

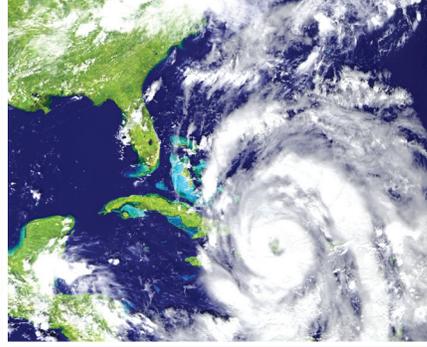
Student Assistance Program

Promoting a Healthy Well-Being for You and Your Family



Coping After a Natural Disaster

Natural disasters can be traumatic for families. The devastation to a familiar environment such as your home can be long lasting and distressing. Often an entire community is impacted, further undermining a family's sense of security and normalcy. Natural disasters present unique issues and coping challenges, including the need to relocate when homes and/or communities have been destroyed. Children, senior citizens, people with access or functional needs, and people for whom English is not their first language are especially at risk. Children may become afraid, and some elderly people may seem disoriented at first. People with access or functional needs may require additional assistance.



BayCare Student Assistance Program Can Help

At BayCare Student Assistance Program (SAP), our trained staff can help you with any stress or anxiety you may be experiencing and refer you to a therapist in your area. BayCare SAP is available to assist you 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Our service is confidential and free to students. You can contact us toll free at (800) 878-5470, email us at BayCareSAP@baycare.org, or through our website at BayCare.org/SAP.

Taking Care of Your Own Needs

Take time for yourself and try to deal with your own reactions to the situation as fully as possible. You will be better able to help your children, and others, if you are coping well. Talk to other adults such as family, friends, counselors, or other supportive people. It is important not to dwell on your fears or anxiety by yourself. Sharing feelings with others often makes people feel more connected and secure.

Easing Stress

Talk to someone and seek professional help for disaster-related stress. BayCare's Student Assistance Program (SAP) is available 24/7/365 at (800) 878-5470 or BayCareSAP@baycare.org.

- Talk with someone about your feelings - anger, sorrow and other emotions - even though it may be difficult.
- Seek help from professional counselors who deal with post-disaster stress.
- Do not hold yourself responsible for the disastrous event or be frustrated because you feel you cannot help directly in the rescue work.
- Take steps to promote your own physical and emotional healing by healthy eating, rest, exercise, relaxation, and meditation.
- Maintain a normal family and daily routine, limiting demanding responsibilities on yourself and your family.
- Spend time with family and friends.
- Participate in memorials.
- Use existing support groups of family, friends, and religious institutions.

Helping Children Cope

For many children, reactions to disasters are brief and represent normal reactions to "abnormal events." Over time, children should be able to cope with the help of parents and other caring adults. A smaller number of children can be at risk for more enduring psychological distress as a result of three major risk factors:

- Direct exposure to the disaster, such as being evacuated, observing injuries or death of others, or experiencing injury along with fearing one's life is in danger.
- Feelings of stress and confusion related to the death or serious injury of family and friends.
- Ongoing stress from the secondary effects of disaster, such as temporarily living elsewhere, loss of friends and social networks, loss of personal property, parental unemployment, and costs incurred during recovery to return the family to pre-disaster life and living conditions.

Recognize Signs of Disaster-Related Stress

When adults have the following signs, they might need crisis counseling or stress management assistance:

- Difficulty communicating thoughts
- Difficulty sleeping
- Difficulty maintaining balance in their lives
- Increased use of drugs/alcohol
- Headaches/stomach problems
- Tunnel vision/muffled hearing
- Colds or flu-like symptoms
- Disorientation or confusion
- Difficulty concentrating
- Reluctance to leave home
- Depression, sadness
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Mood swings and easy bouts of crying
- Overwhelming guilt and self-doubt

Understand Disaster Events

- Understand the individual effects of a disaster.
- Everyone who sees or experiences a disaster is affected by it in some way.
- It is normal to feel anxious about your own safety and that of your family and close friends.
- Profound sadness, grief, and anger are normal reactions to an abnormal event.
- Acknowledging your feelings helps you recover.
- Focusing on your strengths and abilities helps you heal.
- Accepting help from community programs and resources is healthy.
- Everyone has different needs and different ways of coping.

Information in this publication is for general purposes only and is not intended to replace the counsel or advice of a qualified health or legal professional.

