

## COMMON REACTIONS

Disasters create an abrupt change in reality. It is normal to have emotional and physical responses to events as traumatic as the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Below are some common responses to trauma and suggestions for how to help yourself and others.

### **Emotions and Thinking:**

Shock- disbelief that such things could happen.

Fear- concern for the safety of loved ones and the country as a whole.

Grief-for all the victims of destruction and death.

Flashbacks- Anyone who suffered post-traumatic stress disorder from a previous incident may have symptoms return.

Anger- towards persons perceived as responsible for actions causing disaster.

Guilt- the inability to accept that events are random and we do not have influence over them.

Feeling Overwhelmed- having difficulty making decisions and/or the inability to think clearly.

Temporary Memory loss- forgetfulness, both long term and short-term memory may be affected.

Anxiety- a general feeling of uneasiness or worry.

Depression- crying, moodiness, feelings of hopelessness, and isolating oneself from others.

### **Physical Reactions:**

Appetite changes – loss or increase of appetite with possible digestion problems.

Sleep problems - the inability to fall or stay asleep. May also include excessive sleep problems.

Headaches – accompanied by nausea, upset stomach and feeling a “lump in the throat”.

Fatigue – weakness, increase in allergies, colds, flu.

## WHAT TO DO – COPING STRATEGIES

Turn off the radio or TV when you start to feel overwhelmed by the news. Try only watching or listening to news reports at the beginning of the hour when the news is summarized, and only do this every three or four hours.

Talk to others about your feelings. Discussing and reviewing the events helps one absorb information and knowing feelings are shared by others eases the tension.

Exercise –going for a walk or run, scrubbing the floor, or cleaning house or being physically active. If you are unable to do physical exercise, try deep breathing exercises or meditation.

Recognize your own feelings. Knowing that the physical and emotional problems you are having are stress-related will reduce their effect on you.

Reach out to others. Offer to listen to others who need to talk.

## **COPING TIPS (Continued)**

Do something you enjoy. See a funny movie. Listen to soothing music. Keep a journal to write in if you cannot sleep. Draw a picture (this is an especially good idea for children.)

Stay connected with your usual support systems. Stay in touch with your religious/spiritual leader, social groups, neighbors, family and friends. Everyone will benefit from the contact.

Avoid excessive alcohol, caffeine and non-prescribed drugs. Don't try to numb out. Eat good meals, even if you don't feel like it, and avoid junk food and excessive sugar.

Accept help from others when you feel your coping skills are being stretched. Talk to a mental health worker who is trained in crisis intervention.

If you need to talk with someone, contact:

San Mateo County Mental Health  
Access Team  
1-800-686-0101

or contact the local American Red Cross to arrange to speak with a specially trained disaster mental health professional.

## **EMERGENCY RESOURCES**

**San Mateo Area Office of  
Emergency Services:  
650-363-4790**

**Federal Emergency Management  
Association:  
1-800-480-4532**

**Salvation Army:  
1-800-433-7453**

**Pacific Gas and Electric 24 hour  
Emergency:  
1-800-743-5000**

**Pacific Bell:  
1-800-310-2355**

**CITY OF BRISBANE:  
Fire Department: 415-657-4300  
Police Department: 415-508-2181  
City Hall: 415-508-2100  
Parks and Recreation:  
415-508-2142  
Building Department:  
415-508-2120  
Public Works Department:  
415-508-2130  
Finance/Water Department:  
415-508-2150**

## **CITY OF BRISBANE**

Community Emergency Volunteers



## **TIPS FOR COPING WITH TRAUMATIC EVENTS**