

How to Cope With Stress After a Disaster

By [Cathleen Henning Fenton](#), About.com Updated: August 28, 2006

About.com Health's Disease and Condition content is reviewed by [Steven Gans, MD](#)

In a changing world, disasters affect the lives of more and more people. The effects of terrorist acts reverberate as events have taken place. Meanwhile, natural disasters continue to bring our day-to-day lives to a halt. Stress is do we understand our emotional reactions? When should we seek help? Here are tips and suggestions for coping.

What to Remember After a Disaster

- Everyone who sees or experiences a disaster is touched by it in some way.
- During and after a disaster, it is normal to experience anxiety about the safety of you and your loved ones.
- When a disaster or other unusual event takes place, it is normal to feel a variety of emotions, including grief. You may feel these emotions more strongly than in other situations.
- To recover from the stress of a disaster, it is important to acknowledge the emotions you are experiencing.
- It also is important to remember your strengths and abilities. Focus on what you *can* do, rather than on what you *cannot* do.
- Not only is it OK to accept help from community and government programs, it is healthy to do so.
- Everyone copes differently, and everyone has different needs. Don't be afraid to seek help for your particular needs. Understand the needs of those around you.
- If people are the cause of the disaster, such as with terrorism, it is normal to feel anger and to want to seek revenge. These actions often do not lead to healing.

Signs That You Might Need Help

How do you know when you or a loved one requires help? The following symptoms may indicate a deeper stress considered "normal" stress. These types of reactions may interfere with the person's day-to-day functioning and require outside assistance.

- Difficulties with any or all of the following:
 - Communication
 - Sleeping
 - Maintaining balance
 - Work performance

- Concentration and/or attention span

- Physical symptoms:
 - Headaches
 - Stomach problems
 - Tunnel vision
 - Muffled hearing
 - Colds or flu-like symptoms
 - Disorientation or confusion

- Emotion problems:
 - Frustrated easily
 - Increased use of drugs and/or alcohol
 - Reluctance to leave home
 - Depression or sadness
 - Feelings of hopelessness
 - Mood swings
 - Crying easily
 - Overwhelming guilt and self-doubt
 - Fear of crowds, strangers, or being alone

How to Manage Stress After a Disaster

Whether you are coping with stress on your own or receiving help from a professional, these tips will enhance t are important components of strong mental health.

- Talk with someone about your feelings. It may be difficult, but talking may alleviate your feelings quite a talking with friends and family, it may be helpful to talk to a therapist or other professional.

- You are not responsible for the disaster. If you are unable to help others during or after the disaster, it is you can control rather that what you cannot.

- Try to resume your normal routines as soon as possible. Routines help both physical and emotional healir you haven't already done so) include healthy eating, rest, exercise, and relaxation.

- Try limit demanding responsibilities at this time. Focus on your normal daily routines and add bigger task

- Don't go it alone. Spend time with family and friends. If no one is close by, call them -- they want to help seek a local support group, through your local health or mental health department. Your church is another p

- Memorials and other rituals are one way to express and let go of your feelings. Participate in these if you

- Establish an emergency plan. It will make you feel stronger to know that you have some control over any prepared, involve yourself in community preparation.

** When to Seek Help: When your symptoms continue to affect your daily life and your ability to cope, it may b other words, yes, you may feel differently for a while, but if you are unable to go to work or school; unable to , unable to establish your normal routines, then don't hesitate to reach out for help.*

Reference:

Center for Mental Health Services, National Mental Health Information Center, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.