

COPING TIPS FOR TRAUMATIC EVENTS AND DISASTERS

Emotional distress can happen before and after a disaster. Coping strategies include preparation, self-care and identifying support systems. People can experience a wide range of emotions before and after a disaster or traumatic event. There's no right or wrong way to feel. However, it's important to find healthy ways to cope when these events happen.

Take care of yourself and your loved ones.

Eating a healthy diet, avoiding the use of drugs and alcohol, and getting regular exercise can reduce stress and anxiety. Activities as simple as taking a walk, stretching and deep breathing can help relieve stress:

- **Limit your consumption of news.** In today's society, news is available 24 hours a day via television, radio and the internet. The constant replay of news stories about a disaster or traumatic event can increase stress and anxiety and make some people relive the event over and over. Reduce the amount of news you watch or listen to, and engage in relaxing activities to help you heal and move on.
- **Get enough "good" sleep.** Some people have difficulty falling asleep after a disaster, or wake up throughout the night. If you have trouble sleeping, go to bed only when you are ready to sleep, avoid using cell phones or laptops in bed, and avoid drinking caffeine or alcohol at least one hour before going to bed. If you wake up and can't fall back to sleep, try writing what's on your mind in a journal or on a sheet of paper.
- **Establish and maintain a routine.** Try to eat meals at regular times, and put yourself on a sleep schedule to ensure an adequate amount of rest. Include a positive or fun activity in your schedule that you can look forward to each day or week. Schedule exercise into your daily routine as well, if possible.
- **Avoid making major life decisions.** Doing things like switching jobs or careers can already be stressful and is even harder to adjust directly after a disaster.
- **Understand there will be changes.** Disasters can destroy homes, schools, and places of business and worship, and can disrupt the lives of people living in affected areas for a long time. Sometimes, people lose loved ones or experience injuries, both physical and mental, that may last a lifetime. Some people may also experience a temporary or permanent loss of employment. For children, attending a new or temporary school may result in being separated from peers, or after-school activities may be disrupted.



EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE AFTER DISASTER

Ask for help.

Warning signs of stress are normal, short-term reactions to life's unexpected challenges. However, it is important to recognize when you or others experience emotional distress that is persistent and becomes difficult to manage:

- **Find a local support group.** In a group setting led by trained and experienced professionals, people who have shared a similar experience can exchange thoughts, feelings and ideas on how to get through difficult times. Support groups provide a safe place for people to find comfort in knowing they are not alone.
- **Reach out to family and friends.** Talking to someone you trust about your feelings without fear of judgment may offer some relief. Family and friends can be a great resource for support. Your family and friends may have also survived the disaster and understand the emotions you are experiencing. It's also a good idea to speak with friends who were not involved, because they can be objective and provide additional support.

- **Speak with a financial adviser.** The loss of a home or job or being unable to work after a disaster can be an overwhelming financial burden people feel they have to struggle with alone. Financial advisers don't immediately come to mind as a resource after a disaster, but they should be among the first people you call when developing a strategy to rebuild your life. Seeking help from a financial adviser can ease the stress and point you in the direction of other helpful resources or programs tailored to your situation.

If you or your loved ones continue to have feelings of anxiety, fear and anger for two weeks or more, with no improvement, it's best to seek professional help. Call your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for short-term, solution-focused counseling, as well as assistance finding local resources.

Northrop Grumman employees and family members are eligible for eight counseling sessions, per issue, per year—regardless of Benefits coverage. Call 800-892-8161 for support, 24/7.

RECOVERING FROM DISASTER

Health and Safety Guidelines

Recovering from a disaster is usually a gradual process. Safety is a primary issue, as are mental and physical well-being. If assistance is available, knowing how to access it makes the process faster and less stressful. This article offers some general advice on steps to take after disaster strikes in order to begin getting your home, your community and your life back to normal.

Your first concern after a disaster is your family's health and safety. You need to consider possible safety issues, and monitor family health and well-being.

Aiding the Injured

Check for injuries. Do not attempt to move seriously injured persons unless they are in immediate danger of death or further injury. If you must move an unconscious person, first stabilize the neck and back, then call for help immediately.

- If the victim is not breathing, carefully position the victim for artificial respiration, clear the airway and commence mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.
- Maintain body temperature with blankets. Be sure the victim does not become overheated.
- Never try to feed liquids to an unconscious person.

Health

- Be aware of exhaustion. Don't try to do too much at once. Set priorities and pace yourself. Get enough rest.
- Drink plenty of clean water.
- Eat well.
- Wear sturdy work boots and gloves.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and clean water often when working in debris.

Safety Issues

- Be aware of new safety issues created by the disaster. Watch for washed-out roads, contaminated buildings, contaminated water, gas leaks, broken glass, damaged electrical wiring and slippery floors.
- Inform local authorities about health and safety issues, including chemical spills, downed power lines, washed-out roads, smoldering insulation and dead animals.

Seeking Disaster Assistance

Throughout the recovery period, it is important to monitor local radio or television reports and other media sources for information about where to get emergency housing, food, first aid, clothing and financial assistance. The following provides general information about the kinds of assistance that may be available.

Direct Assistance

Direct assistance to individuals and families may come from any number of organizations, including the American Red Cross, Salvation Army or other volunteer organizations. These organizations provide food, shelter and supplies, and assist in cleanup efforts.

The Federal Role

In the most severe disasters, the federal government is also called in to help individuals and families with temporary housing, counseling (for postdisaster trauma), low-interest loans and grants, and other assistance. The federal government also has programs that help small businesses and farmers.

Most federal assistance becomes available when the president of the United States declares a major disaster for the affected area at the request of a state governor. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will provide information through the media and community outreach about federal assistance and how to apply.

EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE AFTER DISASTER

Coping With Disaster

The emotional toll that disaster brings can sometimes be even more devastating than the financial strains of damage and loss of home, business or personal property. Children and older adults are of special concern in the aftermath of disasters. Even individuals who experience a disaster "secondhand" through exposure to extensive media coverage can be affected. Contact local faith-based organizations, voluntary agencies or professional counselors for counseling. Additionally, FEMA and state and local governments of the affected area may provide crisis-counseling assistance.

Recognize Signs of Disaster Related to Stress

When adults have the following signs, they might need crisis counseling or stress-management assistance:

- Difficulty communicating thoughts
- Difficulty sleeping
- Difficulty maintaining balance in their lives
- Low threshold of frustration
- Increased use of drugs or alcohol
- Limited attention span
- Poor work performance
- Headaches or stomach problems
- Tunnel vision or muffled hearing
- Colds or flu-like symptoms
- Disorientation or confusion
- Difficulty concentrating
- Reluctance to leave home

- Depression, sadness
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Mood swings and easy bouts of crying
- Overwhelming guilt and self-doubt
- Fear of crowds, strangers or being alone

Easing Disaster-Related Stress

The following are ways to ease disaster-related stress:

- Talk with someone about your feelings—anger, sorrow and other emotions—even though it may be difficult.
- Seek help from professional counselors who deal with post-disaster stress.
- Do not hold yourself responsible for the disastrous event or be frustrated because you feel you cannot help directly in the rescue work.
- Take steps to promote your own physical and emotional healing by healthy eating, rest, exercise, relaxation and meditation.
- Maintain a normal family and daily routine, limiting demanding responsibilities on yourself and your family.
- Spend time with family and friends.
- Participate in memorials.
- Use existing support groups of family, friends and religious institutions.
- Ensure you are ready for future events by restocking your disaster-supplies kits and updating your family disaster plan. Doing these positive actions can be comforting.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). (n.d.). Recovering from disaster (Chapter 5) [Excerpt]. In *Are you ready?* Retrieved September 12, 2018, from <https://www.fema.gov/>

COPING WITH THE STRESS OF RELOCATION AFTER A DISASTER

Unplanned evacuations during a disaster can cause great stress on a community and on the individuals in that community. Some of the stressful factors related to sudden evacuations are the following:

- Disruptions of daily life routines
- Separation from family, friends and coworkers
- Worries about the condition of homes and the community.
- Concerns about pets
- Loss of family pictures and special items
- Difficulties getting around in a new location

The stress of evacuation can lead to feelings of isolation in the new location and of being neglected by society and government. Evacuees also may feel there was not adequate time to prepare for the evacuation.

First Steps of Recovery

Recovering from a disaster occurs in phases over days, weeks and months. Soon after being uprooted by a disaster, you can start the recovery process. During this time, there are three general steps you can take to improve the mental and emotional strength of your family. The following steps will help you to begin to retake control over your life.

Step 1: Rebuild physical strength and health.

Once you and your loved ones are in a safe and secure place (e.g., a shelter, a new apartment, or a place with relatives or friends), make sure to tend to everyone's immediate medical needs if there are any. Be sure everyone has enough to eat and drink to regain their physical strength. Make sure everyone gets some restful sleep in as private a space as possible. Rebuilding physical strength is a good first step to calm shattered emotions.

Step 2: Restore daily activities.

Restoring daily routines helps build a sense of being home mentally and emotionally, even in the absence of a physical home. Simple routines that your family normally does together, such as taking family walks, watching television and reading bedtime stories, help pull the pieces of daily life back together, even in a new place. Restoring daily activities rebuilds the normal sense of morning, afternoon, evening and night. Even though you are away from home and in a strange place, try to resume the daily routines as much as possible.



EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE AFTER DISASTER

Step 3: Provide comfort.

Family members are better able to deal with the stress of relocation when they are comfortable and informed. Comfort can be increased by doing the following:

- Provide your family with information about other family members, friends and news of home.
- Express affection for family members in the ways your family normally shows affection.
- Discuss, when ready, the emotions associated with the disaster and relocation—such as feelings of loss; missing home; and worries about family members, friends and pets.

Emotional Healing

After the initial emergency has passed, and the shock and confusion from disaster relocation have subsided, the physical rebuilding and long-term emotional-recovery phase begins. This longer recovery phase has two steps:

1. Assess all physical and emotional losses the family has experienced. This inventory can help you identify practical actions to take in rebuilding the physical losses the family has experienced.
2. Develop an emotional understanding of the disaster experience and your relocation situation to help rebuild family life. Working through emotions takes time. There is no set time frame or stages for it. Resolving emotions is a natural healing process that relies on talking to friends about your feelings; mentally sorting your emotions; and receiving practical and emotional help from family, friends, your place of worship or other organized support groups in the community.

Your personal support groups can help you process your emotions and understand your experiences. Emotional processing involves experiencing the emotions associated with the disaster and figuring out what the disaster means to your life. One way that many people work through their emotions is by telling the story of what happened.

Many people who have lived through a traumatic incident have an overwhelming urge to tell the story over and over again. By sharing stories, you and those around you can sort out the sequence of events associated with the disaster, which at first may be a confused jumble. By telling the story, you can get input from others about what they saw and begin to put meaning into the experience.

Generally, as you heal emotionally over time, the story will pull together into an organized account that will have vivid details, emotions and reflections about lessons learned during the experience. With emotional healing, thoughts and dreams about the disaster will be less painful. You will have gained some emotional distance from the events of the disaster. How long this process takes depends on what happened during the disaster and your own unique mental and emotional makeup. You will always associate some pain with the disaster, but it will not be so overwhelming after the passage of time allows for emotional healing.

Signs That Professional Help Is Needed

Here are signs that the person is overwhelmed by their emotions and may need help:

- The story is too painful to tell.
- The person creates a wall of silence around the event for a long time.
- The person cannot express or experience his or her feelings.
- Dreams and thoughts of the experience continue to evoke very painful emotions that do not go away.
- The person's behavior dramatically changes.
- The person has thoughts of hurting themselves or others.

If these signs are present, an appointment with a mental health professional should be arranged to help with the healing process.

EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE AFTER DISASTER

How Disaster-Related Stress Affects Young People

Disaster-related stress affects young people in several ways:

- Damage, injuries and deaths that result from an unexpected or uncontrollable event are difficult for most young people to understand.
- Following a disaster, a young person's view of the world as safe and predictable is temporarily lost. (This is true of adults as well.)
- Young people express their feelings and reactions in various ways, especially in different age groups. Many are confused about what has happened and about their feelings. Not every child has immediate reactions; some can have delayed reactions that show up days, weeks or even months later; and some may never have a reaction. Children's reactions are strongly affected by the emotional reactions of their parents and the adults around them.
- Young people can easily become afraid that a similar event will happen again, and that they or their family will be injured or killed.

How Young People Show Stress

It is normal for young people to show signs of stress after a disaster. Young people show signs of stress differently at different ages or school levels. This article looks at three age groupings:

- Preschool years
- Elementary and middle school years
- High school and teenage years

Signs of Stress: Preschoolers

Signs that preschool-age children may be experiencing normal, but high, levels of stress may include:

- Waking up confused and frightened from bad dreams
- Being reluctant to go to bed or refusing to sleep alone.
- Acting and showing behaviors younger than their actual age, such as whining, thumb-sucking, bed-wetting, baby talk or fear of darkness
- Clinging to adults more than normal
- Complaining often about illnesses such as stomach aches
- Not having fun doing things they normally enjoyed
- Being irritable

Signs of Stress: Elementary- or Middle-School Age

Signs that elementary- or middle school-age children are experiencing normal, but high, levels of stress may include:

- Ongoing concern over their own safety and the safety of others in their school or family
- Irrational fears
- Becoming extremely upset for little or no reason
- Having nightmares and sleep problems
- Experiencing problems in school, such as truancy or misbehavior (e.g., loss of interest, withdrawal or excessive need for attention)
- Complaining of headaches or stomach aches without cause
- Not having fun doing things they normally enjoyed
- Disruptive behaviors—outbursts of anger and fighting
- Being numb to their emotions
- Experiencing guilt or shame about what they did or did not do during the disaster

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Signs of Stress: High-School Age

Signs that teenagers may be experiencing normal, but high, levels of stress include:

- Feeling self-conscious about their feelings concerning the disaster
- Feeling fearful, helpless, and concerned about being labeled "abnormal" or different from their friends or classmates (this may lead to social withdrawal)
- Experiencing shame or guilt about the disaster
- Expressing fantasies about retribution concerning people connected to disaster events
- Not having fun doing things they normally enjoyed
- Difficulty concentrating
- Impulsive behaviors
- Emotional numbing
- Seeing the world as an unsafe place

Helping Young People Understand a Disaster

Disasters can hit young people hard. It is difficult for them to understand and accept that there are events in their lives that cannot be controlled or predicted. When facing an unknown and potentially dangerous situation, young people usually look to adults for answers and help.

Talk with your young person at a level in line with their age. Children handle information differently at different ages. Preschool-age children cannot handle as much information as teenagers.

Before you as an adult can help young people cope with a disaster, it is important for you to recognize your own natural feelings of helplessness, fear and anger, if these exist. Until this occurs, you will not be able to give the young person the full emotional help they need. Nothing is wrong with letting young people know that you do not have all the answers. Things that can be done immediately include the following:

- Let young people know how you see the family situation improving—for example, your plans for their school, your work and family housing.

- Communicate a positive "I'm not helpless" attitude, stressing that "we can get through this together."
- Ask for parenting or other help if the situation gets beyond your abilities and control.

These actions will start the healing process and help the young person to feel relief in knowing the family will regain control and restore their lives.

Tips for Helping Young People Manage Stress

You can use these practical parenting tips to help deal with managing high levels of stress in young people.

For Preschool-Age Children

- Reassure young children that the disaster was not their fault in any way.
- Talk with children about how they are feeling, and listen without judgment.
- Let children know they can have their own feelings, which may be different from the feelings of others.
- Let children take their own time to figure things out.
- Do not expect children to be brave or ask them to pretend that they do not think or feel as they do.
- Give them small bits of information in relation to their questions. Too much information can confuse them.

For Preschool and School-Age Children

- Return to former routines of bedtime, eating and so forth, as soon as possible. If this is not possible, develop new routines. The structure of a routine provides security and assurance.
- Do not expect children to be brave or tough or not to cry.
- Do not minimize the event.
- Hug your children. Hugging lets your children know that someone is there for them.

- Allow special privileges, such as leaving the light on when they sleep.
- Spend extra time with your children at bedtime. Read stories, listen to music and talk quietly.
- Children, just like adults, cope better when healthy. Make sure children are getting balanced meals, proper exercise and enough rest.
- Find ways to emphasize to your children that you love them.
- Encourage children and adolescents to feel in control by letting them choose which clothes to wear, food to eat at meals and so forth.

Activities to Help Children Manage Stress

Consider the following activities and tips that can help young people manage stress.

For Preschool and School-Age Children

- Encourage children to draw or paint pictures of how they feel about their experiences. Hang the pictures at a level where children can see them easily. Talking about their drawings can help lessen feelings of stress.
- Playing with Play-Doh or clay is good way for children to release tension.
- Playing music is fun and valuable for children.
- Creating music with instruments or rhythm toys helps relieve stress and tension.
- Making puppets with the children, and putting on a puppet show for family and friends or helping children put on a skit, helps them tell about what happened.
- Don't let children watch too much disaster-related television. Hearing about the events and seeing the tragic images over and over again will certainly raise their anxiety.
- Be aware of your own emotional reactions around your children. It is all right to share your feelings, but you must also show your children that you are in control of your emotions. Do not look to children for your emotional support.

EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE AFTER DISASTER

For Teenagers

- Encourage your teenager to talk one-on-one with a trusted adult or in a small group of peers about the event. Generally, this is most successful when you begin with general events, move to more event-specific experiences, and then follow with each person's experiences with the disaster.
- Teenagers may wish to talk about values, moral issues and the meaning of the disaster.

When Young People May Need Additional Help

Situations may develop when young people need additional help dealing with emotional aftereffects of the disaster. Young people may benefit from help from a health care professional if the emotional stress associated with the disaster does not get better in a few weeks, or when they do any of the following:

- Display continual and aggressive emotional outbursts.
- Show serious problems at school (e.g., fighting, skipping school, arguments with teachers or food fights).
- Withdraw completely from family and friends.
- They cannot cope with routine problems or daily activities.
- Engage in vandalism or juvenile, law-breaking activities.
- Express suicidal ideas.

Reaching out for help is not a sign of weakness. People have limits and sometimes need help when stretched beyond their limits. Seeking help from others can offer solutions that may not be known to you.

Issues and Tips: Stress Effects in Older People

Several issues need to be taken into account when helping elderly friends and family who may be under stress after a disaster and who are suffering from the effects of a sudden relocation.

EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE AFTER DISASTER

Communication Problems

Some older persons in shelters or in new surroundings may have difficulty understanding family and friends, talking to people or answering questions. These communication problems may be caused by normal, age-related problems with memory, seeing and hearing, and the reduced ability to physically move because of illnesses or the effects of medications. Make sure that the older person has the eyeglasses he or she needs and that hearing aids are on before talking to him or her. Be patient and calm. Speak loudly enough to be heard, but do not shout. Keep your messages simple and clear. Repeat information and make sure that the person in your care hears and understands what is said.

Danger from Falls

Be aware that in unfamiliar settings, clutter and poor lighting could cause an elderly person to fall. Balance problems, muscle weakness and medications can add to the risk of falling. Check new living quarters for anything that could lead to a fall. Make sure stairs and rooms are well lit. Provide walking assistance, if needed.

Chronic Illness and Dietary Considerations

Arthritis may prevent an elderly family member from standing in a line. Some medications can cause mental confusion or a greater susceptibility to problems such as dehydration. Memory problems can cause communication problems. Neglect of special meal needs in certain illnesses can lead to medical crises. As soon as possible, make sure the elderly family member:

- Has all of his or her medicines
- Eats the foods required to manage illnesses
- Has written diet and medication information along in case he or she is separated from you
- Establishes contact with his or her medical care provider, or finds a new one and provides his or her medical history to the care provider

Disoriented Behavior

At night, when nearby surroundings are not seen as well as in the day, some elderly people with mild or moderate dementia or problems thinking clearly can become confused about where they are. You may need to orient them to time and place.

Make sure the elderly person has a clock and a calendar in his or her room. If you have any of his or her familiar things, place those in the room. Be sure that there is some soft, non-glaring light in the room and that it is as quiet and calm as possible. If you cannot reorient the elderly person to where he or she is, and your efforts are upsetting, just reassure him or her, and distract the person with other activities.

Multiple-Loss Effect

The elderly family member who may have lost his or her spouse, income, home or physical capabilities may have difficulty "bouncing back" from the loss. Show empathy for the person's situation by listening. Give comfort by your presence and let him or her know you are there and care. Do not minimize what he or she has lost.

Worries about Loss of Independence

Loss of the ability to live independently because of a disaster-related injury or loss of a home can be the biggest blow that a disaster deals older people. Within the constraints of the situation, allow them to do what they can for themselves and keep as much dignity and independence as is possible.

Welfare Stigma and Unfamiliarity with Bureaucracy

Many older family members are unwilling to accept government welfare assistance because they have always "paid their way." In a disaster, however, government help may be needed. Their unwillingness to accept help may be made worse by unfamiliarity with government services for which they are eligible, particularly during disasters. If the person is reluctant to accept assistance, relate the assistance to a time when he or she helped someone in need, or explain that this help comes from taxes he or she has paid.

Getting Too Hot or Too Cold

Older people may not handle extremes of heat or cold well. Either too much heat or cold can have marked effects upon them. Be aware of the need to keep elderly family members out of extremes of heat and cold.

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Dehydration

Elderly people are more susceptible to dehydration. They do not feel thirsty as quickly as young people and do not drink water and other liquids as often. Some of the medicine they take can also lead to water loss. Check to make sure that your elderly relatives have access to safe, clean drinking water and that they are drinking it. Watch for signs of dehydration such as sunken eyes, no tears and dry mouth.

Language and Cultural Barriers

Lower reading skill levels among some elders and inadequate command of the English language among speakers of other languages can cause confusion and frustration at relief centers or in new housing locations. Try to match the elderly person with someone fluent in his or her native language.

Dealing with Change

Remember that elderly people have strengths gained from a lifetime of coping with adversity. Know also that elderly people tend to underreport problems, both to family and physicians, as they may want to cope on their own. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to how they feel and act in times of change and relocation.

Signs of Stress in Older People

Elders can suffer various symptoms, from worsening of preexisting medical problems, problems with medications, new illnesses or psychological stress. Therefore, it is important to make sure that they are medically stable before deciding that these symptoms are due to emotional stress. Under stress, whether from physical or emotional sources, people who are elderly can:

- Become mentally confused
- Tire easily
- Withdraw from friends and family
- Undergo personality changes in severe cases

You should also know that older people might tend to complain of bodily symptoms rather than emotional problems when under stress. Again, remember not to dismiss any bodily symptoms as "just due to stress."

Special Issues for Frail Elders

Many elderly are very healthy, well-functioning, capable adults. For example, according to the U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, at age 60 years, only 15 percent of elderly people suffer from dementia; at age 85 years, 50 percent of the elderly are affected by dementia. The older, frailer elders are the ones who may be more vulnerable in a disaster due to medical illnesses.

How to Help Older People Deal with Stress

In general terms, these principles will help guide you when helping an elderly person deal with the stress of evacuation and relocation:

- Provide strong and persistent verbal reassurance.
- Assist with recovery of physical possessions as is safe.
- Visit them often.
- Help reestablish contact with family and friends.
- Assist in obtaining medical and financial assistance.
- Help reestablish medication and any dietary regimens.
- Provide transportation to the doctor, grocery store and so forth.

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). (Reviewed 2018 [Ed.]). *Relocation stress: Helping families deal with the stress of relocation after a disaster*. Retrieved September 14, 2018, from <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/>

COPING WITH TRAUMA: HOW CAN FAMILIES BE SUPPORTIVE?

Your loved one has been through a traumatic incident. What can you do to help support them? Below are several suggestions for offering support and comfort during a trying time.

Listen.

One of the most important needs after a trauma is to talk about the event—and to do so often. Talk about it over and over. It may be difficult for you to hear, or you may get tired of hearing the same old story, but talking is a crucial part of your loved one's recovery.

Be supportive and sympathetic, but try to avoid overreacting. Your loved one needs to tell his or her story and not be upset by your reactions. If your loved one tries to shield you from the event by refusing to talk about it, you obviously cannot force him or her to talk. However, you can encourage openness, and listen to whatever else the person wants to say.

Include the whole family in the healing process.

You and your spouse or partner may feel you should protect your children from the upsetting event. Regardless, they'll undoubtedly know something is wrong. This can be stressful for them too, and they may need some help to get through it.

Take care of yourself.

While it is important to be supportive, you also need to take care of yourself. Ask friends and family for help, and don't be afraid to seek counseling for yourself if needed.

Enjoy the little things.

Take time out for your family, have a special meal together or take small outings. Appreciating the little things won't make the pain go away, but will help in the healing process.

Workplace Options. (Reviewed 2018). *Coping with trauma: How can families be supportive?* Raleigh, NC: Author.



EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE AFTER DISASTER

ADDRESSING EMPLOYEES' NEEDS IN A CRISIS

When a traumatic event occurs in the workplace, employees and often the entire organization are impacted. This is a special time that requires special management. Through their immediate and supportive actions, managers can significantly contribute to the recovery of individuals directly and indirectly impacted. Here are some examples of steps managers can take in a crisis.

Safety

- Follow all emergency response procedures to ensure the physical safety of employees, customers or other visitors in the workplace.
- Contact 911 for appropriate local law enforcement or fire department personnel.
- Depending upon the nature of the event, help the employees secure or evacuate the building, move to a designated shelter or follow lockdown procedures.
- Take a count of everyone assembled, and determine

if anyone is missing. Inform emergency response personnel of any missing employees.

- Communicate in a calm, controlled manner. Reassure employees that they are safe.
- When available, communicate accurate and verified information to emergency response personnel, your manager, employees and others with a need-to-know position.

Triage

- Identify those employees most at risk physically. Give necessary emergency first aid and emotional support. If possible, ask about any history of exhibited physical problems. Provide information to emergency response personnel when they arrive. Enlist other employees to stay with their coworkers at the workplace and, if feasible, at the hospital.
- Contact family members of hurt employees and, in a caring manner, inform them of the event. Offer transportation to the hospital, if needed.



EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE AFTER DISASTER

Assessment and Follow-Through

- Identify employees who were directly or indirectly involved, for example, any who were minimally hurt during the event, witnesses or first responders. Talk to them to judge how they were affected. You will likely observe a wide range of reactions: from none to extreme agitation. Explain that everyone's reactions are normal responses to an abnormal event. Calmly give them encouragement and support. If necessary, find a colleague to act as a buddy to someone who continues to cry or remains agitated. Consult with your manager, Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or other professional resource if you become concerned about an employee's extreme state of mind.
- Communicate with supervisors and team leaders to assist in identifying needs and providing support. Possible acute needs include water and food, a change of clothing, phones to contact loved ones and transportation home.
- Arrange transportation for anyone needing nonacute medical care.

Advocacy

- If needed, request additional support from senior management. You may need coverage from other areas or departments to balance out the disruption in your work team. Let senior management know that normal work productivity will be reduced for a period of time after the event.
- Be flexible in work schedules; for example, extend time to complete projects, and if a funeral or memorial service is held during the workday, encourage employees to attend.
- Consult with the EAP about available services and on-site support. Inform employees if any arrangements are made.
- Foster opportunities for coworkers to support one another.

Communication

- Notify the next of kin in cases of fatal accidental, suicidal or homicidal death.
- Share information as soon as it becomes available.

Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know." Follow up when you find the answers to those questions.

- Always communicate in a caring and understanding manner. Talking about an incident is one of the ways people recover from a traumatic event. Model that behavior by sharing your feelings and experience of the incident. However, make sure you have first talked through your experience with someone else. You will want to convey your personal side without losing your composure.
- Help employees feel supported by your presence. Be visible, ask them how they are doing and be a good listener. Don't judge their experience or give them advice about how they should be reacting. If you do, they will shut down and not be forthcoming in the future. Tell them you are extending an open-door policy to them as a result of this crisis. Make sure you can follow through with that promise.
- If you find that your time is limited and you're unable to stay on top of the communication process, appoint an information coordinator. That person can gather pertinent information from law enforcement, family members or other sources; send updates; work with you to share major announcements at meetings and so forth.

Return to Work

- Returning to normal work schedules and routines promotes a sense of normalcy and recovery from the traumatic experience. Help employees remain at work or return to work as soon as they can. Accommodate employee needs or consider temporary adjustments.
- Provide information on the EAP or other sources of support. Explain why these resources can be helpful at times like these. Northrop Grumman's EAP is available 24/7: 800-982-8161.
- Keep in contact with employees who are off work due to the incident. Help them with the transition back to work when they return.

Sulaski, C. & Schuette, B. (Ed.) (Reviewed 2018). *Addressing employees' needs in a crisis*. Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.