

How to cope emotionally

People react to emergencies in many ways. You need to understand that your emotional reactions may change.

Natural Reactions

During or following the emergency you may experience a range of physical, behavioural and emotional reactions. This is common and normal.

Reactions may include:

- shock and disbelief, or increased focus
- fear and anxiety, including shaking, nausea, diarrhoea and difficulty in breathing
- helplessness, or hope/strength
- guilt or shame
- horror, and
- depression, anger and grief

These reactions may change, be delayed, or may not occur – everyone is different.

What to Do

Keeping calm may help to control your fear and actions. Remember that someone may need your help and that you may also need help. If you are feeling particularly anxious or frightened, follow this advice:

- keep your family together wherever possible
- shelter and safety are a priority in the coming hours and days
- comfort each other and support those who are with you or have come together during or after the emergency – everyone will react differently
- focus on your feelings and thoughts – talk calmly about them with family or friends who you can easily talk with
- focus on what practical tasks you and your family can do – practical actions are helpful and will lessen anxiety
- monitor information from emergency services by listening to your radio or television – **DO NOT** continuously watch disturbing footage on television. If necessary, take turns listening to the news with other adult members of your family or household
- if separated from family members, find out where they are and arrange to reunite with them when it is safe to do so; and

- when the danger has passed, check your neighbours are safe.

Helping Children

After an emergency, children are often afraid that the event will happen again, someone will get hurt or injured, they will be separated from the family, or that they will be left alone. Children may also appear to be coping better than they are.

Children are generally resilient. To help children cope:

- comfort and reassure them
- keep them with you
- explain what is happening and what they may be feeling
- encourage them to talk, draw and play about what happened, and respond simply and clearly to their questions
- let them help
- avoid exposure to excessive television replays of events; and
- provide normal activities such as school and shared family activities as soon as possible, when safety is assured.

Positive actions and attitudes, and comforting yourself and others, will help adults, families and children deal with emergencies. However, should feelings become too intense or persistent after the emergency, consult your local health service who have professionals who can help you deal with these normal reactions to an emergency.