

When to Seek Outside Help for Stress

Sometimes a disaster is so overwhelming that our regular coping methods are not enough. Floods, fires, hurricanes, and tornadoes can destroy crops, homes, businesses, and anything that humans can build. When this happens, people may become critical of themselves and begin to feel desperate and worthless.

A devastating feeling of helplessness is a normal reaction to a natural disaster. When personal coping methods fail, the following signs may signal a need for outside help, usually with a mental health professional:

- **Physical abuse.** Hitting, shoving, or kicking a spouse or a child.
- **Verbal abuse.** A parent can say nothing good about a child or continually reprimands or criticizes the child. A spouse's words are critical or demeaning.
- **Thoughts of suicide.**
- **Thoughts or talk of marital separation.**
- **Panic attacks.** Feeling overcome with fear and having a racing pulse and difficulty breathing.

The following are normal reactions to severe stress, but if one or more of the signs continues for several weeks, seek outside help.

- **Depression.** Signs include: sleep-pattern changes, such as difficulty falling asleep, frequently waking in the night or too early in the morning, continual sleeping; personal-care changes, such as skipping baths and shampoos; physical or mental changes, such as overeating or under-eating; feeling numb or continually tired; losing ability to concentrate; or crying constantly.
- **Parenting problems.** Inability to cope and give needed attention to children.
- **Behavioral problems.** Children act up frequently; get into trouble with authorities.
- **Isolation.** Not having anyone to talk with.
- **Inability to face reality.** Not wanting to admit the seriousness of problems or not beginning to work on them.

Help is available. Many people in the community have been affected by the disaster. No one has to face these problems alone.

If you need immediate help coping with your emotions and stress, call the CARELINE at 1-800-662-7030.

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