

## Coping After Disaster

When we experience a disaster or traumatic event, either firsthand or through exposure to the event, it can impact our sense of emotional and mental safety. Stress reactions are expected and normal. Below are suggestions for how to cope during these stressful times and increase resiliency.

### Symptoms of Trauma

Remember that everyone will be impacted and react in their own way. There is no “right” way to feel and act when we experience a traumatic event.

- Physical symptoms: headaches, stomachaches, feeling excessively tired, ect.
- Changes in sleep and appetite
- Easily startled
- More susceptible to colds and illness
- Outbursts of anger or rage
- Emotional swings
- Restlessness
- Re-experiencing the trauma: nightmares and flashbacks
- Isolating yourself or feeling of detachment
- Survivor guilt
- Less interest in everyday activities
- Overwhelmed by tasks
- Increased Alcohol/ Substance Use
- Anxiety
- Depression

### Helpful Coping Strategies

- Connect with others, especially those who may have shared the disaster event.
- Exercise in moderation.
- Relaxation activities – yoga, stretching, deep breathing, massage, mindfulness.
- Maintain a balanced diet & sleep cycle as best you can.
- Engage in positive distracting activities.
- Avoid over-using stimulants like caffeine, sugar, or nicotine.
- Commit to something personally meaningful and important each day.
- Write about your experience.
- At the end of each day write down 3 things you are grateful for, and how each makes you feel.
- Take regular breaks.
- Limit media exposure.
- Re-establish family routines to the extent possible (meal times, bedtimes, reading and playtime, school).

### Talking with Children & Adolescents

- Spend time with your children.
- Be available to talk.
- Ask them what they already know.
- Encourage them to talk about their feelings – provide a judgment free space to be heard and accepted.
- Remind them that it's normal to have big / different emotions and feelings after a traumatic event.
- Help them feel safe. Remind them of ways you keep them safe and what the families communication plan is.
- Limit media exposure.
- Maintain family routines and "rules".
- Address "acting out" behaviors and give alternative ways to express new and strong emotions.
- Be patient.

### Crisis Resources

- Behavioral Health Walk-In Center at 2551 W 84TH Ave, Westminster CO
- Colorado State Crisis Line: 1-844-493-8255 or text "TALK" to 38255
- The Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990

Find many more resources on our website at [www.communityreachcenter.org](http://www.communityreachcenter.org).

Information adapted from The National Child Traumatic Stress Network and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration.