

Impacted by Disaster? Take Care of Your Emotional Health



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August 06, 2018

The wildfires out west are forcing thousands of people from their homes. For some, the fires have claimed everything they own. For others, the evacuation orders have come more than once. The situation is devastating and extremely stressful for those impacted by the fires and the American Red Cross offers these steps for people to take care of their emotional health as well as that of their family and friends.

HOW YOU MAY BE FEELING

When you experience a disaster you may:

- Feel physically and mentally drained
- Have difficulty making decisions or staying focused on topics
- Become easily frustrated on a frequent basis
- Argue more with family and friends
- Feel tired, sad, numb, lonely or worried
- Experience changes in appetite or sleep patterns

Most of these reactions are temporary and will go away over time. Try to accept whatever reactions you may have. Look for ways to take one step at a time and focus on taking care of your disaster-related needs and those of your family.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Take care of your safety. Find a safe place to stay and make sure your physical health needs and those of your family are addressed. Seek medical attention if necessary.
- Eat healthy.
- Get some rest.
- Stay connected with family and friends. Giving and getting support is one of the most important things you can do
- Be patient with yourself and with those around you. Recognize that everyone is stressed and may need some time to put their feelings and thoughts in order.
- Set priorities. Tackle tasks in small steps.
- Gather information about assistance and resources that will help you and your family members meet your disaster-related needs.
- Stay positive.

SIGNS YOU MAY NEED ADDITIONAL HELP

Many people typically feel better after a few days. Others find that their stress does not go away as quickly as they would like and it influences their relationships with their family, friends and others. If you find yourself or a loved one experiencing some of the feelings and reactions listed below for 2 weeks or longer, this may be a sign that you need to reach out for additional assistance:

- Crying spells or bursts of anger
- Difficulty eating
- Difficulty sleeping
- Losing interest in things
- Increased physical symptoms such as headaches or stomachaches
- Fatigue
- Feeling guilty, helpless or hopeless
- Avoiding family and friends

CHILDREN AND DISASTERS

Children experience traumatic events differently. Experiencing a disaster can leave children feeling frightened, confused and insecure, particularly if this experience is not their first.

Because they can't always talk about their worries, it sometimes comes out in a child's behavior. Some may react immediately; others may be fine for weeks or months and then show troubling behavior. Knowing the signs that are common at different ages can help parents recognize problems and respond accordingly.

- They may be more agitated or act out
- They may be more clingy or cry often
- They may need more attention or reassurance from adults they trust
- Scary memories become attached to the sounds, sights and smells that happen at the time of the experience. It's important to remind children that they are remembering the scary thing that happened; that it is not happening now.

Here are a few tips for talking to children after a traumatic event:

- Provide children with opportunities to talk
- Don't be afraid to admit you don't have all the answers
- Allow kids to discuss their fears and concerns
- Answer questions appropriate for their age

For additional resources, contact your local Red Cross Disaster Mental Health or community mental health professional. Please seek immediate help if you or someone you know is feeling that life isn't worth living or if you are having thoughts of harming yourself or others. You can also contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or [SuicidePreventionLifeline.org](https://www.SuicidePreventionLifeline.org).