Distress

While it is common for people to experience emotional distress after a disaster, most people are resilient and recover over time. Utilize support networks and maintain healthy habits to improve your emotional well-being after a disaster or emergency. If you or someone you know is experiencing distress related to a natural or man-made disaster, seek support and assistance to cope with emotional and mental health issues.

- Take time to adjust and grieve and recognize that you may experience emotional distress after a disaster. Acknowledge your feelings, focus on your strengths and positive thinking, and don't be afraid to ask for help.
- Improve your overall emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being through healthy eating, adequate rest and relaxation, physical activity and exercise, and mindfulness activities such as meditation.
- Maintain or establish normal routines and spend time with family and friends. Limit demanding activities, major life decisions, or responsibilities that may be overwhelming for you and your family.
- Use your existing social support networks, such as family and friends, to talk about your emotional well-being. Express your feelings and communicate your experiences in whatever way is comfortable to you. Support groups may be available in your area for survivors of disasters and trauma.
- Engage in activities that will provide relief from emotional distress such as keeping a diary, walking in the park, drawing, and painting, or reading a book.
- The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), state governments, local non-profit agencies, and faith-based organizations may offer crisis counseling and support in areas affected by a disaster.
- Professional counselors, therapists, and psychologists can provide counseling and stress management assistance for disaster-related distress.
- Previous disaster experiences may cause fear and anxiety about emergency preparedness. However, it is important to be prepared for potential events by reevaluating your disaster plan and restocking your emergency supply kit. Adequate preparation will ensure that you are ready for any future emergencies and may provide comfort and reassurance if you are experiencing stress from a previous disaster experience.



## Disaster Distress Helpline

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) provides 24/7 crisis counseling for individuals experiencing disaster-related emotional distress. Visit the **Disaster Distress Helpline** website or call **1-800-985-5990** for counseling support or more information about the emotional effects of disasters, healthy coping, and referrals.