

MOVING AHEAD

Disasters are sudden and overwhelming. It is common for people who have experienced traumatic situations to have very strong emotional reactions. Understanding normal responses to these abnormal events can aid you in coping effectively with your feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, and help you along the path to recovery.

How should I help my family and myself?

There are a number of steps you can take to help restore emotional well-being and cope better following a natural disaster. Such as:

- **Give yourself time to heal.** This will be a difficult time in your life. Allow yourself to mourn the losses. Try to be patient with changes in your emotional state.
- **Ask for support** from people who care about you and who will listen and understand your situation. But keep in mind that your typical support system may be weakened if those who are close to you also have experienced or witnessed the trauma.
- **Communicate** your experience in whatever way you feel comfortable - such as by talking with family or close friends, or keeping a diary.
- Find out about **local support groups** that often are available. These can be especially helpful if your personal support systems are limited.
- Try to find groups led by appropriately trained and experienced professionals such as psychologists. **Group discussion** can help you realize that other individuals in the same circumstances often have similar reactions and emotions.
- **Engage in healthy behaviors** to enhance your ability to cope with excessive stress. Eat well-balanced meals and get plenty of rest.

- Avoid alcohol and drugs.
- Establish or **re-establish routines** such as eating meals at regular times, following an exercise program. Take some time off from the demands of daily life by doing something you enjoy. Such as, going for a walk, playing with children etc. pursuing hobbies.
- **Avoid major life decisions** such as, switching jobs, if possible, because these activities tend to be highly stressful.

When should I seek professional help?

Sometimes it can get difficult for us to cope with the disaster and the losses that it brings. Time is unable to heal some wounds. You must seek professional psychological help when you notice the following reactions continuing for more than six to eight weeks-

- Feeling very nervous.
- Feeling very low and sad for most part of the day.
- Inability to perform daily tasks, such as cleaning, bathing etc. (this inability is not due unavailability of resources).
- Interpersonal problems, social withdrawal.

If you have such **prolonged reactions** that disrupt your daily functioning please consult with a trained and experienced mental health professional. Psychologists and other appropriate mental health providers help educate people about normal responses to extreme stress. These professionals work with individuals affected by trauma to help them find constructive ways of dealing with the emotional impact.

How can I help the children?

It is difficult and confusing for children to come to terms with a disaster. Be patient and provide them with physical security and comfort. Talk to them and involve them in daily activities. Seek professional help when, even after four to six weeks you notice:

- Uncontrollable emotional outbursts, such as, crying, shouting.
- Problem in sleeping and eating.
- Increased aggressive behavior: hitting, fighting, screaming etc. - much more than the child would do before the disaster.
- Extreme social withdrawal. Staying away from fellow play mates, decreased interaction with loved ones, very scanty or no response when spoken to.
- Extreme fear, nervousness and sadness.

Most definitely this is a difficult period. And most definitely it is going to get better. Life must go on.

