

- Take time to talk with children about their experience. **Listen** to what they have to say and let them freely express their feelings. This is a confusing and frightening time for them. Remember that children do not have the same level of coping or understanding that you have.

#### FOR OLDER ADULTS

As an older adult, you probably have many of the same reactions and feelings already mentioned; however, some may be different or intensified. It is important to ask for support when you need it.

#### Common Feelings

- Current losses can trigger memories or feelings, associated with prior losses
- Fear of dependency or lack of self-sufficiency
- Worry about limited financial resources and time to rebuild
- Fear of institutionalization
- Fear of a decline in health and mobility
- Fear of inability to rebuild home

#### Common Reactions

- Withdrawal and/or isolation from family and friends
- Concealing the full extent of the disaster's impact
- Apathy – no longer caring to rebuild or start over
- Confusion or disorientation
- Decline in physical health
- Not making use of available resources

#### What lies ahead...

The weeks and months ahead will undoubtedly present some new and unexpected challenges, related to the disaster. Although you cannot predict all that you will face, it is helpful to anticipate a few likely circumstances. The next page describes some considerations.

- Moving back home (once it is repaired) – Moving back into the family home can bring mixed emotions such as relief and joy as well as sadness and fear. These are normal feelings and reactions. Sadness is often due to the reminders of things that were lost or destroyed. Feelings of fear and anxiety are common upon returning to the location that was invaded and damaged by the disaster.
- Seasonal events – During the first year following a disaster, many calendar events such as birthdays, holidays, and the change of seasons can arouse emotions such as sadness and distress. It is normal for certain events to remind you of “how things used to be,” and of things that were changed or lost. Recovery and healing involves letting yourself grieve the loss of these things.
- Your health – As you endure long-term stress, your health can be adversely effected. It is common for headaches, stomach or intestinal problems, colds, infections, and an increase in allergies to occur more frequently. In addition, pre-existing medical conditions such as heart problems and high blood pressure may be exacerbated by the prolonged stress.
- Final note – If stress, anxiety, depression, or physical problems increase, persist, or interfere with your regular activities, you should consult a physician, mental health professional, or call the local telephone number provided below.

Adapted from information from FEMA, CMHS, and the Texas Department of Public Safety- Victim Services

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*Texas P.R.I.D.E. Crisis Counseling Program  
Bluebonnet Trails Community Services  
1-800-841-1255*



# ***Recovering from the Emotional Aftermath Of a Disaster***



***Information for you  
and your family***

*Disasters often strike with little or no warning. In an instant your home and community can be damaged or destroyed and forever changed. Even if your home or business does not suffer directly, no one who experiences a disaster is untouched by it.*

For many a disaster continues as a very real presence even long after it has passed. **Feelings of sadness, depression, frustration, anger, and anxiety are common.** It is not unusual for these feelings to last for many months. Learning to recognize the normal reactions and emotions that occur can help you better understand these feelings and become more comfortable and effective in coping with them.

The following information explains the range of feelings and behaviors you can expect and how you, your family, friends, and neighbors can best help yourselves and each other during this time of recovery. Suggestions for coping with the aftermath are offered throughout this brochure.

## **Why do I feel the way I do?**

The loss of or damage to your home, property, and personal belongings has set into motion weeks and even months of effort to recover and rebuild. While physical property and possessions are initial concerns that consume your time and energy, emotional reactions to disasters are often pushed aside or ignored.

It is very common for people to experience a wide range of emotional reactions to a disaster. These reactions are experienced through thoughts, feelings, and actions, and are often very upsetting to you and those around you.

However, it is **extremely important to remember that they are NORMAL REACTIONS TO AN ABNORMAL EVENT.** You have been through an exceptionally stressful situation and these emotional reactions may continue for many months following the disaster.

## **Things to look for...**

### YOUR BEHAVIORS

- Problems falling asleep or staying asleep
- Isolating yourself or withdrawing from others
- Keeping excessively busy and preoccupied to avoid the unpleasant affects of the disaster
- At times, becoming overly alert or easily startled
- Avoiding activities, places, or even people that remind you of the disaster
- Increased conflicts or tension with family members or other people/Increased anger
- Easily crying or becoming tearful for no apparent reason
- An increase or decrease in your normal appetite
- Increased alcohol use

### YOUR FEELINGS

- Feeling just “not yourself,” out of balance, or easily upset
- Feeling a loss of interest in everyday activities
- Feeling a sense of despair, hopelessness, or emptiness about the future
- Experiencing anxiety or fear, especially when things remind you of the disaster
- Feeling irritable, short-tempered, or angry and resentful
- Feeling depressed, sad, or down much of the time

### YOUR THOUGHTS

- Trouble concentrating or remembering things
- Difficulty making decisions
- Frequently replaying the events and circumstances of the disaster in your mind
- Recurring dreams or nightmares about the disaster
- Questioning your spiritual or religious beliefs

## **What can I expect?**

There are many concerns, adjustments, and ordeals that follow the experience of a disaster. Generally, within a short time there is the reality of financial setbacks and the loss of property and personal possessions. The endless adjustments that you and your family must make will put additional stress on your relationships and daily living. You may also grow physically and mentally weary from the

enormous task of cleaning up and rebuilding. All of these factors can hinder your ability to move forward.

In the aftermath of a disaster, it is important to **remember that it will take time to heal and recover** from the emotional affects of the event. However, with the passing of time, your efforts to cope will begin to reduce the intensity and duration of these reactions and behaviors.

## **How to cope and what works...**

### FOR YOURSELF

- Talk to others about how you are feeling. It is important to talk about your experiences. You need to express sadness, grief, anger, and fears over what has happened and what you face.
- Don't overwork yourself. Take time off from repairs to be with your family. Take time for recreation, relaxation, or a favorite hobby.
- Do not let yourself become isolated. Seek out and maintain connections with your community, friends, relatives, neighbors, co-workers, or church members. Talk about your experiences with them.
- Pay close attention to your physical health, as prolonged stress takes its toll on your body. Maintain a good diet and make sure you are getting enough sleep. It is also helpful to be physically active or exercise.
- Upsetting times can cause some people to use alcohol or drugs to cope with the stress. It does not help in the long run and will likely cause other problems.

### FOR YOUR FAMILY

- Families should keep some routines in place such as regular meals, certain enjoyable activities, and other family rituals. This will help you feel as though life has some sense of order and normalcy.
- Couples need to tend to their relationship, as this is often overlooked. Take time to be alone, to talk about how you are feeling, and to have fun together.