

# DISASTER STRESS

Disaster stress is a normal response to a tragic experience. It may last days, weeks, or months. It may not even show up until weeks after the disaster.

## Normal Reactions to Disaster Stress

### Mind

- Difficulty with concentrating or making decisions
- Trouble remembering things
- Avoidance of reminders of the traumatic event(s)
- Recurring or disturbing thoughts, images, or nightmares
- Feeling numb
- Withdrawing from people or activities that are usually enjoyable

### Body

- Feeling tired or having difficulty sleeping
- Constantly feeling on alert for more danger
- Jumpy reactions to noises, smells and other reminders
- Difficulty breathing or rapid heart beat
- Frequent headaches, stomach problems or other physical symptoms
- Feeling numb or detached somehow from others

### Emotions

- Irritability, anger outbursts, or a tendency to blame others
- Mood changes, frequent crying
- New or increased fears
- Guilt about surviving, not having been able to prevent losses, etc.
- Feelings of helplessness or being overwhelmed
- Constant anxiety
- Disappointment with outside help
- Many other emotions

### Spiritual

- Some will develop a much deeper faith and sense of meaning in their lives
- Others may feel abandoned by God and feel like they've lost their purpose

# Things that Help

## Physical

- Get adequate rest and sleep
- Exercise in moderation
- Eat healthy foods, and drink water instead of just sugary and caffeinated drinks
- Learn new ways of calming your body

## Mental

- Remind yourself your symptoms are normal and temporary
- Laugh at your difficulties in memory or concentration
- Spend time talking with others – share questions, struggles and coping strategies

## Emotional

- Use relaxation, deep breathing, or bilateral (or other) music for calming
- Express your feelings with words (talking, journaling, or writing stories/poetry), or the arts (drama, dance, visual arts or music)
- Schedule pleasant activities
- Take time to be present and listen to each other

## Behavioral

- Show affection to each other, especially the children
- Have a regular routine for eating, sleeping, working and school
- Keep consistent behavioral expectations for your children
- Discuss acceptable ways of expressing various emotions (like anger) in your home
- Acknowledge when your irritability is impacting others
- Check out rumors before repeating them
- Participate in religious/cultural rituals or discussions about the meaning of pain

# Things that Don't Help

- Numbing your pain with the use of alcohol and drugs
- Spending large amounts of time reading about or watching images of the disaster
- Working too much
- Withdrawing from family, friends or pleasant activities
- Blaming others
- Eating too much or too little
- Violent or hurtful anger
- Excessive screen time

*Get help from a professional if your symptoms don't seem to be improving over time*