



Mental Health America of Franklin County

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Coping with Disaster

Tips for Adults

A disaster of any size will cause unusual stress in people who have been directly and indirectly impacted by it. Each person will react differently, and a range of responses to a disaster is normal and to be expected. Emotional responses to disasters can appear immediately or sometimes months later. Understanding what you're feeling and taking positive steps can help you cope with this disaster.

Here are some common responses to disasters:

Responses to Disaster

- Disbelief and shock
- Fear and anxiety about the future
- Disorientation, apathy and emotional numbing
- Irritability and anger
- Sadness and depression
- Feeling powerless
- Extreme hunger or lack of appetite
- Difficulty making decisions
- Crying for "no apparent reason"
- Headaches and stomach problems
- Difficulty sleeping
- Excessive drinking or drug use

Most of these reactions will decrease as time passes and you focus attention on daily activities. Because everyone experiences stress differently, don't compare your progress with others around you or judge other people's reactions and emotions.

What You Can Do

- Talk about it. Not expressing your feelings will keep you from being able to work through what happened. By talking with others, you will relieve stress and realize that other people share your feelings.

- Get plenty of rest and exercise. Remember to eat well. Avoid excessive drinking and risk-taking activities.
- Spend time with your family. If you have any children, encourage them to discuss their concerns and feelings with you.
- As soon as it feels comfortable, go back to your usual routine.
- Do things that you find relaxing and soothing.
- Recall other times you have experienced strong emotions and how they were resolved.
- Do something positive that will help you gain a greater sense of control (for example, give blood, take a first aid class or donate food or clothing).
- If you feel overwhelmed by the disaster, ask for help. It's not a sign of weakness. Talk with a trusted relative, friend, social worker, minister or rabbi.

If you have strong feelings that won't go away or if you are troubled for longer than four to six weeks, you may want to seek professional help. People who have existing mental health problems and those who have survived past trauma may also want to check in with a mental health care professional. Being unable to manage your responses to the disaster and resume your regular activities may be symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a real and treatable illness. Help is available.

Mental Health America of Franklin County has several resources available to help you and others cope with the disaster, including *Tips for Dealing with the Trauma of the Day*, *Helping Children Handle Disaster-Related Anxiety*, and fact sheets on post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, coping with loss and other topics. To obtain this information, go to www.mhafc.org or call 614-221-1441. For a referral to a mental health care professional in Franklin County, 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.