



AFTER A DISASTER

Posttraumatic stress reaction is a normal response to a distressing event that is outside the range of usual human experience. Disasters are dramatic and intense experiences, especially frightening for the elderly.

Trauma And The Sense Of Loss

All of us feel a loss of control over our lives when a disaster strikes. 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. These responses are normal and will pass with time.

Anxieties and fears may translate into physical symptoms

- headaches
- aches & pains
- overeating or loss of appetite
- vomiting
- bowel problems
- skin disorders
- sleep disorders

(nightmares or excessive sleeping)

or emotional/behavioral reactions

- forgetfulness
- loss of interest in activities
- sleep disturbance
- irritability
- confusion
- sadness or depression

These reactions are understandable.

Fear is a normal reaction to danger.

Dealing With Distress

Providing someone to stay with the older adult is often helpful.

- 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.
- Frequently touching and calling the older adult by name is helpful and enhances the ability to recover more quickly.
- Give additional attention and reassurance.
- Rehearse safety measures to be taken in future disasters.
- Encourage contact with friends and relatives.

When Problems Persist

Talk with a counselor or family therapist. With professional assistance, "adjustment reactions" can be dealt with relatively quickly and easily.

Call Project REBOUND's crisis hotline, 1 (800) 854-7771, for information or referral.

Trained, multi-lingual operators can provide assistance free of charge.

Accessing Special Services

Individuals who are hearing impaired may call the following information and referral numbers for referral to mental health counselors working with the deaf and hard of hearing:

TDD/TTY: 213/487-9613

Voice: 213/738-4961.

Or,

Greater Los Angeles Council on Deafness, Inc. (GLAD)
Voice/TDD: 213/383-2220

Project REBOUND

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