

LifeAdviser Special Edition

A Balanced Living Special Edition Newsletter

Professional Help Is Available

Professional counselors are familiar with the effects trauma can have on individuals and families – unexpected trauma is unfortunately something we all may experience. Should you, a family member or someone you know seem to have difficulty successfully dealing with the aftermath of a traumatic event or situation, do not hesitate to seek professional assistance. The following resources may provide additional information on coping with traumatic events:

Resources

[Google -Crisis Map](#) – Use this interactive map to find information regarding weather, shelters, traffic, and more.

[American Red Cross - Safe & Well Website](#) Use this link to reconnect with friends, family, and loved ones.

[American Red Cross - Open Shelters List](#) - Use this link to locate open shelters that have been set up in and around your local community.

[Federal Disaster Relief Aid](#) - If your county has been declared a disaster site, you may be eligible for disaster relief aid. Use this link to apply.

California Flooding



A series of storms have inundated California over the past few weeks. The runoff from the storms puts some residents at risk for flooding. When flooding is imminent, it's important to be aware of what steps you and your loved ones can take to prepare for floods, how to respond to flooding in your area, and what to do if you need to evacuate your home with special attention given to children, older family members and pets.

If you are an employee or eligible dependent of an organization contracting with CONCERN: EAP and need additional assistance, you can request counseling and work/life services by phoning (800) 344-4222, answered live 24/7. Other options for support are identified at the end of this newsletter.

Let Your Family Know You Are Safe

If your community has experienced a disaster, register on the American Red Cross Safe and Well web site to let your family and friends know about your welfare.

After the Flood: Return Home Safely

Flood dangers do not end when the water begins to recede. Listen to a radio or television and don't return home until authorities indicate it is safe to do so. Remember to help your neighbors who may require special assistance, such as people with infants, elderly people, and people with disabilities.

- If your home, apartment, or business has suffered damage, call the insurance

company or agent who handles your flood insurance policy right away to file a claim.

- Before entering a building, inspect foundations for cracks or other damage. Don't go in if there is any chance of the building collapsing.
- Upon entering the building, don't use matches, cigarette lighters or any other open flames, since gas may be trapped inside. Instead, use a flashlight to light your way.
- Keep power off until an electrician has inspected your system for safety.
- Floodwaters pick up sewage and chemicals from roads, farms, and factories. If your home has been flooded, protect your family's health by cleaning up your house right away. Throw out foods and medicines that may have been contaminated by floodwater.
- Until local authorities proclaim your water supply to be safe, boil water vigorously for five minutes before using for drinking and food preparation.
- Be careful walking around. After a flood, steps and floors are often slippery with mud and covered with debris, including nails and broken glass.
- Take steps to reduce your risk of future floods. Make sure to follow local building codes and ordinances when rebuilding, and use flood-resistant materials and techniques to protect yourself and your property from future flood damage.

Inspecting Utilities in a Damaged Home

Check for gas leaks. If you smell gas or hear blowing or hissing noise, open a window and quickly leave the building. Turn off the gas at the outside main valve if you can and call the gas company from a neighbor's home. If you turn off the gas for any reason, it must be turned back on by a professional.

Look for electrical system damage. If you see sparks or broken or frayed wires, or if you smell hot insulation, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker. If you have to step in water to get to the fuse box or circuit breaker, call an electrician for advice.

Check for sewage and water line damage. If you suspect sewage lines are damaged avoid using the toilets and call a plumber. If water pipes are damaged, contact the water company and avoid the water from the tap. You can obtain safe water by melting ice cubes.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). (2007, January 9). Once the water recedes [News release]. Retrieved May 28, 2008, from <http://www.fema.gov>

After a Traumatic Event: What You Can Do

What You May Experience:

The following list describes a variety of normal reactions to a traumatic event. You or others may experience some of these in the weeks following the event. These reactions are generally temporary and not of great concern.

- Recurring thoughts or images of the event
- Heightened response to loud noises, shouting or crying – easily startled
- Discomfort being alone
- Difficulty concentrating and/or deciding what to do next
- Strong desire to contact people who are important to you
- Feeling sad, scared, angry, irritable, or confused
- Difficulty sleeping
- Increase or decrease in appetite
- Physical problems—headaches, stomach aches, sore muscles, etc.
- Discomfort being in places that seem unsafe to you
- Feeling vulnerable, a loss of control
- Feeling exhausted
- Difficulty making decisions and thinking creatively

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- Feeling guilty that others have suffered more than you have
- Recall of past traumas or losses
- Fear of leaving loved ones or your home
- Feeling excited and alive, or empty and depressed, or both intermittently
- Re-evaluation of your life – what's important; what's not

Self-Help Coping Tools

Sometimes frightening and overwhelming events invade our world. Suddenly our vision of our neighborhood and community as safe and predictable is abruptly shattered. We must first recognize that dealing with tragedy is a process. Ask yourself and others what they think, know, feel or fear before offering guidance. Below are some self-care tips to try.

- Talk to other people about your experiences, reactions and feelings
- Take it easy – don't push yourself!
- Plan extra time to do usual tasks – you may be distracted and not able to function as efficiently as usual
- Re-establish your normal routine as soon as you can do so comfortably – this helps you regain a sense of stability and predictability
- Check to see if your decision-making ability has been impaired (ask for feedback on how you're doing).
- Discuss your current emergency plan with significant others and prepare for future crises
- Don't forget to eat and eat "smart" – avoid junk food, excessive sugar, alcohol, and caffeine
- Rest and get some exercise
- Recognize that information about the event can be upsetting as well as helpful. Turn off your radio and television when you start to feel overwhelmed by the news

- If you are having trouble sleeping, listen to soothing music or drink a glass of milk at least a half hour before going to bed
- Reach out to help others – either through volunteer activities, donations of money or supplies, or provide personal support to friends and neighbors

If you have been busy performing necessary tasks after the event, you may have a delay in your reactions until after you stop being busy. Recognize we may all be on different timetables, so don't expect others to handle things or be feeling the same way you do or vice versa. Be tolerant of your own, and others' reactions. If you are feeling overwhelmed, consulting with or seeing a counselor may be helpful.

After a Traumatic Experience:

What to Do for Your Children

Parents try their best to protect their children from tragic events. However, sometimes frightening and overwhelming events invade a child's world. Suddenly a child's vision of his/her world as safe and predictable is abruptly shattered. As a parent, you must first recognize that dealing with tragedy is a process. Ask your child what they think, know, feel or fear before offering guidance.

The following information is meant to be a guide in talking with your children, but if intense fears persist, please seek professional assistance.

Recognize that you have experienced the same event, so take care of your emotional needs first. This is critical in conveying to your child that everything will be okay. In order for them to feel safe, they need to sense that you can cope with this event as well.

Children can benefit by expressing their feelings to a parent who is genuinely listening. Listen carefully as your child recounts their version of the story including their fears and feelings. This brings them a sense that you understand their thoughts so that they can feel safe to talk more.

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It is very important to let children know their feelings of fear or anger are a natural reaction to a traumatic event. Rebuild self-confidence by finding ways to praise your child for their actions, for talking with you, for sharing their feelings, for wanting to help and/or for expressing concern for others.

It is important to remember that you do not have to "fix" how your child feels. Instead, focus on helping your child understand and deal with his or her experiences. Healing is an evolving state for most children, but some may need professional help.

If signs of stress do not subside after a few weeks, or if they get worse, consider consulting a mental health professional who has special training in working with children. In time, and with help, your children will return to health.

If talking is not working, find alternate ways to help your child express his/her feelings. Drawing pictures, writing or role-playing a positive happy ending can be reassuring to a child.

Include your child in future safety precautions to assist him/her in feeling safe and secure. This could include making sure the house is locked or where to meet in case there is a frightening event and you are separated. Taking action can assist in regaining a sense of security.

If your child chooses to watch the tragic news on TV, set limits. Sit with your child and convey the stories of heroism and unity. Again, reassure your child that preventative measures are currently in force.

Re-establishing regular routines as soon as possible is helpful. Children are comforted in knowing their daily schedule is predictable.

Plan a future event (vacation, time together, family outing) and express your excitement about following through with this plan.

Recovering from tragedy is a process and through time, and

with support, children will eventually heal. Talk to your children daily and affirm to them that you are there to listen and provide on-going support.

When to Seek Help

If self-help strategies are not helping or you find that you are using drugs or alcohol in order to cope, you may wish to seek outside or professional assistance with your stress symptoms. For more information or to make an appointment, please contact CONCERN: EAP at 800-344-4222.

Source: National Mental Health Center, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

Additional Resources

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) www.aacap.org

National Mental Health Association
www.nmha.org/reassurance/anniversary/index.cfm

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
(Information for Children & Adolescents)
www.fema.gov/kids/

National Institute of Mental Health
Office of Communications
www.nimh.nih.gov

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