

Coping with traumatic natural disasters

Traumatic natural disasters such as hurricanes, fires, floods and tornados can be distressing events for individuals in the impacted area. It can also be distressing for those who may have family and friends in the there. The media's constant reporting of the severe aftermath of the event can trigger upsetting memories and anxiety. Although these effects vary from person to person, feeling distressed as a result of a traumatic event is normal. It means that you're trying to come to terms and process what happened the best way you know how.

What to expect

You may find yourself feeling uncomfortable and upset. Some typical reactions to a traumatic event include:

- Feeling preoccupied with the incident; feeling like you can't get it out of your mind
- Extreme worry and preoccupation about the safety of loved ones who may have been directly or indirectly impacted by the incident
- Having trouble sleeping, or experiencing nightmares about the event
- Feeling anxious or fearful
- Feeling unusually irritable or angry
- Feeling depressed or low, with unexpected crying bouts
- Feeling helpless or guilty; unrealistically thinking that you should have done something to prevent it from happening
- Feeling fearful of returning to work or getting back to normal daily routines
- Feeling the need to reassure family members about your day-to-day safety

What to do

Remember, the reactions outlined above are normal responses to a very out-of-the ordinary event. Although these thoughts and feelings may be uncomfortable, time and support can help you make it through this stressful experience. To help you cope, try some of the following tips.

- Talking to your supervisor and fellow co-workers about what you are experiencing and how you are coping helps relieve negative emotions.
- Sharing your thoughts and feelings with family members and close friends you can trust.
- Trying not to be hard on yourself; remember that you cannot change the forces of nature.
- Realizing that the feelings and thoughts troubling you now are temporary, and will ease with the passing of time. Getting back to a normal routine can help you feel more grounded.
- Ask for help by using emergency resources available in your community to support you in recovering from damage caused by the natural disaster.