



Supporting people affected by disaster

Sometimes it can be difficult to know how to help a person affected by disaster. It is normal to struggle with what to say or do in these cases.

Below are some tips on how to best help a person recovering from a traumatic event.

- Spend time with the stressed person, without judging or demanding. Everyone's recovery will occur in its own time.
- Offer support and listen. Talking is one of the best things people can do to work things out. Remember that people may need to go over things many more times than usual.
- Help with practical tasks and chores. This gives people more energy and time for the recovery process.
- Give people time, space and patience and don't take it personally if at times they are irritable, bad tempered or want to be alone. These reactions are a natural part of the stress response and will pass as people recover.
- Don't try to talk people out of their reactions, minimise the event or try to get them to look on the bright side. Saying things like 'you're lucky it wasn't worse', or 'pull yourself together' isn't helpful.
- Stressed people need to concentrate on themselves at first; they will feel supported if you let them know you are concerned, want to help and are trying to understand.

When to get extra help

People may need to be supported by specialists in the community to ensure that the stress does not linger unnecessarily or lead to other health problems. Below are some guidelines on when extra help may be required.

If:

- recovery has stalled or does not seem to be proceeding
- physical or other symptoms are causing concern
- there is no one to talk to or relationships are being affected by the stress
- there is emotional numbness, depression or continuing anxiety
- you continue to have disturbed sleep and nightmares
- you are unable to handle the intense feelings or physical sensations
- you are becoming accident prone and are increasing the use of drugs and alcohol

Then it might be a good time to seek support from someone who can help.

Talk to your GP or call one of the personal support services.

This fact sheet has been reproduced from information provided by Dr Rob Gordon, Clinical Psychologist, consultant to the State Emergency Recovery Unit of the Victorian Department of Human Services.

It is intended as a guide to help people deal with traumatic events and is not a substitute for seeking professional help.

www.disasterassist.gov.au

