

# Maintain a Healthy State of Mind

High School Students



Disasters like hurricanes; tsunamis; the September 11, 2001, attacks; and school shootings may be upsetting. They may cause people to question their own safety, the safety of their families and friends, and what is right and wrong. These types of questions are natural.

The following information can help you prepare and cope more easily with disasters. It describes common feelings and reactions you may have. It also suggests things you can do to get ready. This knowledge can reduce your fear and help you prepare for, withstand and bounce back from these kinds of events.

## What can I do before a disaster happens?

It makes sense to prepare for disasters just as you might for any major event. As a teenager you can:

- Talk about disasters with your parents. Identify ways that you have responded to stressful events in the past that were useful.
- Help your parents make a [plan](#) and prepare a [disaster supplies kit](#). Decide how to stay in touch with them in an emergency situation. (Read the American Red Cross publication "[Preparing for Disaster](#)" for the details.)
- Learn about your school's and town's preparedness plans. Contact your [local emergency management agency](#).
- Learn more about how you react to stress and ways to handle it.



## How might I react to a disaster?

People react differently to things that are stressful, and nearly everyone is able to work through problems and pain. Most people recover (in weeks or months) from the following kinds of natural reactions to a terrible event:

- Shock, numbness and disbelief.
- Difficulty concentrating on school work, your job, friends, or family.
- Eating too much or too little.
- Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep. Nightmares.
- Thinking too much about what happened.
- Being afraid for your safety and the safety of your family, friends, police, and firefighters.

- Feeling sad about the people who were injured or died.
- Having upsetting thoughts or pictures in your mind of what happened. They can pop into your head, or come when you're reminded of the painful event.
- Anger, bad temper, and not trusting others. You might argue and get into fights.
- Feeling guilty or helpless.
- Feeling restless-kind of uneasy or worried.
- Headaches, stomachaches, skin rashes, body pains. and more severe allergic reactions.

## **If a disaster happens, what can I do to get through it okay?**

- It's a good idea to take care of yourself physically, especially when under increased stress, such as after a disaster. Drinking enough water, eating right, exercising, getting plenty of rest, and returning to a regular routine should help you feel better.
- Most people find that it helps to talk about what happened and how it makes them feel. If you feel like talking, it's a good idea to find friends, family, or other people you trust who have lived through the same kinds of things and talk to them.
- It also helps if you can find meaning in what has happened.
- Pay attention to the useful ways that you handled things. (Atl: give yourself credit for the different ways that helped you to handle the situation.)

## **How will I know if I need help to cope with what I'm feeling?**

It's possible to try these ways to feel better and still not be able to get back to your regular routine, or feel as good as you used to. You might want to see a counselor if—after several or more weeks—you:

- Suffer so much or for so long you are not sure you can stand it.
- Can't think clearly or do your school work.
- Can't handle helping out in your family (like caring for brothers or sisters, or doing chores).
- Are doing yourself injury or disease by:
  - Drinking or smoking more than you usually do
  - Using street drugs to help feel better or to escape your daily life.
  - Using too much or too little prescribed medication.
  - Speeding or driving carelessly
  - Threatening, hurting, or fighting people.
- Are still have eating or sleeping problems, or are getting sick from stress.
- Withdraw from other people, such as close friends or family.
- Feel like hurting yourself or others.

## **How would I get outside help?**

Asking for support may feel uncomfortable, but seeking the assistance you need can really help. You can start by talking to one or more of these people:

- Your family doctor or health care provider.
- A school counselor or teacher.
- A pastoral care counselor.
- A trained mental health professional.
- Your community health center or the local mental health clinic.
- Mental health groups (found on the Internet or in the phone book).

## What should I do if a disaster or terrorist attack occurs?

If you are prepared, you may find it easier to take appropriate action, such as:

- Stay informed and follow official instructions to protect yourself and your family.
- Use the plan you and your family developed. Use those items that will help you distract yourself from the disaster while it is happening.
- Find trusted, safe sources of information.
- Limit how much TV and images you see of the disaster.
- Remind yourself that feelings of upset will fade and disappear.
- Be patient, especially with yourself. Find time to relax. Find a place to go where you feel safe so you can figure out how you're feeling and what you want to do.
- Return to your regular routine (like school, sports, part-time job, etc.) as soon as possible.
- Keep up your exercise and good health habits. Get plenty of rest and drink plenty of water.
- Stay in touch with friends, family, church activities, neighbors, etc.
- Talk about your thoughts and feelings with people you trust.
- Spend time with family and people you like.
- Ask for help when you need it.

## Check out these online resources

For further information about how to cope with disasters and terrorism, visit the following:

- [American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry](#)
- [American Psychiatric Association](#)
- [American Red Cross](#)
- [Federal Emergency Management Agency](#)
- [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)
- [National Mental Health Association](#)
- [National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center](#)
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)
- [U.S. Department of Homeland Security](#)



*This information is provided by the American Red Cross and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).*