Managing Traumatic Stress:
Tips for Recovering from Natural Disasters

Disasters are often unexpected, sudden and overwhelming. There may or may not be visible signs of physical injury, but there may be a serious emotional toll. People who experience a traumatic event can have very strong emotional reactions. Sometimes the distress may result from the loss of loved ones or the fear for their wellbeing. Understanding normal responses to these abnormal events may assist you in coping effectively with your feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, and help you along the path to recovery. Below is a listing of some of the more common reactions.

Initial reactions :
• Shock /Intense emotions that may leave you stunned or dazed
• Denial/Minimize that the situation occurred
• Feel numb or disconnected from life or others

As the shock subsides there are other reactions:  
• Increase in intensity of various feelings  
  Possibly more: irritable, moody, anxious, or depressed  
• Repeated and vivid memories  
• Difficulty concentrating and making decisions  
• Physical symptoms as such as sleep disruptions, headaches, nausea, chest pain  
• Reactions to anniversaries of the event (one month, one year)  
• Interpersonal relationships change  
• Withdraw, isolate or avoid usual activities

How should I help myself or someone I know?
• Recognize this is a challenging time and give yourself time to heal  
• Allow yourself to mourn the losses you have experienced  
• Tell someone who will be supportive and who will listen  
• Get plenty of rest and eat well balanced meals; make a special effort to take care of yourself  
• Engage in healthy behaviors that help you reduce stress such as exercising, listening to music, socializing.  
• Avoid alcohol and drugs.  
• If the problems persist and interfere with your normal functioning seek professional support

Please know that there is no one ‘standard’ pattern of reaction to a traumatic experience. It can really vary from one person to the next. Some people may respond immediately. Others can have delayed reactions. These reactions can be months or even years after an event. There are also some people who have difficulties for a long time, while others deal with the trauma more quickly.

For more information or if you want to talk to a counselor for additional support, please do not hesitate to call the University Counseling Center at 442-5800. For support from a peer assistant call the Middle Earth hotline at 442-5777.

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