

COPING WITH TRAUMATIC EVENTS

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Coping Tips for Traumatic Events and Disasters

SOURCE: [Coping Tips for Traumatic Events and Disasters | SAMHSA](#)

Emotional distress can happen before and after a disaster. Coping strategies include preparation, self-care, and identifying support systems.

People can experience a wide range of emotions before and after a disaster or traumatic event. There's no right or wrong way to feel. However, it's important to find healthy ways to cope when these events happen.

Take Care of Yourself and Your Loved Ones

Eating a healthy diet, avoiding the use of drugs and alcohol, and getting regular exercise can reduce stress and anxiety. Activities as simple as taking a walk, stretching, and deep breathing can help relieve stress.

- **Take care of yourself.** Try to eat healthy, avoid using alcohol and drugs, and get some exercise when you can—even a walk around the block can make a difference.
- **Reach out to friends and family.** Talk to someone you trust about how you are doing.
- **If you have children, talk to them.** They may feel scared, angry, sad, worried, and confused. Let them know it's okay to talk about what's on their mind. Role model healthy coping.
- **Limit your consumption of news.** We live in a society where the news is available to us 24 hours a day via television, radio, and the Internet. The constant replay of news stories about a disaster or traumatic event can increase stress and anxiety and make some people relive the event over and over. Reduce the amount of news you watch and/or listen to.
- **Get enough “good” sleep.** Some people have difficulty falling asleep after a disaster, or wake up throughout the night. If you have trouble sleeping,

only go to bed when you are ready to sleep, avoid using cell phones or laptops in bed, and avoid drinking caffeine or alcohol at least one hour before going to bed. If you wake up and can't fall back to sleep, try writing what's on your mind in a journal or on a sheet of paper.

- **Establish and maintain a routine.** Try to eat meals at regular times and put yourself on a sleep schedule to ensure an adequate amount of rest. Include a positive or fun activity in your schedule that you can look forward to each day or week.
- **Avoid making major life decisions.** Doing things like switching jobs or careers can already be stressful and are even harder to adjust to directly after a disaster.
- **Understand there will be changes.** Disasters can destroy homes, schools, and places of business and worship and can disrupt the lives of people living in affected areas for a long time. Sometimes, people lose loved ones or experience injuries, both physical and mental, that may last a lifetime. Some people may also experience a temporary or permanent loss of employment. For children, attending a new or temporary school may result in being separated from peers, or after-school activities may be disrupted.
- **Take care of pets or get outside into nature when it's safe.** Nature and animals can help us to feel better when we are down. See if you can volunteer at a local animal shelter—they may need help after a disaster. Once it's safe to return to public parks or natural areas, find a quiet spot to sit in or go for a hike.
- **Know when to ask for help.** Signs of stress can be normal, short-term reactions to any of life's unexpected events—not only after surviving a disaster, but also after a death in the family, the loss of a job, or a breakup. It's important to pay attention to what's going on with you or with someone you care about, because what may seem like “everyday stress” can actually be: depression (including the thoughts of suicide), anxiety, or alcohol/drug abuse.

Those at Risk

Disasters have the potential to cause emotional distress.

Some are more at risk than others:

- Survivors living or working in the impacted areas (youth & adults)
- Loved ones of victims
- First Responders, Rescue & Recovery Workers

Stress, anxiety, and depression are common reactions after a disaster.

Warning signs of distress may include:

- Sleeping too much or too little
- Stomach aches or headaches
- Anger, feeling edgy or lashing out at others
- Overwhelming sadness
- Worrying a lot of the time; feeling guilty but not sure why
- Feeling like you have to keep busy
- Lack of energy or always feeling tired
- Drinking alcohol, smoking or using tobacco more than usual; using illegal drugs
- Eating too much or too little
- Not connecting with others

Ask for Help

[Warning signs](#) of stress are normal, short-term reactions to life's unexpected challenges. However, it is important to recognize when you or others experience emotional distress that is persistent and becomes difficult to manage.

- **Find a local support group.** In a group setting led by trained and experienced professionals, people who have shared a similar experience can exchange thoughts, feelings, and ideas on how to get through difficult times. Support groups provide a safe place for people to find comfort in knowing they are not alone.
- **Reach out to family and friends.** Talking to someone you trust about your feelings without fear of judgment may offer some relief. Family and friends can be a great resource for support. Your family and friends may have also survived the disaster and understand the emotions you are experiencing. It's also a good idea to speak with friends who were not involved, because they can be objective and provide additional support.
- **Speak with a financial adviser.** The loss of a home or job or being unable to work after a disaster can be an overwhelming financial burden people feel they have to struggle with alone. Financial advisers don't immediately come to mind as a resource after a disaster, but they should be among the first people you call when developing a strategy to rebuild your life. Seeking help from a financial adviser can ease the stress and point you in the direction of other helpful resources or programs tailored to your situation.

If you or your loved ones continue to have feelings of anxiety, fear, and anger for two weeks or more, with no improvement, it's best to seek professional help. Call or text the [Disaster Distress Helpline](#) to locate services and speak with trained crisis counselors who are ready to assist you

Coping With Trauma Associated With Global Conflicts/ Events

SOURCE:

<https://www.everydayhealth.com/emotional-health/israel-hamas-war-how-do-you-cope-when-you-witness-violence-and-trauma-even-from-afar/>

Know That You Experienced Something Real

Watching traumatic events unfold directly or indirectly (on TV) gets processed by the brain in the same way. It's important to note that sometimes the signs of distress occur immediately, and sometimes they can be delayed — even by years. Signs of response to trauma include sustained sadness, [anxiety](#), [depressed moods](#), impaired function in daily life, poor appetite, weight loss or gain, and sustained feelings of hopelessness or helplessness.

Unplug When You Need To

It's important to not overconsume the images. Watching these events repeatedly on television, or following every twist and turn on social media, will just reignite the trauma.

Don't Suppress or Deny Your Feelings

You may feel like the best way to get through your daily life is to suppress your emotional reactions to what you're seeing on TV and social media. First give yourself permission to experience all that you are feeling. These feelings are your own, and they are valid, so give yourself the grace and space to deal with them. Are you angry, afraid, anxious, sad, or frustrated? Acknowledging and identifying these feelings can help you

begin to address them.

When It Comes to Coping, Find What Works Best for You

I often say we are all in the same storm, but we're not in the same boat. Different people have different lived experiences, different vantage points, and different needs. There is no one right way to cope, and no one way to work through the anger, stress, and trauma. Use your usual coping skills: [Meditate](#), pray, exercise, connect with and spend time with a loved one, or take extra “me time.” Contributing financially to organizations you believe in may also help you feel less powerless.

Skip the Urge to Self-Medicating

While it may be tempting, this is not the time to have an extra glass of wine or use food, drugs, or tobacco to manage your emotions. Relying on these things can leave you with other problems when this crisis passes.

Make Sure You're Accurately Informed

Make sure you are getting accurate, factual information about new developments and events from reputable sources. It can be especially important to vet what you see on social media, since misinformation and disinformation spread so easily on these platforms. Getting bogged down by rumors will needlessly add to your anxiety.

Stick to Your Routine

Following an established routine can make things feel more normal and calming, whether that's having dinner at the same time, watching your favorite TV show, or going for a walk with a friend. It allows us to control what we can.

Words Matter

When describing traumatic or disturbing events, using accurate and appropriate words is key. Truth telling, transparency, and trust building allow informed dialogue — dialogue that respects the moment.

Ask for Help

There's no shame in acknowledging you need help. You can start with a trusted friend or your faith leader. But don't delay if you think you may need professional help.

[Therapists](#), counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists are all trained to help, especially in these difficult times.

Allow Children to Talk About Their Feelings, and Help Them to Process Events

It's not uncommon for a child to become fearful, distressed, or confused after witnessing a traumatic event or seeing adults processing these events. The good news is that children are emotionally resilient. In the meantime, here's how you can help them deal with the trauma.

Take their concerns seriously. Your child's fears may be unrealistic, but they are real to them. It's important to listen and respond without mockery in an open, honest, and supportive manner. Remember to use age appropriate language. Be in tune with your child's unique needs. Daily check-ins to discuss thoughts and feelings, and talking about stress, can be helpful.

Don't make assumptions. Instead of saying "I know you're angry or frightened," let them tell you what they're feeling. It allows them to be honest about their emotions instead of trying to meet your expectations.

Explain the reality. As adults, we understand that news outlets will continue to show unsettling images. Explain that the traumatic event is not close to home, and find something more age appropriate for them to watch. I lean on one of my many favorite quotes from Mr. Rogers: "Look for the helpers." There are people who are working on the situation.

Don't pathologize normal reactions. Like adults, it's normal for children to experience negative emotions during a traumatic event, so don't overreact and possibly exacerbate their negative experiences. If the feelings persist, however, consider professional help.

If you or a loved one is experiencing emotional distress around the Israel-Hamas war, try the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's [Disaster Distress Helpline](#), where crisis counselors are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week: 1-800-985-5990.

Coping With Crisis: Five Tips From An Expert

SOURCE:

<https://www.multco.us/multnomah-county/news/coping-crisis-five-tips-expert#:~:text=Acknowledge%20your%20feelings%20and%20forgive,with%20acceptance%20and%20non%2Djudgment>

Acknowledge your feelings and forgive yourself

The first step towards healing is learning to identify what you're feeling. Simply acknowledging your feelings can help calm anxious feelings. During stressful situations, it's helpful to regularly check in with your body and mind with acceptance and non-judgment.

Acknowledge your feelings:

- Assign words to your emotions (e.g. grief, anger, sadness, shame)
- Scan your body and pay attention to physical sensations
- Write your feelings on paper

“Trying to battle your emotions is only going to make the situation worse,” Sainz said. “It can be exhausting, both physically and emotionally. It’s better to make room for those emotions and focus on what you can do, instead of what you can’t.”

Protect your physical health

A healthy mind is connected to a healthy body. No matter how you're feeling, it's easier to cope if you're taking care of your basic needs. Make sure you're taking care of your physical self however you can, so you have the ability to focus on your emotions.

- Make sure you're getting enough sleep
- Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water
- Remember to feed yourself and give your body the nutrients it needs
- If you can, make time for exercise indoors

“Think of your body as your foundation,” Sainz said. “You can only begin to improve your mental health after your basic needs have already been taken care of. Stick to a physical wellness routine if it's helpful, and set reminders to eat, drink water, and sleep.”

Support your emotional wellness

If you're struggling with difficult feelings, it's helpful to think about some ways to steer your emotions in a different direction. When you're feeling overwhelmed or burned out, try to pause and lean on your natural supports.

- Stay in (virtual) touch with the people you love
- Show affection to your pets
- Pause: Take some deep breaths. Pray. Explore mindfulness
- Make a gratitude list

"Talking with someone else, or playing with your pet, are just a couple ways of positively steering your emotions when you're having difficult emotions," Sainz said.

Find activities you enjoy

Creativity has been shown to benefit the mind during times of stress and isolation. Taking time to explore your personal interests and passions, even during times of crisis, can give your mind a break and allow yourself to re-focus on something that uplifts you.

- Make art
- Take photos
- Play music
- Read books
- Write a story. Keep a journal.

"We all have unique ways of feeling better when we're experiencing difficult emotions," Sainz said. "Think about what works for you, so that when those thoughts come up, you already have a list of activities that can help with whatever you're feeling."

Practice coping skills long term

After the trauma of the immediate disaster, it's common to deal with lingering effects. If you're having difficult feelings that won't go away, talk with a mental health professional about a long-term coping strategy.

Other Resources:

[When Terrible Things Happen - What You May Experience](#)

Youtube Video to help practice coping

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30VMIEmA114>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=grfXR6FAsI8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEmt1Znux58>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XfcZ0McM-RI> (for kids)

Palestinian Support Groups Resource

<https://www.instagram.com/sane.in.the.membrane/?hl=en>

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