

MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION IN TEXAS

THERE IS LIFE AFTER THE STORM

HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE COPE AFTER A DISASTER

A disaster or traumatic event like a hurricane or flood is something that many people, especially young people, never forget. They are affected in different ways. Some are more affected than others, and their individual reactions may differ quite a bit. Life history, personality, age and a person's experiences during and after an event all play a role in how a person responds.

Strong Feelings and Emotions Are Normal

For many young people, a scary or life threatening event such as a hurricane or flood can bring on strong feelings and mixed emotions. This is normal for anyone of any age who has seen, heard about or lived through, a natural disaster or other distressing event.

Not all young people that experience disaster-related trauma react in the same way or at the same time. Some young people are able to deal with the events of the disaster and go on with their lives. Some have reactions right away and others may seem fine for weeks or months, then suddenly break down in emotion.

Crying, anger, guilt, headaches, stomachaches, trouble concentrating, nightmares, flashbacks or disturbing thoughts are all common feelings and emotions you may have after a traumatic ordeal.

Other normal reactions you may have include:

- ◆ Trouble having friendships
- ◆ Problems in school (Poor grades, behavior or attitude)
- ◆ Difficulty concentrating
- ◆ Worries about dying at an early age
- ◆ Feelings of helplessness or guilt
- ◆ Jittery or jumpy feelings
- ◆ No interest in doing fun or enjoyable activities
- ◆ Aggressive, mean, or even violent behavior
- ◆ Trouble being in certain places or situations that bring back memories
- ◆ Problems with reality; pretending that the event did not happen

If these or other common, stress-related symptoms last for several months and you are not feeling any better you may have what is called **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD**.

About Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

PTSD is a set of symptoms that occur after a person has seen, heard about or lived through, a disaster or frightening event. People of all ages can experience PTSD. Approximately three million children and young people are diagnosed with PTSD each year. For most people, stress reactions usually lessen or go away after a few weeks, but when the symptoms are more severe or interfere with a person's everyday activities, you should get help to cope with your feelings. Only a doctor or mental health professional can determine if you have PTSD.



PTSD is a treatable illness.

Many times PTSD is treated with **Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy**, a form of therapy that shows you how to calm your mind and body so you can feel better, think more clearly, and make better decisions. It also teaches you how certain thinking patterns cause your symptoms and make you feel anxious, depressed, or angry or even cause you to make poor choices. In some cases, you may receive a combination of medication and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy to treat and help reduce your symptoms.



How Young People Can Help Themselves Cope

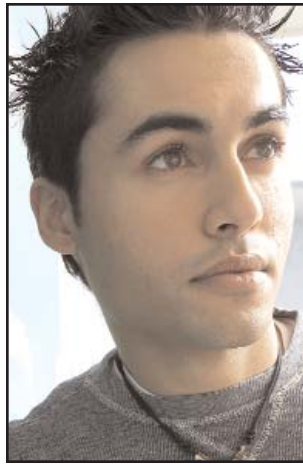
If you are a young person who is coping with trauma, in the long run, it is best that you are honest about your feelings and to allow yourself time to acknowledge your feelings.

Although it may be hard to begin talking with someone about your sorrow, anger, and other emotions, it is important to realize that your life can and will return to normal.

While you will always remember the event, the symptoms and painful feelings will decrease as time passes. You will come to understand that, in learning to cope with tragedy, you have become stronger, more adaptable, more self-reliant.

Who Can Help You Cope and Feel Better

Working through your feelings after a disaster is a normal part of coping with what you have experienced. You do not have to deal with these emotions and feelings alone. There are people who want to help you get through this challenging time.



You may feel most comfortable talking about your feelings with a parent or guardian, teacher, religious leader, school counselor, social worker, doctor, mental health professional, or another adult you trust. The important thing is that you have someone you trust to confide in about your thoughts and feelings. They may give you the support you need to feel better so you can get your life on a more satisfying track.



Information in this brochure is adapted from materials by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Agency, and the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder



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HELPFUL RESOURCES AND INFORMATION FOR THE FAMILY

FOR LOCAL AND TEXAS RESOURCES

Mental Health Association in Texas
<http://www.mhatexas.org>

Austin Child Guidance Center
www.austinchildguidance.org
(512) 451-2242

Capitol Area Mental Health Center
(512) 302-1000

United Way Capitol Area
<http://www.unitedwaycapitalarea.org/>
Dial 211

Red Cross-Central Texas
<http://www.centex.redcross.org/>

Texas Department of State Health Services
<http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/>
(800) 252-8154

Texas Council of Community Mental Health Mental Retardation Centers, Inc.
<http://www.txcouncil.com/centers.html>

Austin Travis County MHMR Center
<http://www.atcmhmr.com/>
(512) 447-4141 INFORMATION
(512) 472-4357 (472-HELP) CRISIS LINE

NATIONAL RESOURCES

American Red Cross
<http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster>

Anxiety Disorders Association of America
<http://www.adaa.org/index.cfm>

FEMA for Kids
www.fema.gov/kids/

National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (NCPTSD)
<http://www.ncptsd.org/>

National Institute on Mental Health (NIMH)
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/>

National Mental Health Association
<http://www.nmha.org/>
(800) 969-NMHA (6642) INFORMATION
(800) SUICIDE (784-2433) CRISIS LINE

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>
(800) 273-TALK (8255)

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Alliance
<http://www.ptsdalliance.org/>
(877) 507-PTSD

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Agency (SAMHSA)
<http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/>