

*Emotional Health Issues
for Victims & People
affected by Disaster*

Help Your Community

Listen when you can to those who are having problems. Share your feelings about the disaster and be tolerant of the irritability and short tempers others show — everyone is stressed at this time. Share information on available assistance and resources.

IF ANY OF YOUR DISASTER REACTIONS ARE SEVERE, OR PERSISTANT, WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO SEEK HELP FOR YOURSELF, YOUR CHILD, OR YOUR FAMILY MEMBER.

*Sometimes we
all need someone to lean
on for a short while.*

Local ESS contact:

Disasters affect people in many ways. In some disaster situations it may mean loss of loved ones, including relatives, friends, neighbours, or family pets. In others, it means loss of home and property, furnishings, and important or cherished belongings. Sometimes it means starting over with a new home or business. The emotional effects of loss and disruption may show up immediately or may appear many months later.

It is very important to understand that there is a natural grieving process following any loss and that a disaster of any size will cause unusual and unwanted stress in those attempting to reconstruct their lives. These are normal reactions.



**The Heart of
Disaster Response**



**Emergency Social Services Program
Ministry of Human Resources**

Phone toll free within B.C. **1 800 585-9559**



Information provided courtesy of American Red Cross



**PEOPLE
AFFECTED
BY DISASTERS**

Emotional Health Issues



**The Heart of
Disaster Response**

Emotional health issues for People Affected by Disasters

Typical first reactions

Disbelief and shock•Disorientation and numbness•Fear•Reluctance to abandon property•Problems with concentration or memory•Difficulty in making decisions•Need for information•Wanting to help other disaster victims.

Some later responses

Frustration and anxiety•Anger and suspicion•Moodiness and irritability•Apathy and depression•Crying for no apparent reason•Fatigue, low energy•Change in appetite•Digestive problems•Difficulty in sleeping•Headaches•Feelings of powerlessness and of being overwhelmed•Guilt over being unable to prevent the disaster•Disappointment with, and rejection of, outside help•Isolation from family, friends, or social activities•Domestic violence.

Effects on children

A return to earlier behaviour, (thumb sucking or bed wetting)•Clinging to parents, crying and screaming•Reluctance to go to bed•Nightmares•Fantasies that the disaster never happened. •Refusal to attend school•Problems at school•Inability to concentrate•Withdrawal, immobility.

If you or your family experience any of these reactions, realize that they are normal. If, however, they last more than a month or become severe, it is recommended that you seek professional help through your family doctor, local clergy or community organization.

What you can do after the initial crisis

Recognize your own feelings and talk to others about them; this will help relieve your stress and help you realize that your feelings are shared by other victims.

*Accept help from others in the spirit in which it is given.
Wouldn't you help them?
Whenever possible, take time off and do something you enjoy.
Get enough rest. Get as much physical activity as possible, such as running or walking.
Give someone a hug; touching is very important.*

Help For Your Children

Talk to your children about their feelings and your feelings. You will find that many feelings are shared, regardless of age.

Encourage your children to draw pictures of the disaster. This will help you understand how they view what happened.

Talk with your children about what happened, providing factual information that they can understand. Talk about your family's preparedness, including the role your children can take.

Reassure your children that you and they are safe. Repeat this assurance as often as necessary.

Hold your children. Touch provides extra reassurance that someone is there for them. Spend extra time with them, especially at bedtime.

Relax rules, and praise and recognize responsible behaviour.

Work closely with teachers, child-care givers, baby sitters and others who may not understand how the disaster has affected your children.

