

Coping With Storm Related Natural Disasters



Natural disasters, like hurricanes, can have devastating effects and a tremendous psychological impact on those affected. Individuals may experience various stress reactions psychologically as well as physically. Individuals and families can take steps to minimize possible mental and emotional effects of trauma caused by destruction and loss of life during natural disasters.

While preparing for a storm related natural disaster, the Federal Emergency Management Agency suggests:

1. Take precautionary steps to prepare for the disaster by assembling an emergency first aid kit, stocking food and water, securing your home and belongings, making arrangements for pets should you need to leave your home immediately, and following evacuation instructions as they are issued.
2. Listen to the radio or television for weather updates and stay in touch with your family and neighbors concerning evacuation orders. Keep each other updated. A feeling of community can be comforting during a natural disaster.
3. Plan a place for your family to meet in case you are separated during the disaster. Designate a family member or friend outside the area that your family can call to say they are OK.
4. In general, research shows that the more devastating and terrifying the trauma is, the higher the risk for developing psychiatric symptoms. Aspects of disaster or trauma that increase the likelihood of psychiatric distress include: lack of warning about the event, injury during the trauma, death of a loved one, exposure to horrifying events, experiencing the trauma alone, and the possibility of recurrence.

After an event has passed, the American Psychological Association recommends following these steps to begin coping with the possible devastation and stress that follows such a disaster:

1. Keep informed about new information and developments, but avoid overexposure to news rebroadcasts of the events. Be sure to use credible information sources to avoid speculation and rumors.
2. Take control of what you can. If possible, stay out of heavily damaged areas that will cause you unnecessary stress and anxiety.
3. If you feel anxious, angry, or depressed, you are not alone. Talk to friends, family, or colleagues who likely are experiencing the same feelings.
4. If you have contact with children, keep open dialogues with them regarding their fears of danger and the disaster. Let them know that in time, the tragedy will pass. Don't minimize the danger, but talk about your ability to cope with tragedy and get through the ordeal.
5. Feelings of anxiety and depression following a traumatic event are natural. If these symptoms continue, even after order has been restored, or if these feelings begin to overwhelm you, contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

It is especially important during these stressful and uncertain times that we all focus on restoring our emotional well-being. We must be attentive to how we as individuals are responding to stress - and also to how our family, friends, and colleagues are responding. Be alert for increases in substance use and make sure that substance abusers and those with mental health problems seek professional help.

Stress	For free and confidential assistance, call your Employee Assistance Program and speak with a Care Coordinator:	(713) 781-3364 Se Habla Español (800) 324-4327 (800) 324-2490	www.4eap.com	Marital Problems
Financial				Family Problems
Legal				Alcohol/Drug Problems
Depression				Other Referrals

Your employer has contracted with Interface EAP to provide an Employee Assistance Program.