



## Tips for Coping in a Disaster

Natural and manmade disasters and the destruction they leave behind can make people feel powerless and out of control. You may have been in a situation where your life, health or safety was in danger, or you may have suffered some serious losses in your life—such as seeing a family member lose a job, being displaced from your home, school and community or being far from friends or family—or those close to you may have experienced these things. These are difficult times for teenagers, but with some help and perspective, you will make it through.

Right now, you may not have all the answers. There might be a lot of uncertainty about the future—such as where you're going to go to school, if you'll be able to do the activities you once enjoyed and where you'll live. It may take some time for things to return to normal. You may have a lot of different emotions about everything that has happened and all the challenges to come. It's important to remember that these feelings are normal. Everyone who experiences a major event has strong feelings about it. You may find yourself feeling very sad, and grieving for things you've lost or that you miss. It's important to grieve and to commemorate the things that have been important to you. You might find yourself feeling hopeless, or angry and frustrated, or even frightened. It's natural to be feeling these different emotions.

In difficult times like this, it's important to take care of yourself and each other. Although sometimes you may need to be alone, try to stay connected with friends and family. Talk to your friends and to the adults in your life. Your parents or guardians, teachers and other important adults are there to support you. They can help. Remember, recovery takes time. Be patient with yourself and with others.

## How Do You Handle Stress?

People cope with stress in different ways. What about you—how do you handle stress? Listed below are different types of coping strategies. Which description fits you best? Is there more than one?

- **Make the connections:** For you, spending time with other people helps you cope with tough times. You recharge when you spend time with friends, family, neighbors, and people at school and work. You like to be social.
- **Express yourself:** You don't keep those emotions bottled up inside. When you're feeling upset, it helps you to get it all out. When you vent your feelings you feel so much better.
- **Tackle the issues:** You like to deal with issues directly. You examine the logical strategies for addressing problems. You're a problem-solver.
- **Get creative:** You use your creative talents to cope with stress. You make sense out of it all by writing, drawing, painting, sculpting, dancing, playing music or play-acting.
- **Work it out:** For you, the best way to blow off some steam is physical activity. Team sports, going for a run or swim, or getting to work on chores are things that energize you. You get a boost from being active.
- **Search for meaning:** You look to your core values and beliefs in times of stress. Religion and spirituality are important sources of strength for you. Your beliefs can guide you through the tough times. Spending time with others who share your beliefs gives you a lift.

Think of a time you recently felt like you'd reached your limit. Your stress level was through the roof. What did you do that helped you to keep going? What actions did you take that made you feel better? Know yourself and what helps you take care of yourself. If some of the things that usually work to relieve your stress aren't doing the trick right now, consider trying out some new strategies.

## Some Thoughts on the Big Picture

- Put things in perspective and remind yourself that you have what it takes to get through this. You've faced new situations before—joining new teams, getting a job, starting new schools, asking someone out on a date. You can do this.
- During these times of recovery, your contributions to your family and community are important. You have a significant role to play in rebuilding your community. Start exploring ways that you can get involved and share your time and talents in recovery efforts.
- Set some goals for yourself and work toward them. Avoid focusing on what you can't achieve and focus on what you can do today.
- Be prepared for emotional ups and downs as these can increase in the uncertainty following a natural disaster. Cut yourself some slack.
- Pay attention to your needs. Are you getting enough sleep? Eating healthy meals? Getting some exercise? You want to be in good shape to deal with all the changes happening now.
- Get into a routine. Sticking to a routine will help you keep calm and organized.
- Avoid making major life decisions or taking big risks right now. Give yourself time to think things through.
- Explore opportunities to grow personally, express yourself creatively, contribute to your community or family in new ways and learn new things during these extraordinary times.

## Time to set some goals: What can you do to manage your stress?

1.
2.
3.

## During Times Like These...

In uncertain times of recovery, it's normal to be experiencing:

- Strong emotions such as sadness, shock, anger, fear, guilt, helplessness and moodiness
- Feeling numb and disconnected
- A desire to be alone, or to not be alone
- Wanting to overeat, or lacking an appetite
- Problems with sleep including fatigue, being unable to sleep, or sleeping restlessly
- More frequent arguments with family
- Irritability
- Headaches, upset stomach and general aches and pains
- Confusion, indecisiveness and worry
- Trouble concentrating and focusing

You'll always remember the disaster and the challenges it brought to you, your family, your friends and your community. But the symptoms and feelings you may be experiencing now will get better over time. You will learn to cope with adversity, and emerge from this tragedy stronger, more capable of adapting and more self-reliant.

## Dangerous Roads

After surviving dangerous or stressful situations, you may notice that people you know are engaging in dangerous behaviors such as drinking, taking drugs and engaging in risky sex. Take some time to put things in perspective. You have a long life ahead, full of opportunities. It might be hard to know what the "right" decisions are for your future right now, but dangerous behaviors definitely won't get you where you want to be in the future. These risky behaviors could even cut short your life. Think hard before you act: Your life is precious.

## Tips for Supporting Your Friends

- **Listen:** Letting your friend talk through thoughts and feelings can be a big help.
- **Normalize:** You can reassure your friend that feeling strong emotions, physical symptoms, and overwhelming thoughts are all normal experiences at this time.
- **Do something:** If you usually spend time with a friend who is spending a lot of time alone, make a call and invite him/her out.

- **Do for your friends what you do for yourself:** Remember it's important to cut yourself some slack right now. Do the same for a friend who isn't feeling quite normal.
- **Know when you're in over your head:** If your friend is being reckless, engaging in dangerous behaviors, abusing drugs and alcohol or indicating a desire to hurt himself/herself, get help. Talk to an adult you trust.

### What to do When You Feel in Over Your Head

If you continue to feel hopeless and helpless about your situation, notice increased changes in your mood or sleeping and eating habits, or see yourself engaging in dangerous behaviors, it may be time to get yourself help.

Friends are important and you need to stay connected with them, but they might not have the answers for you right now. Talk with someone you trust, an adult that you're close to. Let that person know how you're feeling. Talk with your counselor at school or a professional in the community. Many people find it helpful to see a counselor during times like these. Seeing a counselor is a good way to reflect on everything you've been through, where your life is now and where it's headed—and to get the help you need to feel better and move forward. Especially if you have begun to have feelings that life may not be worth living anymore, get help as soon as you can. It might be hard to see it right now, but your life is just beginning on a new path. Make sure you're healthy and safe for the ride!

#### Important Numbers

<b>I-800-273-TALK</b>	National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
<b>I-800-656-HOPE</b>	National Sexual Assault Hotline
<b>I-800-789-2647</b>	National Mental Health Information Center A confidential hotline to speak with trained mental health professionals who can assist with information and local referrals