

## The Long-term Impact of a Traumatic Event: What to Expect in Your Personal, Family, Work, and Financial Lives

---

The impact of a disaster or traumatic event goes way beyond the destruction and confusion that happens directly after an event. Just like it takes time to rebuild damaged buildings, it takes time to grieve and rebuild our lives. Life may not return to normal for months, or even years, after a disaster or traumatic event. There may be changes in living conditions that cause changes in daily routine. These changes can lead to trouble in relationships, changes in expectations and shifts in responsibilities. Disruptions in relationships, roles and routines can make life feel strange and unstable.

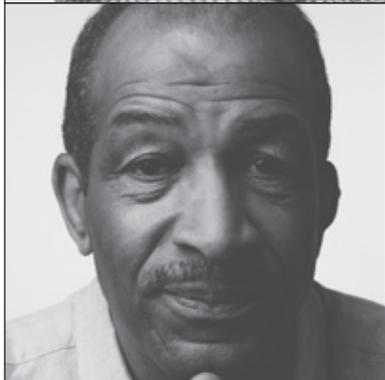
A disaster or traumatic event can have far reaching effects in several major areas of our lives that can make rebuilding our emotional lives very hard. However, sometimes just knowing what to expect can help make it easier to get back to a normal life. As you and your family begin to rebuild your lives, you may face any or all of the situations described below:

### Personal Uncertainties

- Feeling mentally drained and physically exhausted is normal and common.
- The loss of a home, business or income may result in a loss of self-esteem.
- Unsettled emotional issues or pre-existing problems and losses that happened before the disaster or traumatic event may show up again.
- Anniversaries of the disaster or traumatic event remind us of what we lost. This reaction may be triggered by the day the event happened every month and may be especially strong on the one-year anniversary.

### Family Relationship Changes

- Relationships may become stressed when everyone's emotions are closer to the surface, and conflicts with spouses and other family members may happen more often.
- Families may have to live in temporary housing or with friends and relatives when their homes are destroyed or damaged. This can lead to overcrowding and added tension.
- Parents may be physically or emotionally unavailable to their children after a disaster or traumatic event for many reasons. They could be busy cleaning up, distracted, or upset by the hard times to come because of the event.
- Parents may become overprotective of their children and their children's safety.
- Children may be expected to take on more adult roles, such as watching their brothers or sisters, or helping with cleanup efforts. This leaves less time for children to spend with their friends or to take part in routine activities.



### **Work Disruptions**

- Being overly tired and having increased stress from being distracted by personal issues can lead to performing badly at work.
- Disagreements with co-workers may begin to happen more often because of the added stress.
- Businesses may be forced to lay off employees, or cut work hours and wages.
- Having less income may make some people have to take a second job.
- The way people get to work may change due to the loss of a car or road construction.

### **Financial Worries**

- People who experience problems at work may be unable to get back the same standard of living they had before, leading to worries about money and unpaid bills.
- Looking for financial help to rebuild and repair damages adds to the already high levels of stress caused by the disaster or traumatic event, and the hassles of dealing with all of the paperwork can add to the frustration.

### **How to Be a Survivor**

Regardless of what individual situations are, everyone needs to take several steps on the road to recovery from a disaster or a traumatic event.

- Accept that the loss is real.
- Allow yourself and your family members to be sad and grieve over what has happened.
- Get used to your new environment. Accept that the people or things lost are gone forever
- Find closure with the situation and move on. Do not continue to let the loss take over your physical, emotional or spiritual life.
- Believe that better times will come.

You and your family have survived a traumatic event. That doesn't mean your lives are over or that you don't deserve to be happy again. Go back to doing the things you enjoy with your friends and as a family. Remake the routines in your life. Make commitments and keep them.

### **Where can I find help?**

For additional assistance, contact your local public health department, community mental health center, a counselor or a mental health professional.

The information in this fact sheet was adapted from a publication by the Center for Mental Health Services of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.