

Coping with Disasters During the Holidays

Each positive action you take can help you feel better and more in control.

Disasters are stressful, especially during the holidays.

- ❑ If you've been affected by Super Storm Sandy or any other recent disaster, holidays can bring times of both hope and stress.
- ❑ The good news is that stress after a disaster or during the holidays is common and usually temporary. Also, we all have experience coping with stressful events and can usually "bounce back" after difficult times.
- ❑ Here is some information on disaster reactions and tips for taking care of the emotional health of you, your family and friends during the holidays.

What you may be feeling now



When recovering from a disaster, especially during the holidays, we can have a variety of reactions, all of which are common.

These reactions can include:

- ❑ Feeling sad that a normally joyful time of the year now feels burdened with trying to find a new home or with memories of a lost loved one
- ❑ Feeling lonely, especially when holiday sights and sounds remind us of happier times or of those we will be missing from this year's rituals
- ❑ Feeling overwhelmed or unable to plan daily activities, including holiday activities
- ❑ Feeling physically and mentally drained
- ❑ Having difficulty making decisions or staying focused on tasks at hand
- ❑ Becoming easily frustrated with daily tasks or with family and friends
- ❑ Arguing more with those around us
- ❑ Feeling tired, numb, or worried
- ❑ Experiencing changes in appetite or sleep patterns
- ❑ Increasing alcohol or substance use
- ❑ Children can experience all of the reactions above, but they can also resume earlier behaviors (e.g., thumb-sucking or bed-wetting or "acting out")

Most of these reactions are temporary and will go away over time. Try to accept whatever reactions you may have. Look forward, one small step at a time, and focus on taking care of your needs and those of your friends and family.

Taking action



Getting ourselves and our lives back in a routine that is comfortable for us takes time.

- ❑ **Take care of your safety.** Focus first on ensuring you have a safe place to stay and that your physical needs are met.
- ❑ **Eat healthy.** Maintain a balanced diet and drink plenty of water. Too much holiday "cheer" can increase your stress.
- ❑ **Get some rest.** With so much to do, it can be difficult to rest or get adequate sleep. Giving your body and mind a break can boost your ability to cope with stress.
- ❑ **Reach out to others.** If you find yourself in new surroundings, reach out to those around you. Giving and receiving support is important.
- ❑ **Be patient with yourself and with those around you.** Recognize that others may be struggling to cope with the disaster during the holidays and may need your patience and support.
- ❑ **Honor your holiday traditions,** but be flexible and prepared to engage in new activities this year.
- ❑ **Set priorities.** Tackle tasks in small steps.
- ❑ **Gather information** about assistance and resources that will help you and your family members meet your needs.
- ❑ **Stay positive.** Remind yourself of how you've successfully gotten through difficult times in the past.
- ❑ **If you have children,** give them extra time, hugs and patience. Provide them with reassurance of your family's recovery plans. Involving them in activities to assist others can help them cope.

If you still don't feel better



Many people have experience coping with stressful life events and typically feel better after a few days.

- ❑ Others find that their stress does not go away as quickly as they would like and it influences their relationships with their family, friends and others.
- ❑ If you find yourself or a loved one experiencing some of the feelings and reactions listed below for two weeks or more, this may be a sign that you need to reach out for additional assistance.
 - Crying spells or bursts of anger
 - Difficulty eating
 - Difficulty sleeping
 - Losing interest in things
 - Increased physical symptoms, such as headaches, stomachaches,
 - Fatigue
 - Feeling guilty, helpless or hopeless
 - Avoiding family and friends
 - Increasing alcohol or substance use

For additional resources, contact your local Red Cross Disaster Mental Health or community mental health professional or call the Disaster Distress Helpline at 1-800-985-5990 or Text "TalkWithUs" to 66746.

Please seek immediate help if you or someone you know is feeling that life isn't worth living or if you are having thoughts of harming yourself or others. You can also call the national suicide hotline at 1-800-273-8255.

Let Your Family Know You're Safe

If not all of your family and friends know that you are safe after the disaster, register on the American Red Cross Safe and Well Web site available through RedCross.org to let them know about your welfare. If you don't have internet access, call **1-800-REDCROSS** to register yourself and your family.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
SAMHSA
www.samhsa.gov • 1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)

