

# Helping yourself and others after disaster

When you have been affected by a natural disaster or tragedy, it may be very difficult to know what to do or what to expect. Whether you were actively involved in the event or even if you simply witnessed it, it's almost impossible to be left untouched by the experience.



## Helping yourself

Recovering from a traumatic experience such as a disaster can often be a gradual and ongoing process. It may take longer than you had hoped or expected, but there are certain tips and procedures that can make a difference in your recovery journey.

- If it triggers negative emotions, avoid news coverage or social media commentary of the event.
- Accept that your feelings and emotions are a necessary part of the healing process.
- Don't judge yourself for your reactions.
- Don't be in a hurry. Let the healing process run its course.
- Avoid stressful situations.
- When you feel you're up to it, take small but positive steps back into your familiar routine.
- If you feel it will help, connect with others who shared your experience.
- Avoid excessive use of drugs and alcohol.
- Focus on self-care. Try to get adequate amounts of rest, exercise and nutrition.

## Symptoms related to trauma

There may be a desire to take the recovery journey alone to prove that you are strong enough to do so. But seeking help from those closest to you can be its own sign of strength. Lean on people you trust. Share your feelings with them. You may even find comfort in an organised support group.

In the first week or two after the event, you may experience a range of physical and emotional responses or symptoms related to trauma. These symptoms may include breathing difficulties, change in appetite, disrupted sleep, lack of focus, anger, fear, guilt, emotional numbness and feelings of isolation and abandonment.

These symptoms are not things to be hidden or ignored. They are normal responses to abnormal events.

As time goes on, the symptoms often diminish. But if you feel that you are not making progress, if you feel that your symptoms are interfering with your ability to manage your daily life or you find yourself overindulging in drugs or alcohol, you may be suffering from complicated/traumatic grief or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In these cases, seeking help from a mental health professional is an advisable course of action.

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.



### Helping others

In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, psychological first aid (PFA) is a way you can provide support and assistance to those who were involved in or witnessed the event.

Given that disaster survivors often experience an extensive range of physical, psychological, behavioural and spiritual reactions, psychological first aid is designed to reduce the initial stress and then help develop effective coping skills.



### Critical support when you need it

Visit [optumwellbeing.com/criticalsupportcenter](https://optumwellbeing.com/criticalsupportcenter) for additional critical support resources and information.



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