

Coping in Response to a Natural Disaster

Natural disasters can cause significant disruption to our way of life and, in worst case scenarios, be a source of trauma. These experiences can have a profound impact on our mental and physical health and leave us struggling with difficult thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to support yourself and your loved ones during these difficult times. Here are seven strategies to support your well-being in the aftermath of a natural disaster:

Remind yourself there is no “right way” to feel.

It is normal to experience heightened fear, anxiety, irritability, grief, or other strong emotions. It is common to experience distressing thoughts, confusion, or painful memories. You may also experience physiological responses, such as fatigue and difficulty sleeping.

Rely on your resources.

You don't have to reinvent the wheel. Remind yourself of the people and strategies that have helped you deal with stress in the past.

Connect with family, friends, and community.

Experiencing a life disrupting event can leave you feeling alone and disconnected. Reach out to your support system—connect with those you feel close to or with others who have had similar experiences.

Break down tasks into manageable steps.

If you find yourself overwhelmed by the number of problems or tasks you face, start by identifying your most pressing or important one. Then break that problem or task down into manageable steps. Tackle it one step at a time. Ask a friend or family member for help when you need it.

Take care of your body.

When possible, eat nourishing foods throughout your day, move your body (e.g., light stretching), and maintain a consistent sleep schedule.

Pay attention to your thinking.

Our thoughts have a powerful effect on how we feel. If you are feeling stuck, frustrated, or powerless, ask yourself: How accurate is this thought? What's the impact of this thought? What's a more helpful, empowering thought?

Be patient with yourself.

Be kind to yourself, seek support when you need it, and remind yourself that what you're experiencing is temporary and normal.