

Helping yourself after a disaster

Recovering after a disaster doesn't mean that you forget about it. Recovery means becoming less upset when you remember the event, and having more confidence in your ability to cope as time goes on.

The following strategies may help you recover:

1. Acknowledge your experience

- a. You have been through a hard time. Many people will have an emotional reaction. Give yourself permission to feel the way you do.
- b. Give yourself time to re-think. A traumatic event can affect the way you see the world, your life, your goals, and your relationships.

2. Take care of yourself

- a. Rest and relax. You need time to replenish.
- a. Get regular exercise and eat regular, well-balanced meals. Good physical health supports good mental health.
- a. Cut back on stimulants like tea, coffee, chocolate, soft drink, and cigarettes. If your body is feeling tense, stimulants will only add to this feeling.
- a. Try to avoid using drugs or alcohol to cope as these can lead to more problems.
- a. Self-soothe through the five senses: pleasant sounds, sights, smells, tastes and sensations that help you to wind down, relax and feel settled.

3. Have a routine and structure where possible

- a. Structure your days and try to schedule at least one enjoyable activity each day.
- b. Try making a timetable for each day, including some exercise, some work, and some relaxation.
- c. Get back into your normal routine as soon as possible, but take it easy, and do it bit by bit.

Strategies to help you recover (continued)

4. Ask for help and stay connected

- a. Spend time with people you care about, even if you don't want to talk about what happened.
- b. Sometimes you will want to be alone, and that's OK too, but don't become too isolated.
- c. Talk about your feelings to other people who will understand, if and when you feel able to do so.
- d. Write about your feelings if you feel that you can't talk to others about them.

5. Don't over do it

- a. Tackle the things that need to be done a bit at a time, and count each success.
- b. Don't do activities or work to avoid thinking about or remembering what happened.
- c. Stay informed by watching the news or reading the newspaper, but limit exposure to what you really need.
- d. Make as many small daily decisions as possible - such as what you will eat or what you will do to relax - as this can help you to feel more in control of your life.
- e. Avoid making important life decisions such as moving house or changing jobs.

If you've tried these strategies and things still aren't getting better after three or four weeks, or if you are having trouble coping, talk to your doctor or mental health professional about getting some professional support to help you feel better.

Further information and support

- Download a copy of **Recovery after trauma – A guide for people with posttraumatic stress disorder** from www.phoenixaustralia.org.
- Talk to your doctor about your concerns and ask about a Medicare Mental Health Plan if you feel you could benefit from some professional support.
- If you are in immediate distress, and cannot see your doctor right away, call Lifeline on 13 11 14.
- If you or someone you know is at immediate risk, call 000.