

# Dealing With the Effects of Social Disruption

## Supporting Family, Friends and Co-workers

Sometimes the best cure for our feelings of isolation and life disruption is to reach out to support someone else.

Supporting family, friends and co-workers mostly means being a good, empathetic listener.

Parents will be a source of support for their kids, managers to their staff, and family and friends to each other. Whether communicating with an adult or a child, acknowledge the awful reality and permit expression of feelings. When appropriate, try to put the catastrophe into perspective with reminders of how rare and unusual the traumatic events are and how the best law-enforcement, medical and diplomatic leaders in the world are vigorously attacking the crisis.

Be honest with yourself and those around you. You and your friends and family may be experiencing distress that interferes with your well-being and ability to cope with the normal demands of life. Review the list of common reactions below.

## Symptoms of Distress

1. Emotional withdrawal from friends and family
2. Confusion, disorientation or an unusually short attention span
3. Diminished ability to solve problems
4. Interruption of normal eating or sleeping habits, or nightmares
5. An abrupt change in regular daily activities
6. Increased alcohol consumption
7. Changes in speech patterns
8. Antisocial acts

People in distress also sometimes experience heightened emotions of fear, guilt, anxiety, denial, depression and anger, as well as physical fatigue, chest pains, elevated blood pressure, rapid heart rate, sweating and tremors.

## How to Cope

First, understand that such reactions to distress are normal and will likely subside over time. People usually go through the predictable stages of coping with distress or grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and, finally, acceptance.

There are ways you can reduce the impact of these events on your health and well-being. To help the healing process along, consider the following:

- **Take care of yourself.** You cannot help others if your own perspective is out of balance. A crisis leaves us all with less confidence and control, and it is all the more important to control what we can.
- **Get in touch with how you give meaning to life.** Draw on your spiritual faith and personal values to remind you of the larger perspective. Take a few minutes every day to reflect on the positive aspects of your life.
- **Understand that everything will not immediately go back to normal** as it was before, but look for the evidence that you are able to continue forward with life, work and love despite the distress.
- **Try to eat regular, healthy meals.** Your body needs essential nutrients during stressful times, so not feeding it enough or overindulging in sweets or fats can throw your body off balance. If your body is off balance, your emotions may be too.
- **It is very important in stressful times to maintain healthy sleep patterns.** Try not to sleep too much or too little. Your energy level and emotional state could be adversely affected by changes in your sleep behavior.
- **If you exercise, try to get back into your normal routine.** Because exercise patterns are linked directly to sleep patterns and caloric intake needs, getting your body back on track will improve your ability to cope with stress. In addition, chemicals released in the brain during exercise have been shown to relieve stress.
- **Donate to charity or support your community in another safe manner.** Whether you make this a one-time effort to do your part or decide to make it a regular activity, doing something good for your community is a great way to deal with stress and improve the quality of life for yourself and others.

The landscape of safety can become permanently altered by a tragedy. It shakes up all of us to some degree. Now is the time to assure safety, to support others and to take care of yourself. The coming days and weeks will provide numerous opportunities to memorialize and learn from a crisis.