

# STEP ONE: TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY



Disasters can cause emotional and physical reactions. Most people caught in a disaster usually feel confused and may not “act like themselves” for awhile. They may tremble or feel numb. Immediately after the disaster, it is common to feel bewildered, shocked, and relieved to be alive. That’s why it’s important to take good care of yourself and your family in the days and weeks ahead. You should try to:

- Rest often and eat well.
- Keep a manageable schedule. Make a list and do one job at a time. Decide what needs to be done right away and defer the rest until a less stressful time.
- Get as much physical activity as possible.
- Accept help from others – wouldn’t you help them? Ask for help and advice on practical matters relating to your finances, your job or other concerns.
- Give someone a hug – touching is very important.
- Think about the coping skills you have used at other difficult times, and use them now.
- Focus on positive memories.

## Warning signs of stress:

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|--|-----------------------------------|
| • Short tempers, frequent arguments    | • Difficulty sleeping, bad dreams |
| • Greater consumption of alcohol       | • Aches, pains, stomach problems  |
| • Getting upset over minor irritations | • Apathy, loss of concentration   |
|  | • Depression                      |

It’s important to be aware of your children’s reactions. They might start thumb-sucking or bed-wetting, become clingy or fearful. Children might withdraw and try to be brave, when they really

need your reassurance. To get yourself and your family back on track, talk about what’s happened. Here are some suggestions:

- Encourage children to express themselves. They may want to do this by drawing or playing instead of talking.
- Take their fears seriously, reassure them and give them additional attention. Admit to them that you also felt afraid and may still be experiencing some feelings of fear or anxiety, but that with time and possibly some outside help you will work it out together.
- Tell children what you know about the situation. Be honest but gentle. Talk to them about the disaster.
- Keep children with you whenever it is possible to do so, even if it seems easier to look for housing or help on your own. At a time like this, it’s important for the the whole family to stay together.
- Expect regressive behaviour and be tolerant of it.
- Give them a real task to do, something that gets the family back on its feet, and let them help in planning something to remember the loss.
- Watch for health problems and signs of stress, such as nightmares and depression, in you or your family. Seek help if you need it. Many organizations in your community can provide counselling and other supports.
- Continue with regular routines (teeth brushing, bed time stories) and chores (picking out their own clothes to wear, etc.).
- Avoid or minimize watching news reports of frightening events.

Recognize that when you suffer a loss, you may grieve – over the loss of personal treasures, your home, your security, a pet. You may feel angry. You may not sleep or eat well. These are normal grief reactions. Give yourself and your family permission to grieve and time to heal.