Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
SAMHSA
www.samhsa.gov • 1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)

Tips for College Students:

AFTER A DISASTER OR OTHER TRAUMA

If you have experienced a disaster such as a hurricane or flood, or other traumatic event such as a car crash, you may have distressing reactions like feeling anxious or afraid. It's also pretty common to think about the event often, even if you were not directly affected and especially if you saw it on television. No reactions are wrong or right. Most responses are just normal ways of reacting to the situation.

Common Reactions of Survivors of Disasters and Other Traumatic Events

- Having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep
- Feeling like you have no energy or like you are always exhausted
- Feeling sad or depressed
- Having stomachaches or headaches
- Feeling like you have too much energy or like you are hyperactive
- Feeling very irritable or angry—fighting with friends or family for no reason
- Being numb—not feeling at all
- Having trouble focusing on schoolwork
- Having periods of confusion
- Drinking alcohol or using illicit drugs or even legal medications to stop your feelings
- Not having any appetite at all, or just the opposite—finding that you are eating too much
- Thinking that no one else is having any of the same reactions and that you are alone in dealing with your feelings

Tips To Help With Recovery

- **Talk About It.** One of the most helpful things to do is to connect with others. Don't isolate yourself. Talk with someone about your sadness, anger, and other emotions, even though it may be difficult to get started. Find a peer who will understand and accept your feelings, or a trusted professor, counselor, or faith leader. Call home to talk with your parents or other caregivers (for example, your Resident Assistant if you are living on campus). Share your feelings and concerns with them, or visit the Student Health Center for any physical or emotional concerns.
- **Calm Yourself.** Move the stress hormones out of your body:
  - Deep breathing or breathing that emphasizes the exhale is really helpful in reducing stress.
  - Simple exercises like walking or gentle stretching such as yoga helps get rid of stress.
- **Take Care of Yourself.** Rest when you need to. Eat healthy meals and snacks when they are available, and drink plenty of water.

- **Give Yourself a Break—Turn Off the Television/Radio.** Take breaks from watching news coverage of the event or listening to radio reports.
- **Avoid Using Alcohol, Drugs, and Tobacco.** They will not help you deal with stress, especially right after a traumatic event. They usually just make things worse.
- **Get Back to Your Daily Routines.** Do the things you would normally do, even if you don't feel like it. It's a good way to regain a sense of control and help you feel less anxious.
- **Get Involved in Your Community.** Engaging in positive activities like group discussions and candlelight vigils can help bring you comfort and promote healing. They also help you realize you are not alone. Volunteering is a great way to help and can create a sense of connectedness and meaning. Try something you think you'd like to do. For example, answer hotlines, distribute clothing, or join a food drive.
- **Help Others.** If you are trying to help a friend, make sure to listen attentively (for example, avoid looking at your cell phone) to find out where he or she is in the coping process. Others may have different responses from you, so try to accept their feelings. If you are concerned about them, contact one of the resources on this tip sheet for help.
- **Remember.** If a trauma was caused by a violent act, it is common to be angry at people who have caused great pain. Know that nothing good can come out of more violence or hateful acts.

We tend to remember traumatic events like disasters all our lives, but the pain will decrease over time, and even though it hurts, we usually do get stronger.

Be honest with yourself and accept your feelings—even if you have a sense of uncertainty. Things may seem off balance for a while, but most people start to feel differently after a week or two, especially if they get back to regular routines. Think about what you may have learned that might be helpful to you in the future. Do you feel this tragedy made you more adaptable or more self-reliant?

If you continue to experience emotional distress for 2–4 weeks after a disaster or other traumatic event, or if you just want to talk with a professional, see the available resources on the next page to help you or someone you know recover.

If you or someone you know is struggling after a disaster, you are not alone.

Disaster Distress Helpline

PHONE: 1-800-985-5990 TEXT: "TalkWithUs" to 66746
WEB: http://disasterdistress.samhsa.gov

Call 1-800-985-5990 or text "TalkWithUs" to 66746 to get help and support 24/7.

Helpful Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Disaster Technical Assistance Center (SAMHSA DTAC)
Toll-Free: 1-800-308-3515
Website: http://www.samhsa.gov/dtac

Treatment Locators

Mental Health Treatment Facility Locator
Toll-Free: 1-800-789-2647 (English and español)
TDD: 1-866-889-2647
Website: http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/MHTreatmentLocator

MentalHealth.gov
Website: http://www.mentalhealth.gov
MentalHealth.gov provides U.S. government information and resources on mental health.

Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator
Toll-Free: 1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357)
(24/7 English and español); TDD: 1-800-487-4889
Website: http://www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov

Hotlines

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
Toll-Free: 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)
TTY: 1-800-799-4TTY (1-800-799-4889)
Website: http://www.samhsa.gov
This resource can be found by accessing the Suicide Prevention Lifeline box once on the SAMHSA website.

National Dating Abuse Helpline*
Toll-Free: 1-866-331-9474 Text "loveis" to 77054

National Domestic Violence Hotline*
Toll-Free: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233); TTY: 1-800-787-3224

Office for Victims of Crime*
Toll-Free: 1-800-851-3420, or 301-519-5500
TTY: 301-947-8374
Website: http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/ovcres/welcome.html

The Rape Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN)*
operates the 24/7 confidential National Sexual Assault Hotline.
Toll-Free: 1-800-656-HOPE (1-800-646-4673)

Additional Behavioral Health Resources

National Child Traumatic Stress Network
Website: http://www.samhsa.gov/traumaJustice
This behavioral health resource can be accessed by visiting the SAMHSA website and then selecting the related link.

Administration for Children and Families
Website: http://www.acf.hhs.gov

**Note: Inclusion of a resource in this fact sheet does not imply endorsement by the Center for Mental Health Services, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.*

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