



What You Should Know

You may have difficulty dealing with the additional stresses caused by the disaster, fear that you won't have the quality of life you once had, or worry that another disaster will occur. Such fears and worries may cause considerable distress and interfere with your daily activities. Exposure to reminders of the disaster, such as aftershocks following an earthquake or winds and rain after a hurricane or tornado, may intensify these post-disaster fears and worries.

What Can Help

- **Practice ways to manage reactions.** Try calming strategies, such as breathing exercises, writing about feelings and thoughts, meditation, exercise, stretching, yoga, prayer, listening to quiet music, or spending time outdoors. These activities can improve your mood and reduce your fear. Make a plan to identify stressful situations or those things that trigger your fear, and ways to handle them before, during, and afterwards.
- **Do fun or meaningful activities.** Distract yourself from your reactions by engaging in hobbies, helping others, re-establishing family routines, and participating in satisfying activities.
- **Spend time with others.** Being with family, friends, or others in your community may help reduce your sense of isolation, get you the practical help you may need to handle your fear, and provide an opportunity to contribute to others' well-being.
- **Practice helpful thinking.** Check out your thoughts. Are they negative and unhelpful? If so, they may be causing your upset feelings. Develop a plan to substitute helpful thoughts. For example, if you find yourself thinking, "I can't handle what's happening now," or "I can't handle what might happen in the future," challenge yourself with questions such as:
 - "Is it true that I can't handle it?"
 - "Is it ALWAYS true?"
 - "Under what circumstances COULD I handle it?"
 - "Could I handle it if I had some help?"

Choose to deliberately substitute a helpful thought. In this case, you might say to yourself, "With the right help, I can get through this."

- **Use problem-solving.** If your fears are related to post-disaster stresses, use problem-solving to find up-to-date information about the status of the disaster recovery, what resources may be available (i.e., financial, employment, or housing assistance), and how you can get help with your problems.
- **Don't use alcohol or drugs to cope with your fears.** Alcohol and other drugs—while they seem to help in the short term—always make things worse in the long term. If you need to, join an alcohol or drug treatment program.
- **Talk to your doctor about your fears.** Your doctor can take care of your physical health better if he/she knows about your fears. Doctors can prescribe medications that may reduce fearful thoughts, or refer you for more specialized help.
- **Call a counselor for help.** If your fears continue or increase, contact this program or another program for further assistance, or consult with your doctor.
- **Plan ahead.** If you are afraid of future disasters, learn more about the type of disaster that occurred, including the warning signs, and what you can expect to happen afterward. Assemble an emergency preparedness kit for your family, take steps to make your house or school safer, and develop—and practice—a family safety plan. Have your children help, if they are able, with some of the preparations.