

TRAUMA

Helping people who experience trauma because of a natural disaster does not require specialized training but requires us to be informed. Below you will find some essential tips for helping people cope with trauma after a natural disaster.

1

Interactions should be compassionate, calm, and helpful. When working with people who experience trauma, it's important to listen, speak calmly, and keep an open posture. Recognize individuals may be in shock, angry, crying, or fearful. People may be unable to verbalize needs.

2

Prioritize physical safety and basic needs. Prioritize safety and shelter can reduce stress and restore a sense of normalcy. Be practical and connect individuals with up-to-date information and resources. Practical efforts can include providing the following:

- **Food:** undamaged, nonperishable items
- **Water:** bottled water
- **Clothing:** dry clothing, including socks, shoes, pants, a shirt, and a jacket or coat
- **Shelter:** shelter in an undamaged or affected structure
- **Safety:** to prevent further injury or loss of life. Discourage re-entering disaster areas.
- **Ask:** What else do they need?

3

Look for signs of trauma and provide support. Individuals might feel helpless and be unable to problem solve or follow simple directions. They may also suddenly become overwhelmed with emotion. Simple support can include:

- Tell them you care about them.
- Actively listen and give information.
- Connect them with family, friends, and other resources.
- Provide safety and shelter.
- Empathize, but avoid statements like "I understand what you are going through."
- DO NOT make promises such as, "We will find everyone," or "We will recover what you lost."
- DO NOT ask or try to force someone to share their experience or story, which can retraumatize them.

4

Give information about coping and connect with professional helpers. By doing so, you help deactivate the survival system and can help restore a sense of calm. Information about coping can include tips on caring for themselves and others who experience a natural disaster. These include:

- **Encouraging and helping restore routine:** Restoring routine provides a sense of empowerment and normalcy. Routines can include eating, sleeping, and waking up at the same time each day. Keep tasks simple.
- **Encourage acknowledgement of emotions:** It is normal to feel angry, sad, tired, helpless, and worried. Making room for painful emotions is OK.
- **Remain flexible:** After a natural disaster, changes occur. We can remain flexible. We help people differentiate between controllable and uncontrollable situations.
- **Seek professional help:** It is important to connect people experiencing trauma after a natural disaster to professional helpers like doctors, crisis responders, counselors, or nurses.

- Panic attacks
- Substance misuse
- Expressing feelings of hopelessness
- Social isolation
- Suicidal behaviors

Crisis can occur at any time after a traumatic event, but sometimes one to three months afterward.



Watch for Signs of Crisis

For more resources or to talk with a crisis specialist:



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