

Nebraska Strong Recovery Project



How to Help Yourself and Your Loved Ones



NEBRASKA STRONG
RECOVERY PROJECT

How to help yourself and loved ones?

- **Help for Children**
- **Help for Adolescents/Teens**
- **Help for Older Adults**
- **Common Reactions to Stress**
- **Help for Yourself and Your Loved Ones**

Why do I feel the way I do?

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations like an infectious disease outbreak that requires social distancing, quarantine, or isolation. Even if you are not directly impacted by the disease, it is likely your daily routine is different due to the directed health measures in your community.

Exhaustion, fear, anger, cynicism, disillusionment, and sadness are common reactions to prolonged stress. These responses are normal and appropriate, but over time they can lead to more negative results.

Consult your healthcare provider if you have physical signs of stress to be sure they aren't symptoms of an underlying health issue. It is common for stress to show up as more frequent headaches, stomach or intestinal problems, colds and allergies.

You are living through an exceptionally stressful situation. Remember we are all in this together.

How to Help Loved Ones (and Yourself) Deal with Disaster Stress

HELP FOR CHILDREN

What to Expect

A child's reaction to the disaster will depend on many factors: age of the child, past experienced trauma, and how much of the disaster the child has witnessed in person or on TV. Children take their cue about how to appropriately react to directed health measures from the adults in their life. Be aware of how your behavior shapes their reactions and fears.

Loss of trust in adults and fear of reoccurrence are seen in children exposed to traumatic events. Other reactions vary according to age.

Children Ages 5 & Younger

Typical reactions include fear of being separated from a parent, fear of the dark, increased crying, clinging to a parent, and a return to younger behaviors such as thumb-sucking and/or bed-wetting.

Children Ages 6–11

Common responses may include withdrawal, disruptive behavior, trouble paying attention, avoidance of school, sleep problems, irritability, outbursts of anger, and stomach aches.

How You Can Help Children:

Parents and other adults can help children cope. Take time to listen. Do not pass judgment. Let children know that their feelings are normal and that it is okay to express them. Be sure they know they do not have to be "tough."

Here are some helpful things to consider in helping your child:

- Restore family routines. Children benefit from family routines around meal times and activities. Bedtimes should be kept as close to normal as possible. These routines allow them to feel more secure and in control.
- Reassure your child frequently that you are safe and together.
- Talk with your child regarding his/her feelings about the disaster. Provide them with information they can understand.
- Talk to your child about what is happening in terms they can understand.
- Spend extra time with your child at bedtime.
- Allow children to grieve their losses. This may include loss of social connections, absence of normal celebrations, or loss of loved ones.
- Try to spend extra time together in family activities to begin replacing fears with pleasant memories.
- Allow time for play.
- If your child is having problems at school, talk with the teacher or counselor so you can work together to help your child.

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TEENS

HELP FOR ADOLESCENTS

What to Expect

An adolescent's reaction to the disaster may take some unexpected turns when their natural need to rebel is coupled with confusion and rage over what they have experienced.

Loss of trust in adults and ongoing fear are responses seen in many children and teens exposed to traumatic events.

Teens show symptoms more like those of adults. Symptoms may include flashbacks, nightmares, depression, substance use, and/or acting out. They may also feel extreme guilt because they believe they may have unwittingly exposed others to the virus.

Stress in teens may show up as risk-taking behaviors like driving fast, or not following directed health measures. It may also show as poor school or work performance.

How You Can Help Teens:

Parents and other adults can help teenagers cope. Take time to listen. Do not pass judgment. Let teens know that their feelings are normal and that it is okay to express them. Be sure they know they do not have to be "tough."

Here are some helpful things to consider in helping your child:

- Make time to be with your teenager. Share meals with him/her. Enjoy each other's company. Listen to each other.
- Allow teens to see your vulnerability. Express your anxiety about what has happened and acknowledge your fears.
- Handle conflict as a problem to be solved, not as a war. Avoid pre-judging, labeling, or name-calling. Focus on the issue at hand.
- Treat teenagers with respect. Praise and acknowledge their accomplishments.
- If your teen is having problems at school, talk to the teacher or school counselor so that you can work together to help your teen.
- Have a discussion with your teen about how strain in relationships can be expected.

How to Help Loved Ones (and Yourself) Deal with Disaster Stress

ADULTS

HELP FOR OLDER ADULTS

What to Expect

Older adults may have a variety of stress reactions related to the pandemic. Feelings of vulnerability are likely heightened at the same time they are purposefully isolating in order to remain safe. This isolation can increase stress and feelings of loneliness. Remind older adults that it is okay to ask for support when they need it.

Older adults may experience some of these thoughts and feelings:

- Current losses can trigger memories or feelings associated with prior losses
- Fear of dependency or lack of self-sufficiency
- Worry about limited financial resources and time to rebuild or start over
- Fear of institutionalization
- Fear of a decline in health and limitations on mobility and ability to rebuild

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How You Can Help Older Adults:

Older adults may experience some of these thoughts and feelings:

- Withdrawal and isolation from family and friends
- Concealing the full extent of the disaster's impact
- Apathy - no longer caring
- Confusion and disorientation
- Decline in physical health
- Not making use of available resources
- Increased substance use

Here are some things to consider when helping older adults:

- Make time to be with your loved ones. Include them in family events. Talk to them about their feelings and concerns. Listen carefully.
- Make sure that your loved ones' basic needs are being taken care of. Encourage them to ask for help when they need it. Connect them with resources.
- Encourage their independence. Support them in doing the things that they can.
- Consider finding ways to increase their technology literacy so they can connect with loved ones virtually.

How to Help Loved Ones (and Yourself) Deal with Disaster Stress

—STRESS—

COMMON REACTIONS TO STRESS

Physical Conditions

People may experience different or more intense physical problems. They may:

- Have an upset stomach, eat too much or too little
- Experience a pounding heart, rapid breathing, sweating, or severe headache
- Have trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or sleeping too much
- Be on guard and constantly feel alert
- Be jumpy and startle easily at sudden noises
- Have a worsening of chronic medical problems
- Feel exhausted

These physical signs of stress can mimic signs of the COVID19 virus. Always check with your healthcare provider first. If disease is ruled out, you may be experiencing signs of stress.

Common Reactions to Stress:

Behaviors

People may act differently. They may:

- Withdraw from family and friends
- Be reluctant to leave their home
- Be irritable or have outbursts of anger
- Become easily upset or agitated
- Have difficulty concentrating
- Stay at work longer to avoid dealing with disaster stress

Emotions

People may feel and express their feelings about the disaster differently. They may feel:

- Nervous, helpless, fearful, or angry
- Hopeless about the future
- Detached or unconcerned about others
- Numb or unable to experience love or joy
- Have frequent distressing dreams or memories
- Feel relieved or guilty
- Surprised at how intense their emotions are
- Grateful or more spiritual

How to Help Loved Ones (and Yourself) Deal with Disaster Stress

—HELP—

HELP FOR YOUR LOVED ONES AND YOURSELF

There are several ways that you can help yourself and others:

- Take care of yourself and encourage others to take care of themselves. Remember **H-A-L-T**: don't get too Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired. Eat right, get enough sleep, and share your thoughts and feelings with people around you. Learning how others are coping will help you feel less alone.
- Rely on regular exercise and activities that you or your loved ones enjoy doing to relieve stress and cope in a healthy way. Walking every day or managing stress with relaxation techniques can make a big difference in how you feel. Do the things that give you pleasure such as watching a movie, getting together with friends, or reading a book.

Help Yourself & Loved Ones:

- **Remember that stress can cause physical problems.** It can increase the risk of heart attack or stroke, worsen some conditions (such as stomach problems), and make others (like diabetes and arthritis) more difficult to manage. So, if you or your loved one are under a doctor's care, be sure to keep your appointments and take medication as prescribed.
- **Get extra help to deal with grief** if you or your loved one are feeling overwhelmed by the losses from the disaster. Talk with a spiritual advisor or a friend. Seeing a professional (counselor, doctor) is a sign of strength and can be helpful.
- **Stay away from drinking alcohol or using other substances** to numb yourself. This will only make things worse in the long run. Disaster stress can endanger recovery of people with alcohol or substance use problems. If you or someone you love has a problem, this is a good time to get some help.



NEBRASKA STRONG RECOVERY PROJECT

FREE AND CONFIDENTIAL ASSISTANCE

MON-FRI 8AM TO 5PM

Nebraska Rural Response Hotline

1-800-464-0258

24 HOURS A DAY/7 DAYS A WEEK

Nebraska Family Helpline

1-888-866-8660

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