

Online Resources

Below are some helpful resources for coping with difficult times:

- Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has a page on “Coping with a Disaster or Traumatic Stress”- www.bt.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/
- MedlinePlus (www.medlineplus.gov) includes information pages, handouts, and links to grief, loss and bereavement.
- American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry Disaster Resource Center - www.aacap.org/cs/DisasterTrauma.ResourceCenter
- Kidshealth.org has teen-friendly discussions on grief and death
- The American Psychological Association - www.apa.org/helpcenter/traumatic-stress.aspx
- The American Red Cross - www.redcross.org
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) - www.fema.gov/rebuild/recover/cope.shtm

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Articles in this newsletter are not a substitute for the care and advice of medical professionals. When you have a question or need medical advice, diagnosis or treatment, consult your physician.

This newsletter is produced by Inova Health System in conjunction with your faith community. If you prefer not to receive this newsletter, please notify the appropriate personnel in your faith community.

Inova Health System is a not-for-profit healthcare system based in Northern Virginia that consists of hospitals and other health services, including emergency- and urgent-care centers, home care, nursing homes, mental health and blood donor services, and wellness classes. Governed by a voluntary board of community members, Inova's mission is to improve the health of the diverse community it serves through excellence in patient care, education and research. Inova provides a healthy environment for its patients, families, visitors, staff and physicians by prohibiting tobacco use on its campuses.



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For Your Health

Coping with Disasters

Most of us will experience some form of anxiety and stress due to a tragedy or disaster in our lives. Many of which are out of our human control and happen unexpectedly, such as environmental disasters such as fires, floods, tornados, hurricanes and earthquakes.

Mass tragedies can affect us in many ways: physically, emotionally and mentally. These events can make people feel angry, enraged, confused, sad or even guilty.

When those feelings don't go away over a few weeks, or when they seem to get worse, it may be appropriate to seek help. Among the signs to look for over time are:

- Feeling tense and nervous,
- Being tired all the time,
- Having sleep problems,
- Crying often or easily,
- Wanting to be left alone most of the time,
- Drinking alcohol or taking drugs more often or excessively,
- Feeling numb,
- Being angry or irritable,
- Having problems concentrating or remembering things.

Community members play important roles in helping adults and children cope with stress from experiencing or witnessing disasters.

What is Trauma

There are two types of trauma – physical and mental.

Physical trauma includes the body's response to serious injury and threat. Mental trauma includes frightening thoughts and painful feelings.

Mental trauma can produce strong feelings, and can also produce extreme behavior; such as intense fear or helplessness, withdrawal or detachment, lack of concentration, irritability, sleep disturbance, aggression, hyper vigilance (intensely watching for more distressing events), or flashbacks (having the sense that the event is still reoccurring).



Encourage Children To Talk!

Children are very sensitive and may struggle to make sense of trauma and natural disasters. Some children may not openly express themselves about their concerns and fears.

Youth of many ages respond differently to traumas. Some may have emotional reactions and internalize their fears. Some may have nightmares and have hard times sleeping after witnessing trauma and disasters.

Most children recover within a few weeks, however some need help longer. Some children may need help from a mental health professional or they may turn to religious leaders and other community leaders.



Tips for Coping with Disasters

Watching the news coverage of the earthquake's devastation in Haiti can be very distressing, particularly if there are friends and loved ones affected. Even for those without personal connections to the country, the news coverage can be overwhelming. The American Psychological Association recommends:

- **Take a news break.** Watching endless replays of footage from the disaster can make your stress even greater. Although you will want to keep informed – especially if you have loved ones in Haiti – taking a break from watching the news can lessen your distress.
- **Control what you can.** There are routines in your life that you can continue such as going to work or school and making meals. It is helpful to maintain these routines and schedules to give yourself a break from constantly thinking about the earthquake.
- **Engage in healthy behaviors.** Eat well-balanced meals, engage in regular exercise like going for a long walk, and get plenty of rest. Bolstering your physical well-being is good for your emotional health and can enhance your ability to cope.
- **Keep things in perspective.** While an earthquake can bring tremendous hardship and loss, remember to focus on the things that are good in your life. Keep your faith and trust in your ability to get through the challenging days ahead.
- **Find a productive way to help if you can.** Many organizations provide various forms of aid to survivors. Contributing or volunteering is a positive action that can help you to make a difference.
- **Strive for a positive outlook.** Many people who have experienced tragedy, over time, discover personal strengths and develop a greater appreciation for life.

At times, however, an individual may have difficulty managing intense reactions. It is important to get professional help if you feel like you are unable to function or perform basic activities of daily living. You can find psychologists near you by contacting your state psychological association. Many of these psychologists are trained in trauma and disaster work.