

Encourage healing after a disaster

Coping with the devastating effects of a disaster, whether it's natural (hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, fires etc.) or man-made (explosions, workplace violence, shootings etc.) can be extremely challenging.



Symptoms related to trauma and disaster

Beyond the immediate concerns about property damage or personal safety, it's also vital to remember that emotional wellbeing can be just as important as physical wellbeing.

No one who is involved in or witnesses a disaster is untouched by it. Each person's reaction is unique to their own situation, but in the days and weeks following the event, it's common for people to experience a variety of physical and emotional symptoms. These may include:

- Sadness
- Nervousness and unease
- Irritability or anger
- Disturbed sleeping patterns
- Relationship problems
- Intrusive thoughts, flashbacks or nightmares
- Negativity
- Lack of focus, inability to concentrate
- Shock
- Disbelief
- Guilt

All of these symptoms are normal responses to an abnormal event. If you have experienced a disaster of any kind, a major part of the healing process is acknowledging your feelings and reactions.



How to help yourself

Everyone has different ways of coping and healing. Although you can't control or change what happened, you can (to some extent) control your healing journey. Here are some tips and suggestions to help minimise the impact of a traumatic event on your emotional and psychological health:

- **Accept support.** If your friends or family members offer support, take it. If you feel you need help, ask for it. It can be anything from having someone help with daily tasks such as shopping or household chores, to having a friendly, trusted presence to talk through how you're feeling.
- **Accept the situation.** The event or incident happened. You can't change that, nor can you completely avoid it. The desire for avoidance is normal, but too much of it may delay or postpone your healing.
- **Look after yourself.** Make sure that you get an appropriate amount of rest, exercise and nutrition. Try to steer clear of drugs and alcohol to numb the pain.
- **Find other ways.** Consider using other healthy coping strategies such as art, music, meditation, relaxation techniques and spending time in nature.
- **Take your time.** There is no set timetable for your recovery. Be patient. Focus on your strengths and abilities.
- **Embrace the familiar.** Many people find comfort in returning to familiar daily routines and situations, both at home and at work.

Most people recover in their own time. However, if you feel that your healing process is going too slowly or has stalled, it may be wise to seek professional help. There are numerous treatment options available. Two of the most common are psychological first aid (PSA) and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).

The goal of PSA is to reduce post-disaster stress and develop coping skills. It can be done privately, in community settings or even over the phone.

CBT is a psychological treatment designed to help individuals learn to change negative or unhelpful thinking and behavioural patterns.

So far, we have focused exclusively on how to encourage adults to heal after a disaster. It's important to point out that extra special care may need to be taken if seniors or children are also involved. In those instances, it may be advisable to seek professional assistance.



Critical support when you need it

Visit optumwellbeing.com/criticalsupportcenter for additional critical support resources and information.



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