Emotional First Aid
For Adults

ADULTS
Possible responses following a disaster:
• Irritability and anger
• Feelings of anxiety and worry
• Fatigue
• Lack of concentration, forgetfulness
• Avoidance or denial
• Intense sadness and feelings of hopelessness
• Headaches and stomach/digestion complaints
• Sleep disturbances/sleeplessness
• Intense sadness
• Feelings of vulnerability and helplessness
• Preoccupation with tragic events that may disrupt daily life
• Increased risk taking
• Symptoms of depression
• Tendency to withdraw from social interaction
• Tendency to become reliant on drugs or alcohol

SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP WHEN
• Marital problems occur
• Family conflicts increase, loss of friendships, and problems at work or school
• There is no medical explanation for chronic physical pain
• Memories of the event disrupt daily activities
• You experience feelings of hopelessness, depression, or extreme anger
• You use alcohol or other drugs to help you sleep or hide your feelings

TO HELP ADULTS
Help meet basic food, shelter, and medical care needs
Be friendly and compassionate, even if people are being difficult
Give practical and accurate information
Encourage accessing disaster response services
Be culturally sensitive, don’t impose your beliefs

TO HELP ELDERS
Provide supportive presence and listen attentively
Assist in making arrangements for care to meet basic needs
Take special care to match elders to temporary shelters or appropriate housing
Give practical and accurate information
Be culturally sensitive, don’t impose your beliefs

FIRST RESPONDERS
May experience:
• Physical symptoms such as chest pain, difficulty breathing, shock, fatigue, thirst, nausea/vomiting, profuse sweating, rapid heartbeat, headaches, visual difficulties, jaw clenching, or non-specific aches and pains
• Confusion/disorientation
• Requiring nightmares and reliving disaster events
• Memory disruption/poor concentration
• Heightened or lowered alertness
• Poor problem solving
• Anxiety and feelings of fearfulness
• Guilt with sense of failure
• Grief, denial
• Heightened irritability, restlessness
• Loss of emotional control, feeling overwhelmed
• Severe panic/traumas
• Social withdrawal, depression
• Intense anger, emotional outbursts
• Temporary loss or increase of appetite
• Increased use of alcohol or drugs
• Change in sexual functioning

PLEASE DO
• Help meet basic needs
• Provide simple, clear and accurate information
• Listen with compassion
• Be friendly and calm
• Help reconnect with family, friends and caregivers
• Offer practical suggestions for helping themselves
• Encourage accessing disaster response resources
• Expect normal recovery

PLEASE DON’T
• Force people to share their stories
• Give reassurances like “Everything will be fine”
• Tell people what they should be feeling, thinking or doing
• Instill your personal beliefs on others
• Make promises you can’t keep
• Criticize existing services or relief efforts

Emotional First Aid
For Special Needs

PERSONS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS
May experience:
• Physical symptoms such as chest pain, difficulty breathing, shock, fatigue, thirst, nausea/vomiting, profuse sweating, rapid heartbeat, headaches, visual difficulties, jaw clenching, or non-specific aches and pains
• Confusion/disorientation
• Requiring nightmares and reliving disaster events
• Memory disruption/poor concentration
• Heightened or lowered alertness
• Poor problem solving
• Anxiety and feelings of fearfulness
• Guilt with sense of failure
• Grief, denial
• Heightened irritability, restlessness
• Loss of emotional control, feeling overwhelmed
• Severe panic/traumas
• Social withdrawal, depression
• Intense anger, emotional outbursts
• Temporary loss or increase of appetite
• Increased use of alcohol or drugs
• Change in sexual functioning

HELPFUL REMINDERS

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• Listen with compassion
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• Offer practical suggestions for helping themselves
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• Expect normal recovery

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Information provided by: SAMHSA, Center for Mental Health Services, National Child Traumatic Stress Network: Disaster and Terrorism Branch.