

Emotional Impact of Disasters

Be Informed. Make a Plan. Build a Kit.

Disasters often strike with little or no warning. In an instant your home and community can be damaged or destroyed and forever changed.

After a disaster, it is common to experience a wide range of reactions, including changes in your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Understanding how you may be affected in the aftermath of a disaster can help you cope better. Feelings of sadness, anger, and grief are normal reactions to abnormal events such as disasters. You may not experience these feelings initially while your time and energy are consumed picking up the pieces and rebuilding. They may surface later. Anniversary dates of the disaster may also bring a resurgence of post-traumatic reactions.

Here are some common feelings and reactions to a disaster

- Fear and anxiety, especially when things remind you of the disaster
- A sense of despair, hopelessness, or emptiness
- Irritability and a short temper
- Frustration and resentment
- Feeling out of balance, easily upset, or “just not yourself”
- Loss of interest in everyday activities
- Loss of memory, even of names and phone numbers used frequently
- Increased/hyperactive startle reflex

Changes in behavior also are normal reactions to traumatic events. Common behaviors may include

- Isolating or withdrawing from others
- Keeping excessively busy to avoid the unpleasant effects of the disaster
- Avoiding activities, places, or even people that remind you of the disaster
- Becoming overly alert or easily startled
- Having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep
- Increasing conflicts or tension with family members or others
- Crying or becoming tearful for no apparent reason

Disasters can affect people mentally. You may be experiencing

- Trouble concentrating or remembering things
- Being easily distracted
- Difficulty making decisions
- Replaying the events and circumstances of the disaster in your mind
- Recurring dreams or nightmares
- Questioning your spiritual or religious beliefs

There are several things you and your family can do to reduce stress

- Talk to others about how you are feeling and what you experienced. You need to express sadness, grief, anger, and fear over what has happened and what you are facing.



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