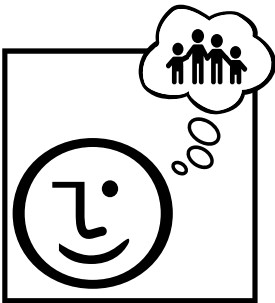


ESP FOCUS

Mental Health



The damage and disruption of natural disasters like earthquakes and floods can rattle nerves of adults and children. The stress, fear, and grief people experience when they witness violence, crime, or tragic accidents are even more powerful. Terrorists count on this natural reaction to sudden and undeserved attacks on innocent people.

It is important to remember that most terrorist attacks, even those involving weapons of mass destruction, are limited in the area in which they cause damage. In the unlikely event that a city or town is the target of a terrorist attack, the odds that one would be in the location of that attack and sustain physical injury are small.

However, the likelihood of being affected psychologically by such an attack is much greater. This is because we are used to feeling safe and protected. Our natural reaction to events like terrorist attacks or school shootings is shock and astonishment. "How could it happen here?" we wonder.

The psychological impact of a disaster event may have both short-term (Acute Stress Disorder, or ASD) and long-term (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD) consequences.

Symptoms of ASD typically occur up to one month following the event and may include:

- Numbness and avoidance—avoiding reminders of the disaster/ avoiding discussions of the event.
- Flashbacks and re-experiencing—this may occur in the form of nightmares or incessant talking about the event.
- Hyper vigilance—a person may be "jumpy", easily upset, or exhibit symptoms of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD).
- Disassociate experiences—those experienced in the 'third person' (observing oneself from the outside). Memory may be impaired; events sometimes seem 'unreal'.

PTSD symptoms are similar to those of ASD but occur later—usually developing within 3 months of the event. However, symptoms may not begin until years after the event. One may also experience emotional numbness, sleep disturbance, depression, intense guilt and anxiety.

Our best protection against the psychological effects of living in an era of terrorism is in our relationships—family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, circles of worship and creative interests. We also have direct control over the amount of exposure we allow ourselves, and our children to the media coverage of terrorist incidents. Repeated images of the events can create haunting reminders. This focus on the event and its aftermath can hold us back from psychological recovery.

TAKE ACTION

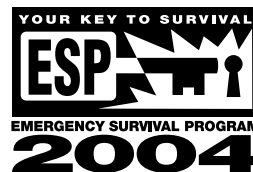
On the reverse side of this sheet you will find steps to help you and your family regain your sense of control and give you peace of mind in any emergency, even a terrorist attack.

LEARN MORE

Knowledge is power. The more you understand about potential emergencies, the better you can respond if they occur.

CHECK THESE WEBSITES

- www.nimh.nih.gov/anxiety/anxietymenu.cfm (National Institute of Mental Health)
- www.redcross.org (American Red Cross)
- www.dmh.ca.gov (Department of Mental Health)
- www.cert-la.com/education/SpecialConsiderations.htm (Community Emergency Response Team)



D E C E M B E R

REACTIONS TO EMOTIONAL TRAUMA

Generally, children are most afraid that:

- The event will happen again.
- Someone will be injured or killed.
- They will be separated from the family.
- They will be left alone.

Children 5 Years of age and younger

- Preschoolers are especially vulnerable to changes in routine and the disruption of previously secure environments. Because they generally lack the verbal and conceptual skills necessary to cope effectively with sudden stress by themselves, they are dependent on family members for comfort.
 - Re-establish comforting routines.
 - Provide opportunities for nonverbal and verbal expression of the child's feelings.
 - Provide lots of reassurance.

Children 6 to 11 years old

- Regressive behaviors are especially common in this age group. Children may become more withdrawn and/or more aggressive. They may be particularly affected by the loss of prized objects or pets.
 - Encourage children to talk about and play-act their experiences.
 - Resume normal functions as soon as possible, but relax your expectations.

Young teens 12 to 14 years old

- Peer reactions are very important to this group. They need acceptance from their friends and need to feel that their feelings and fears are normal. Anxiety and tension may be shown through aggression, rebellion, withdrawal, or attention seeking behavior. "Survivor's guilt" may emerge at this age.
 - Group discussions with peers and adults are effective in reducing the sense of isolation and in normalizing child's feelings.
 - Resumption of group activities in routines and involvement in physical activities may be helpful in reducing tension.

Teens 15 to 18 years old

- Teenagers in this age group may resent disruption of social activities and contacts and may be frustrated by the inability to assume full adult responsibilities in community efforts. Frustrations, anger or guilt may be shown in irresponsible, even delinquent, behavior.
 - Teens should be encouraged to maintain contacts with friends and to resume athletic and social activities.
 - Group discussions are helpful in normalizing feelings.
 - Teens should be encouraged to participate in community rehabilitation efforts.

Adults

- Adults often feel responsible for the safety of their families. The sense of increased responsibility, in addition to normal feelings of fear and anxiety, is to be expected. Acknowledging your feelings, stress, and possible burnout is the first step in feeling better.
 - Be patient with yourself and others.
 - Take care of yourself physically; good diet, adequate sleep, rest and exercise.
 - If needed, speak with a stress or crisis management counselor.

The Elderly

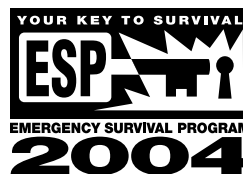
- Loss of control is a common feeling during a disaster. This is particularly true for the elderly, who may already feel a sense of loss because of physical limitations. They may also be more isolated and alone. Any disturbance heightens feelings of vulnerability and isolation.
 - Talk openly about feelings of fear, anxiety and irritability.
 - If confusion is a problem, orient the older adult to the environment by frequent references to the date, time, and surroundings.
 - Give additional attention and reassurance.
 - Encourage contact with friends and relatives.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Minimize exposure to repeated images.
- Keep the family together.
- Calmly and firmly explain the situation.
- Encourage everyone to talk.
- Include children and teens in recovery activities.
- Seek professional help if you feel you need it.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

- Reassurance is extremely important.
- Communicate to others a sense of safety, control, and balance.
- Limit time spent on repeated exposure to TV, radio, and Internet viewing of the incident.
- Resume normal activities as soon as possible.
- Rehearse safety measures that may be taken to give family members a sense of control.



This focus sheet is produced as part of the Emergency Survival Program (ESP). ESP is an awareness campaign designed to increase home, neighborhood, business and school emergency preparedness. ESP was developed by the County of Los Angeles. The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) and representatives from Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Mono, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, and Ventura counties, Southern California Edison, the Southern California Earthquake Center and the American Red Cross assist in the development of campaign materials and coordination of the campaign.