



How disaster affects everyone

Disasters can have an impact on everyone in the community. Whether we have friends or family directly affected by the tragedy or we are part of the shell-shocked community - we may experience a range of reactions to what has happened.

How something like this affects us will often depend on our own personal circumstances like, other personal problems, illnesses, the level of support we have in our lives.

For example, it would be normal for some people to display various behavioural, physical, emotional and mental reactions when they talk or read about the incident.

These reactions may interfere with day-to-day living and the experience may leave people affected by this disaster shaken and worried about the future. 'Getting back to normal' can be difficult after an experience of this kind. Below are some of the common feelings that you, your friends and colleagues may be experiencing.

Shock

- Disbelief at what has happened
- Numbness - the disaster may seem unreal, like a dream
- No understanding of what has happened

Fears

- For the safety of family and friends, or death
- Of a similar disaster happening again
- Awareness of personal vulnerability
- Panicky feelings
- Other apparently unrelated fears.

Anger

- At 'who caused it' or 'allowed it to happen'
- Outrage at what has happened
- At the injustice and senselessness of it all
- Generalised anger and irritability

Helplessness

- Crises show us how powerless we are at times, as well as our strengths

Sadness

- About human destruction and losses of every kind
- For loss of the belief that our world is safe and predictable

Shame

- For having been exposed as helpless, emotional and needing others
- For not having reacted as one would have wished

These feelings are normal and can be accompanied by a range of physical and emotional responses.

As always, talking about how you are feeling can help enormously. Seek support among your friends, family and/or in the community.

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.

