

The Emotional Response to Storms and Flooding

No one who lives through a disaster is untouched by the experience. Like other disasters, severe storms and flooding may cause emotional distress, as well as property damage. Disasters may threaten our sense of control and safety, and affect many aspects of our lives.

Disaster stress that is unrecognized or unmanaged may impact our physical and mental health. Dealing with the emotional consequences soon after a disaster may help reduce the possibility of long-term problems. Recognizing and handling stress properly may help you meet the challenges of recovering from a storm or flood and reclaim your sense of control and security.

This brochure addresses the impact of storms and flooding, as well as strategies for coping. Remember that you don't have to go it alone! There are several services listed to assist you in managing the emotional consequences of these events. Please feel free to reach out to learn more about what behavioral healthcare services are available as your community recovers from the recent storm and flood.

Many Ways to React... Many Ways to Cope

It is important to remember that there is no one correct way to react emotionally to storms and floods. Not everyone reacts the same way, and in fact, you may react in a variety of different ways even in the course of the same day. People get through the emotional challenges of a disaster in their own time and on their own terms.

The best predictor of how a person will react to a disaster is how he or she has reacted to other challenges in the past, and likewise, the best strategies for coping now are those strategies that have worked well in the past.

To help you manage the emotions associated with the storm and flood, use the coping mechanisms that are familiar and comfortable for you. Other ideas for coping are explored in this brochure and may be discussed with counselors and other caregivers.



Predicting and Preparing for Emotional Reactions

Not everyone will have an emotional reaction to storms or floods. Those who do will react in their own unique way. Some of the more typical emotional reactions may include:

- Recurring dreams or nightmares about the storms or floods
- Trouble concentrating or remembering things
- Feeling numb, withdrawn or disconnected
- Having bursts of anger or intense irritability
- Persistent physical symptoms (i.e. headaches, digestive problems, muscle tension, etc.)
- Being overprotective of your family's safety
- Avoiding reminders of the storm or flood
- Being tearful or crying for no apparent reason

Techniques for Managing Stress and Anxiety

Here are some useful suggestions for coping with the stress and anxiety stemming from storms and flooding:

- Limit your exposure to graphic news stories
- Get accurate, timely information from credible sources
- Seek out and follow the experts' advice
- Educate yourself about the specific hazards
- Try to maintain your normal daily routine
- Exercise, eat well and rest
- Stay busy -- physically and mentally
- Communicate with friends, family and supporters
- Use spirituality and your personal beliefs
- Keep a sense of humor
- Express yourself through writing, poetry, drawing, etc.
- Talk and share your feelings with others

Staying Connected

Often the best source of assistance in dealing with the emotional aspect of emergencies is found in each other. If you are anxious about the storm or flooding, talk to someone you love or trust. This may be a family member, friend, clergy member or teacher. Just don't keep your fears to yourself.

If you notice that a loved one, friend or co-worker's behavior has substantially changed, reach out and ask how he or she is doing. Make some time to talk, when it is convenient for both of you, and follow up later on. Watching out for each other demonstrates that you care and may be comforting to both of you.

If you or someone that you know is having an acute emotional reaction that does not subside over the period of a few days, it may be best to seek the assistance of a medical or mental health professional.

You are not alone...
Call the toll-free helpline at
877-294-HELP (4357)
TTY: 877-294-4356



BARNABAS HEALTH
Institute for Prevention



Managing the Emotional Consequences of Storms and Flooding

Understanding the Impact and Exploring Strategies for Coping with Weather Emergencies

This project is sponsored by the New Jersey Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Disaster and Terrorism Branch, through a Federal Emergency Management Agency grant, in partnership with Barnabas Health Institute for Prevention.

Toll Free Helpline:
877-294-HELP (4357)
TTY: 877-294-4356

www.disastermentalhealthnj.com