



Taking Care During Stressful and Traumatic Events: Tips for You and Family

Disasters and other stressful and traumatic events can disrupt the usual flow of life and cause you to feel afraid, unsafe, vulnerable or helpless, leaving you or your family frightened, confused and insecure, and even causing relationship problems and difficulties with children. There are things you can do to cope better and support yourself and your family during stressful and traumatic events.

This handout provides information on common reactions to stress and general stress-coping tips. For free, confidential mental health and substance use support today, call or text **988** or chat at nyc.gov/988. Trained counselors are available 24/7 to speak with you and connect you to services, and counseling is available in more than 200 languages.

Common Reactions to Stress

People react to stress differently. There is no right or wrong way to respond. You may notice some of these common reactions in yourself or your loved ones. Being aware of possible stress reactions will help you cope better.

- Exhaustion, trouble sleeping or eating, or symptoms such as headache, rapid heartbeat, dizziness, chills and sweat
- Strong emotions such as shock, disbelief, loneliness, sorrow, numbness, fear or anger
- Restlessness, becoming argumentative or withdrawn, or having emotional outbursts or conflicts at home, work or school
- Difficulty concentrating or with memory and making decisions
- Questioning oneself or one's values or suddenly becoming spiritual

Taking Care of Yourself

To help cope with stress:

- Get enough sleep; eat regular, healthy meals; and be physically active. Also, avoid using drugs or alcohol to cope.
- Express and accept your feelings. Recover at your own pace and in your own way. Try to do things to recharge and feel in control of life, and set realistic future goals.
- Remind yourself of your strengths and past accomplishments as well as the good things in life, even if they feel distant at the moment.
- Make time to reflect, meditate or pray and for participating in activities that bring joy. Be aware of and maintain a balance between work and rest.
- Do not become isolated or hesitate to ask for help if you feel stuck, overwhelmed or discouraged. Accept support — there are people who care.
- Do things you find relaxing, such as reading, listening to music or taking a walk.
- Consider becoming more active in the community, which can offer a network of support.
- Limit your exposure to stress — if there is a stressful or traumatic event in the news, you can turn off the TV or computer or put down the smartphone.

Taking Care of Your Family

Your family members may respond to stress or trauma in different ways due to their own personalities, ages or roles in the family. To help your family cope with stress:

- Spend time with each other, maintain familiar routines, such as regular meals together, and take time to do fun things together.
- Share experiences by talking and listening to and supporting each other.
- Accept that each other's feelings and reactions to stressful and traumatic events may be different.
- Remind each other that things may not get back to normal immediately and that physical and emotional healing takes time.
- Involve all family members in solving differences and challenges and in coping with stressful events.

Helping Children Cope With Stress

Children do not understand events the same way adults do. Children's reactions vary depending on their age and understanding of what happened. When helping children cope with stress:

- Try to stay calm — an adult's reactions affect children. If a child sees an adult is stressed or extremely anxious, it can make them feel afraid and insecure.
- Talk to them about what happened: Answer their questions in a way they can understand, and let them express their feelings.
- Reassure them that they are safe and not responsible for what happened.
- Limit their exposure to stressful, traumatic, or disturbing news and images by limiting their TV time and monitoring their internet access.

Helping Older Adults Cope With Stress

Traumatic events can be more stressful for older adults because of concerns related to health, housing and finances, among other things. When helping older adults cope with stress:

- Be patient if they seem confused or disoriented — depending on their health-related conditions, they may need further explanations or reassurances.
- Make sure they are safe and their basic personal and medical needs are addressed.

Finding Support

Reactions to stress may appear immediately or later, but they are not usually long-term, and most people recover with time and support. If symptoms from stressful or traumatic events persist, worsen or interfere with daily life and functions, or your attempts to cope cause issues in your life with drugs, alcohol, food or self-destructive behavior, you should consider seeking professional support.

Professionals can also help determine if you have a condition such as depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Visit nyc.gov/988 for more information. If you need help finding a health care provider, call **311** or 844-NYC-4NYC (844-692-4692) — there are services available for all New Yorkers regardless of insurance, ability to pay or immigration status.