



Coping With Disasters/Traumatic World Events

Emotional reactions to traumatic world events are normal. It is not uncommon to experience distress following an event, even when you are not directly affected. Most people manage with the support of family, friends and others in their communities. Others may feel overwhelmed and unable to cope and need additional help and support.

Disasters can cause us to re-experience feelings and memories related to previous disasters, such as the events of 9/11. In addition, other grief and loss experiences may resurface. The emotional impact that a disaster has varies from person to person. **Reactions to disasters are impacted by individual beliefs, customs and cultural traditions.** While those directly affected are more likely to need additional mental health support, it is not uncommon for individuals living thousands of miles away to experience stress and anxiety.

Five important things that you need to know are:

- [What are normal reactions to a disaster?](#)
- [What can I do to cope better?](#)
- [How can I help my children?](#)
- [How do I know when to ask for help?](#)
- [Where can I get help if I need it?](#)

Normal Reactions

The following are predictable reactions to traumatic events and are considered normal short-term responses to an overwhelmingly stressful event.

- A sense of hopelessness about the future.
- Feeling helpless, frustrated, angry and irritable.
- Feeling anxious and afraid.
- Having difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep.
- Having trouble concentrating.
- Experiencing distressing dreams or memories of this disaster or previous events.

If you feel that your reactions are lasting too long, getting worse instead of better or interfering with your ability to function, you may want to consider seeking professional support.

Healthy Coping

- Talk about your feelings and thoughts with family, friends and others in your community when you are ready. This may reduce their intensity and help you feel less uncomfortable. You may also find that your loved ones are experiencing similar feelings and you are not alone.
- Support and comfort one another in ways you find helpful.
- Pay close attention to your physical health - keep medical appointments, get enough rest and exercise, eat nutritious meals, practice deep breathing, engage in fun and enjoyable activities, be gentle with yourself and take time to appreciate the joy and beauty in your life.



- You may want to consider a donation to a relief organization as a way of contributing to the recovery effort. Information about how to donate to relief organizations can be found by clicking on the link below.

<http://nyc.gov/html/fund/html/home/home.shtml>

- Avoid too much sugar, caffeine, alcohol and other substances - including overmedicating with prescription and over the counter drugs.

Children

- Reassure your children concerning their safety. Help them to understand how they are protected.
- Answer their questions as honestly as you can. Remember that children interpret things differently than adults do. They may need help to put things into perspective.
- Avoid overexposure to the disaster by limiting the amount of television your children watch.
- Click on the link below for more information about how to help your children cope.

<http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/disaster.htm>

When To Ask For Help

The time to ask for help varies from person to person. You may want to consider requesting professional support if:

- Your normal sleeping pattern changes significantly.
- You feel that you can't go on.
- You have trouble concentrating and cannot do your usual tasks.
- Your relationships with friends, family and co-workers are significantly impacted.
- You are unable to manage everyday activities like you used to.
- You are relying on alcohol or drugs to cope.
- You are feeling very distressed, irritable, or agitated much of the time.

For children, withdrawal, aggressive behavior, problems at school, sleep disturbance or difficulty separating from caregivers may indicate the need for professional support.

Where To Get Help

If you are concerned about yourself or someone you care about, you can find help by calling **311** or the numbers listed below. The service is confidential and available in several languages.

- 1-800-LifeNet (1-800-543-3638) (English)
- 1-877-Ayudese 1-877-298-3373 (Spanish)
- 1-877-990-8585 (Asian LifeNet)
- 1-212-982-5284 (TTY)

For other languages call 1-800-LifeNet and ask for a translator.