

# Handout: Tips for Adults After Disasters

Reactions/Behavior	Responses	Examples of Things to Do and Say
<p><b>High anxiety/arousal</b> - Tension and anxiety are common after disasters. Adults may be excessively worried about the future, have difficulties sleeping, problems concentrating, and feel jumpy and nervous. These reactions can include rapid heart beat and sweating.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Use breathing and/or other relaxation skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Take time during the day to calm yourself through relaxation exercises to make it easier to sleep, concentrate, and give you energy.</li> <li>▶ Try a breathing exercise as follows: Inhale slowly through your nose and comfortably fill your lungs all the way down to your stomach, while saying to yourself, "My body is filled with calmness." Exhale slowly through your mouth and comfortably empty your lungs, while silently saying to yourself, "My body is releasing the tension." Do this five times slowly, and as many times a day as needed.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Concern or shame</b> over your own reactions. Many people have strong reactions after a disaster, including fear and anxiety, difficulty concentrating, shame over how you react and feeling guilty about something. It is expectable and understandable to feel many things in the aftermath of an extremely difficult event.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Find a good time to discuss your reactions with a family member or trusted friend.</li> <li>▶ Remember that these reactions are common and it takes time for them to subside.</li> <li>▶ Correct excessive self-blame with realistic assessment of what actually could have been done.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ When talking with someone, find the right time and place, and ask if it is okay to talk about your feelings.</li> <li>▶ Remind yourself that your feelings are expectable and you are not "going crazy," and that you are not at fault for the disaster.</li> <li>▶ If these feeling persist for a month, or more you may wish to seek professional help.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Feeling overwhelmed</b> by tasks that need to be accomplished (for example, housing, food, paperwork for insurance, child care, parenting)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Identify what your top priorities are.</li> <li>▶ Find out what services are available to help get your needs met.</li> <li>▶ Make a plan that breaks down the tasks into manageable steps.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Make a list of your concerns and decide what to tackle first? Take it a step at a time.</li> <li>▶ Find out which agencies can help with your needs and how to access them.</li> <li>▶ Where appropriate, rely on your family, friends, and community for practical assistance.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Fears of recurrence and reactions to reminders</b> - it is common for survivors to fear that another disaster will occur, and to react to things that are reminders of what happened</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Be aware that reminders can include people, places, sounds, smells, feelings, time of day.</li> <li>▶ Remember that media coverage of the disaster can be a reminder and trigger fears of it happening again.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ When you are reminded, try saying to yourself, "I am upset because I am being reminded of the disaster, but it is different now because the disaster is not happening and I am safe."</li> <li>▶ Monitor and limit your viewing of news reports so you just get the information that you need.</li> </ul>

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<p><b>Changes in attitude, view of the world and of oneself</b> - Strong changes in people's attitudes after a disaster are common. These can include questioning ones spiritual beliefs, trust in others and social agencies, and concerns about ones own effectiveness, and dedication to helping others.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Postpone any major unnecessary life changes in the immediate future</li> <li>▶ Remember that dealing with post-disaster difficulties increases your sense of courage and effectiveness.</li> <li>▶ Get involved with community recovery efforts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Remember that getting back to a more structured routine can help improve decision-making.</li> <li>▶ Remind yourself that going through a disaster can have positive effects on what you value and how you spend your time.</li> <li>▶ Consider engaging in community recovery projects.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Using alcohol and drugs, or engaging in gambling or high-risk sexual behaviors</b> - Many people feel out of control, scared, hopeless, or angry after a disaster and engage in these behaviors to feel better. This can especially be a problem if there was pre-existing substance abuse or addiction.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Understand that using substances and engaging in addictive behaviors can be a dangerous way to cope with what happened.</li> <li>▶ Get information about local support agencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Remember that substance use and other addictive behaviors can lead to problems with sleep, relationships, jobs, and physical health.</li> <li>▶ Get appropriate help.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Shifts in interpersonal relationships</b> - People may feel differently towards family and friends; for example, they may feel overprotective and very concerned for each other's safety, frustrated by the reactions of a family member or friend, or they may feel like pulling away from family and friends.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Understand that family and friends are a major form of support during the recovery period.</li> <li>▶ It is important to understand and tolerate different courses of recovery among family members.</li> <li>▶ Rely on other family members for help with parenting or other daily activities when you are upset or under stress.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Don't withdraw from seeking support just because you feel you might burden someone else. Most people do better after disasters with good support from others.</li> <li>▶ Don't be afraid to ask your friends and family how they are doing, rather than just giving advice, or trying to get them to "get over it." Let them know you understand, and offer a supportive ear or lend a helping hand.</li> <li>▶ Spend more time talking with family and friends about how everyone is doing. Say, "You know, the fact that we're crabby with each other is completely normal, given what we've been through. I think we're handling things amazingly. It's a good thing we have each other."</li> </ul>

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<p><b>Excessive anger</b> - Some degree of anger is understandable and expected after a disaster, especially when something feels unfair. However, when it leads to violent behavior, extreme anger is a serious problem.</p>	<p>▶ Find ways to manage your anger in a way that helps you rather than hurts you.</p>	<p>▶ Manage your anger by taking time to cool down, walk away from stressful situations, talk to a friend about what is making you angry, get physical exercise, distract yourself with positive activities or problem-solve the situation that is making you angry.</p> <p>▶ Remind yourself that being angry will not get you what you want, and may harm important relationships.</p> <p>▶ If you become violent, get immediate help.</p>
<p><b>Sleep difficulties</b> - Sleep problems are common after a disaster, as people are on edge and worried about adversities and life changes. This can make it more difficult to fall asleep and lead to frequent awakenings during the night.</p>	<p>▶ Make sure you have good sleep routines.</p>	<p>▶ Try to go to sleep at the same time every day.</p> <p>▶ Don't drink caffeinated beverages in the evening.</p> <p>▶ Reduce alcohol consumption.</p> <p>▶ Increase daytime exercise.</p> <p>▶ Relax before bedtime.</p> <p>▶ Limit daytime naps to 15 minutes, and do not nap later than 4 pm.</p>