

# After a Disaster: Self-care strategies

People have different reactions to demanding or stressful events. Responses to an event can depend on factors such as:

- How physically or psychologically close you were to the event
- Your level of responsibility during the event
- Your current life situation
- Your previous experience with personal crisis
- The availability of support from friends, family and coworkers

When we experience a disaster or traumatic event, we are likely to have physical, mental and emotional reactions. Below are some of the most common reactions:

PHYSICAL	THOUGHTS	EMOTIONAL
Nausea or upset stomach	Continued thoughts and images of the event	Anxiety, nervousness, fear and worry
Changes in appetite	Fearful thoughts, worrying	Sadness, withdrawal
Headaches, muscle aches	Difficulty concentrating	Grief, feeling helpless
Difficulty sleeping	Distressing dreams	Anger, irritability
Fatigue	Feeling dazed or disoriented	Numbness



Remind yourself that the reactions you are having are *normal reactions to an abnormal event*.

These reactions are usually temporary and pass within a few weeks. Their severity and duration can be reduced by taking good care of yourself. Self-care means making the choice to act in healthy ways rather than just reacting to events. Here are some ways to do this:

### Physical Self-Care Strategies

- Get enough sleep. Go to bed and get up at regular hours.
- Eat well-balanced meals at regular times of day.
- Stay away from mood altering substances, such as alcohol or drugs.
- Get some type of exercise each day. It helps to reduce stress and can help you sleep better if it's done at least two hours before bedtime.
- Nurture yourself by spending time each day doing something calming, such as deep breathing, meditation, progressive relaxation or activities that you enjoy.

### Mental and Emotional Self-Care Strategies

- Focus on things you have control over, and let go of the rest.
- Lower your expectations of what you can accomplish and reduce the demands that you put on yourself.
- Get your facts about the event from a reliable, objective source. Don't rely on rumors or guesswork.
- Talk about what happened and your feelings with people you trust. Writing about your reactions may also help.
- Give your thoughts a break from thinking about what has happened and what might happen next. Try to concentrate on what is positive in your life and the things that make you grateful.
- Choose activities that engage your mind and body, and keep you focused on the here and now.
- Reach out to and spend time with loved ones and other supportive people who care about you.
- Be careful not to take out your hurt and anger on others. This will make it harder for them to be supportive and can create negative feelings for you.
- Your spirituality may be a further resource for you.

**For more information or resources, contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).**



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