

If a child does not respond to the above suggestions, seek help from a mental health professional.

Parents can help reassure children by telling them they are safe, holding and hugging them frequently, restoring normal routines such as returning to school, providing play experiences for them and making bedtime a special moment of calm and comfort. Encourage activities with their peers.

Why Do I Feel the Way I do?

The loss or damage to your home, property and personal belongings has set into motion weeks and even months of effort to recover and rebuild. While physical property and possessions are initial concerns that consume your time and energy, emotional reactions to tragedy and disaster are often pushed aside or ignored.

It is very common for people to experience a wide range of emotional reactions to a tragic or disastrous event. Their reactions are experienced in thoughts, feelings and actions, and are often very upsetting to you and those around you.

However, it is extremely important to remember that they are normal reactions to an abnormal event. You

have been through an exceptionally stressful situation and these emotional reactions may continue for many months following the tragic event.

Tragedies and Stress

Stress caused by loss or a devastating experience can take on several forms. It can often appear weeks or months following traumatic events. Many victims may experience at least one of several emotional responses: anger, fatigue, sleeplessness, change in appetite, nightmares, depression, inability to concentrate, hyperactivity and increased alcohol or drug use.



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Coping with Tragedies and Stress



Coping After a Tragedy

The emotional consequences of a tragedy can be far-reaching and long lasting. Feelings of sadness, depression, frustration, anger and anxiety are common. It is not unusual for these experiences and feelings to last many months. Learning to recognize the normal reactions and emotions that occur can help you better understand these feelings, and become more comfortable and effective in coping with them.

What Can I Expect?

There are many concerns, adjustments and ordeals that follow the experience of a tragedy or disaster.

The endless adjustments that you and your family must make may put additional stress on your relationships and daily living. You may also grow physically and mentally weary from the enormous task of rebuilding your life. There can be financial setbacks and the loss of property and personal possessions.

All of these factors can strain your ability to move forward. In the aftermath of a tragedy, it is important to remember that it will take time to heal and recover from the tragedy or disaster.

With the passing of time, however, your efforts to cope will begin to reduce the intensity and duration of these emotional reactions and behaviours.

In the meantime, look at your recovery in terms of each day's progress and practice the coping ideas suggested here.

Coping Strategies

For Yourself

Talk to others about how you are feeling. It is important to talk about your experiences; you need to express sadness, grief, anger and fear over what has happened and what you face.

Do not overwork yourself. Take time to be with your family and friends. Indulge in recreation, relaxation, a favorite hobby or pastime.

Do not let yourself become isolated. Seek out and maintain connections with friends, relatives, neighbors, co-workers, church members, or reach out to meet new people in your community. Talk about your experience with them.

Pay close attention to your physical health as prolonged-stress takes its toll on the body. Maintain a good diet and make sure you are getting enough sleep. It is also helpful to be physically active or to exercise.

Upsetting times can cause some people to use alcohol or drugs to help cope with the stress. It does not help in the long run and will likely cause other problems.

Couples need to tend to their relationship as this is often overlooked. Take time to be alone, to talk about how you are feeling and to have fun together.

For Your Family

This is a confusing and frightening time for children. Spend time every day giving each child your undivided attention, even if just for a few minutes. Share experiences, reaffirm your love, make plans together, and just be there for each other.

Encourage them to talk and describe what they are feeling. Let them talk about the disaster and ask as many questions as they like. Listen to what they say. Assure them that the tragedy was not caused by them.

Understand their fears. It is important that parents accept anxieties as being very real to children. Help them cope by getting them to understand what causes their anxieties and fears. Recognize their losses, such as their pets, favorite toys and other personal items. Reassure them that everything will be all right. Through your persistence, children will realize life will eventually return to the normal routine.