



Helping you Recover and Stay Well After a Disaster or Emergency



A disaster or emergency can cause loss and change that go beyond the immediate impact. It's common for people who have experienced disaster to have emotional reactions that can change from day-to-day or sometimes moment to moment. Understanding responses to sudden and overwhelming events can help you cope with your feelings, thoughts, and behaviours and help you recover emotionally.

Stress

Symptoms of stress after a disaster or emergency are normal. For some people, these symptoms don't appear until weeks or months after the event has happened. You might have more headaches, stomach problems, colds, or allergies than usual. Other common stress reactions may include:

- feeling angry or irritable
- trouble focusing, remembering, or making decisions
- feeling anxious, scared, or on edge
- trouble sleeping or staying asleep
- feeling sad or helpless
- muscle tension or body aches
- questioning your belief system (e.g., life's purpose or meaning)
- feeling guilt or shame
- moodiness or crying easily

It's common for things that happen in your environment like sirens, loud noises, burning smells to remind you of the disaster. You may feel a bit anxious or more stressed. For most people these feelings and symptoms of stress improve on their own over time. Some people may need extra support to help them recover. It's important to know when to ask for help. Speak to your healthcare provider or a mental health professional if you are experiencing any of the following warning signs:

- having emotional reactions that are getting in the way of relationships, work, or other important activities
- feeling excessive guilt, shame, or blame
- avoiding or withdrawing from others
- feeling excessive anger, sadness, or hopelessness
- new or increased use of, tobacco, vaping, alcohol, or other drugs
- feeling excessive anxiety, fear, or panic
- feeling confused or disoriented
- thoughts of harming yourself or others

If you're having suicidal thoughts, go to the nearest emergency department or call **911** right away.

What can help?

- Be patient with yourself and others. It takes time to grieve, adjust, rebuild, and recover.
- Make lists of the things that you need to do and when they need to be done.
- Get back to your regular routines or make new ones (e.g., eat at regular times, get up and go to bed at the same time).
- Find reliable information, help, and resources in your community.
- Take care of yourself. Eat well, be active, get enough sleep, and take regular breaks.
- Stay connected. Re-establish community and personal support by staying connected to old friends and making new ones.
- Express what you're feeling. Talk with a trusted family member or friend, keep a diary, or do something creative.
- If you're feeling strong emotions, it's okay. Name them (e.g., "I am feeling angry, frustrated, disappointed, sad..."). Express your emotions calmly in words or write them down.
- Practice stress reducing activities like going for a walk outside, listening to music, or breathing activities (e.g., breathe in even and deeper than normal for 5 seconds, breathe out for 5 seconds).
- Try to limit major life decisions as much as possible. Things like changing jobs, moving, or changes in your personal relationships can be stressful but can be even harder when you're recovering after a disaster.
- Get support (e.g., support group, counselling). Support can help you develop positive coping skills and help you understand that you're not alone in how you feel.



Tell your healthcare provider about changes in your physical health. Changes may be linked to your emotional well-being and the ability to cope after a disaster or emergency.

Family

A disaster or emergency can affect many areas of your life. It's common for you and your family members to have confusing and sometimes scary thoughts and feelings that come and go. As life starts to return to normal, these feelings and thoughts should start to fade. Knowing what to expect can help you and your family have a sense of hope, calm, safety, and well-being.



What do I need to think about?

Relationships can be strained when emotions are high. A breakdown in family and partner relationships can add to your family's stress, making it harder to work together to solve problems, make important decisions, and cope with new routines. This can sometimes lead to verbal, emotional, and physical abuse. **Abuse is never okay.** If you're experiencing abuse talk to a trusted friend, family member, or healthcare provider.

When homes are damaged or destroyed, families might need to move. This can cause more stress, money, and family problems. If you have to move out of your home, you may lose connection with family, friends, and community supports. This can decrease the support you would normally get from them and add to your stress.

What can help?

- Check-in with family members on a regular basis. Encourage, but don't force them to talk about how they're feeling. Accept their feelings without judging. Emotions come and go. Let them know it's okay to feel sad, upset, or distressed. But, it's not okay to be mean or hurt others.
- Answer questions calmly, reassuringly, and honestly. Give answers that your child will understand for their age and ability.
- Offer reassurance and comfort. Avoid telling them not to worry.

If your child is having trouble expressing their emotions in words, help them express their feelings through creativity (e.g., drawing, music).



- Try to model healthy and positive coping skills. Your child sees your emotions through your words, facial expressions, and actions. How you respond to stress can affect how your child reacts. Modeling calm and constructive reactions will help your child feel calmer and cope better. It's okay to have strong emotions. Name them (e.g., "I am feeling frustrated, sad, mad."). Talk about how you feel and how you're going to cope (e.g., deep breathing, positive thinking) so your child learns how to do the same.
- Spend time with family and friends. Engage in activities that you can do together (e.g., share meals, play games, go for a walk). If you can't spend time in person, stay connected through technology (e.g., phone, text, video chat).
- Let yourself smile or laugh. It's okay to laugh during stressful times, it can help relieve tension, relax your muscles, and may help you find solutions to problems.
- Practice gratitude. Make time to think and talk about things that you feel thankful for.
- Get help. Talk to friends, family, and neighbours. Connect to community supports, counselling centres, or phone help lines.



Work

What do I need to think about?

The loss of community businesses, business relocation, lay-offs, or reduced work hours can affect your income and lead to money problems. You might have to look for a new job or a second job.

There may be changes in your daily travel that can cause additional tension and stress. This can affect your ability to think clearly and work with others.



What can help?

- Contact your employer. Let your employer know about your situation. If necessary, make an appointment to speak to your supervisor in-person or if your company has one, contact your human resource department.
- Check your employee benefits to see what supports your employer provides.
- If your route or typical way of getting to work is not possible, try connecting with other co-workers to see if you can commute with one of them.

For business owners

If you own a business, develop a plan of action. Find and check all business, legal, and insurance papers. This will help you know your rights and responsibilities.

Make a list of the things you need to re-open your business. Look for possible relocation sites for your business. Make signs to post around the community to let customers know if and where you will re-open. Connect with your staff and exchange any new personal contact information.



Finances

What do I need to think about?

The cost of repair, recovery, and rebuilding can affect your budget, savings, pension, and retirement funds. Financial loss can make an already stressful situation harder. This can lead to angry or aggressive outbursts and fights or arguments with family members. You may even have feelings of anxiety, guilt, shame, or anger when you spend money.

What can help?

Make a list of your monthly income, expenses (e.g., monthly, quarterly, and yearly), and your debt. If you're having trouble making payments, contact your service providers (e.g., utilities, phone, credit card company), bank, or a free financial counselling service to get help.


When you connect with people and support agencies, remember they're there to work with you and give support. It's okay to express how you're feeling in a calm and respectful way. If you remain calm and clear, you'll find that others will be more understanding, likely to listen, and help you.

Government disaster assistance and recovery supports may be available in your area. For more information and to see if you qualify for support, go to:
www.alberta.ca/disaster-recovery.aspx



1-877-303-2642

Mental Health Help Line
Mental Health Support 24/7

 To order this resource go to:
<https://dol.datacm.com/>
Login ID: mentalhealthresources
Password: mh2016
Item Number: DR003

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