

# HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE COPE AFTER A DISASTER

A disaster or traumatic event like a hurricane or flood is something that many people, especially young people, never forget. They are affected in different ways. Some are more affected than others, and their individual reactions may differ quite a bit. Life history, personality, age and a person's experiences during and after an event all play a role in how a person responds.

## Strong Feelings and Emotions Are Normal

For many young people, a scary or life threatening event such as a hurricane or flood can bring on strong feelings and mixed emotions. This is normal for anyone of any age who has seen, heard about or lived through, a natural disaster or other distressing event.

Some young people are able to deal with the events of the disaster and go on with their lives. Some have reactions right away and others may seem fine for weeks or months, and then suddenly break down in emotion.

Crying, anger, guilt, headaches, stomachaches, trouble concentrating, nightmares, flashbacks or disturbing thoughts are all common feelings and emotions you may have after a traumatic ordeal.

Other normal reactions you may include:

- Trouble having friendships
- Problems in school (poor grades, behavior or attitude)
- Difficulty concentrating
- Worries about dying
- Feelings of helplessness or guilt
- Jittery or jumpy feelings
- No interest in doing fun or enjoyable activities
- Aggressive, mean, or even violent behavior
- Trouble being in certain places or situations that bring back memories
- Problems with reality; pretending that the event did not happen

If these or other common, stress-related symptoms last for several months and you are not feeling any better, you may have what is called **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD**.

## About Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

PTSD is a set of symptoms that occur after a person has seen, heard about or lived through, a disaster or frightening event. People of all ages can experience PTSD. Approximately three million children and young people are diagnosed with PTSD each year.

For most people, stress reactions usually lessen or go away after a few weeks, but when the symptoms are more severe or interfere with a person's everyday activities, you should get help to cope with your feelings. Only a doctor or mental health professional can determine if you have PTSD. PTSD is a treatable illness.

## How Young People Can Help Themselves Cope

If you are a young person who is coping with trauma, in the long run, it is best that you are honest about your feelings and allow yourself time to acknowledge your feelings. Although it may be hard to begin talking with someone about your sorrow, anger, and other emotions, it is important to realize that your life can and will return to normal.

While you will always remember the event, the symptoms and painful feelings will decrease as time passes. You will come to understand that, in learning to cope with tragedy, you have become stronger, more adaptable and more self-reliant.

## Who Can Help You Cope and Feel Better

Working through your feelings after a disaster is a normal part of coping with what you have experienced. You do not have to deal with these emotions and feelings alone. There are people who want to help you get through this challenging time.

You may feel most comfortable talking about your feelings with a parent or guardian, teacher, religious leader, school counselor, social worker, doctor, mental health professional, or another adult you trust. The important thing is that you have someone you trust to confide in about your thoughts and feelings. They may give you the support you need to feel better.



**For Help Contact:**  
**Mental Health America of Greater Houston**  
**Information & Referral**  
713-522-5161  
8:30am-5:00pm, Monday-Friday

**Crisis Hotline:** 713-HOTLINE (468-5463)  
**Spanish Crisis Hotline:** 713-47-AYUDA (29832)  
**Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** 1-800-273-8255