



Mental Health America of Franklin County

2323 W. Fifth Ave. Suite 160, Columbus, OH 43204

Telephone: (614) 221-1441 Fax: (614) 221-1491

info@mhafc.org

www.mhafc.org

Coping with Disaster

Tips for Older Adults

Disasters have a profound effect on people of all generations. Although everyone responds to tragedies with varying degrees of grief, fear and anger, many older adults who have lived through previous tragedies and trauma may be at greater risk for experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression or anxiety.

SOME COMMON RESPONSES TO DISASTER

- Disbelief and shock
- Fear and anxiety about your safety, the safety of others and the future
- Disorientation, apathy and emotional numbing
- Irritability and anger
- Sadness and depression
- Feeling powerless
- Over- or under-eating
- Difficulty making decisions
- Crying for “no apparent reason”
- Headaches and stomach problems
- Difficulty sleeping
- Excessive alcohol or drug use

You may experience all or only a few of these responses. Over time, these symptoms and difficulties should begin to decrease, as you refocus attention on your daily activities. However, everyone experiences stress differently so do not compare your progress with other people or judge their reactions and emotions.

HOW TO COPE IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE ATTACKS

- **Talk about the experience and how you are feeling.** Expressing your thoughts with others gives you the opportunity to relieve stress, reduce anxiety and realize that other people share your feelings.
- **Communicate with loved ones often.** Communicating with family and friends following a disaster helps increase feelings of safety and security.

- **Take care of yourself physically.** If exercise is a regular part of your routine, continue to exercise. It is also important to eat well, drink plenty of water and rest.
- **Be around others.** Isolation and loneliness can increase the degree to which you experience symptoms. If you do not have a local network of family or friends to visit with often, find a place where you can be with people. Volunteer at a local nonprofit, offer to speak at local schools about historical events you have experienced, contact local churches or senior centers to see if they are holding any activities of interest to you, or call your doctor or local mental health center to see if there is an older adults support group in your area that you could attend. If you are unable to drive, do not hesitate to ask for a ride, look into reduced special taxi fares for senior citizens, or take public transportation, if you are able.
- **Do things you enjoy.** If you have put things aside that you normally enjoy, get involved in those activities now. Go for that walk, plant flowers or play cards with your friends.
- **Write about significant experiences in your life and how they have affected you.** Journaling gives you the opportunity to express your feelings in your own words and at your own pace. It is also an opportunity for you to share pieces of your life with future generations.

It is important to return to your usual routine at your own pace; however, if your symptoms do not seem to be subsiding or if they appear to be getting worse, you may want to speak with a mental health professional. If you have already been diagnosed with a mental health disorder or if you find you are distressed about traumatic events from your past, you may want to meet with a mental health professional as a precautionary measure.

Mental Health America of Franklin County has several resources available to help you and others cope with this disaster, including fact sheets on post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, coping with loss and other topics. We can also provide referrals to mental health care professionals in Franklin County. To obtain this information, visit www.mhafc.org or call 614-221-1441.

Mental Health America of Franklin County is a private, not-for-profit organization, established in 1956. We help people navigate the mental health system. We are dedicated to promoting mental health in Franklin County through advocacy, education, and support services. Our programs include: information and referral to community mental health and alcohol/drug services; free support groups for people with mental illness and their families; an Ombudsman program that assists clients in navigating the mental health and alcohol/drug system; mental health screenings in English and Spanish; Pro Bono Counseling Program where underinsured and uninsured individuals can receive free counseling; community and professional mental health education including Get Connected; maternal mental health support and advocacy (POEM); and a quarterly newsletter featuring legislative updates and new happenings at MHAFC. We receive funding from the Franklin County ADAMH Board, United Way of Central Ohio, individuals, foundations, and corporations. To become a member or find out more information, please visit us online at www.mhafc.org.