



What to Expect after a Disaster

It is natural and normal for everyone to experience emotional reactions after the recent serious earthquakes and tsunami in Japan. The effects go far beyond the immediate devastation and destruction, taking an emotional toll on everyone. Disruptions to work, living situations, school, and daily routines add additional strains and stressors on everyone. Helping people understand how events affect them can help them to gain control over their lives again something that was lost with the disaster.

Everyone has different needs and different ways of coping with a disaster. The most common reaction is hyper-vigilance - feeling over cautious and wary about things - others may withdraw, and not want to discuss events. But everyone who sees or experiences a disaster is affected by it, no one is untouched.

Common Reactions After a Disaster

- It is normal to feel anxious about safety for yourself, family members, relatives, and friends.
- Some people may experience headaches, muscles aches, and stomach aches.
- Some people may experience disruptions to their sleeping and eating patterns.
- Some people experience trouble concentrating, thinking clearly, and making decisions.
- Some people feel sad, anxious, overwhelmed, and angry.

These are all normal reactions, and over time, as life gets back to normal, these will decrease. As you and your family begin to rebuild your lives, you may face some of the following stressors.

Personal and Relationship Changes

- Displacement from home, business, or income, may result in confusion about the future.
- Relationships may become stressed when everyone's emotions are heightened, and conflicts with spouses and other family members may increase.
- Pre-existing problems, and previous losses, may resurface.
- Individuals and families may have had to live in temporary housing or with relatives and friends disrupting relationships and usual support systems.
- Parents may be physically or emotionally unavailable to their children, or overprotective of their safety.
- Children may display a range of behavioral problem according to their age such as being extra clingy or disruptive and will take their cues from their parents.

Work Disruptions

- Fatigue and increased stressors can lead to poor work performance.
- Conflicts with co-workers may increase, because of added stress.
- Businesses may be forced to lay off employees, or company work hours and wages may be cut.
- Daily travel and commute patterns may be disrupted.
- Those who experience work disruptions may be unable to regain their previous standard of living, leading to financial concerns.



How to Build Resilience

The recent events have reminded all of us that we can't control everything in our lives. But there are things we can do to help us manage the emotional impact. Taking control and managing stress is the key.

- Allow yourself and other family members to feel sad, anger, or grief and an opportunity to talk about these feelings.
- Establishing an emergency plan, knowing there is something you can do for future events can be comforting; including building an emergency supplies kit.
- Re-establishing normal household and daily routines, limiting inflammatory media exposure, and demanding responsibilities are also important.
- Return to doing things you enjoy with friends and as a family.
- Being willing to accept help from others in the community is healthy.
- Making donations to those directly affected.
- Keeping healthy, eating healthy foods, and drinking water.
- Avoid excessive amounts of caffeine and alcohol.
- Get enough sleep, rest, and physical exercise.
- Connect with other people who experienced the event.
- Adults can help their children and others by creating an environment of safety.
- Learn stress reduction techniques such as mediation and deep breathing

If you or a member of your family still has trouble coping, please ask for help. You can consult a mental health professional, or you may be able to get assistance from your human resources department or your company's Employee Assistance Program. The following is a list of helpful resources.

- TELL Life Line 03 5774 0992
- TELL Counseling 03 4550 – 1146 for English & 03 4550 – 1147 for Japanese
- TELL wiki - <http://www.bluejava.com/tell/index.html> - English resources and services in Japan
- TELL website - <http://www.telljp.com/> - for earthquake and tsunami information and resources,
- TELL website - <http://www.telljp.com/> how to cope following and disaster and stress management techniques.
- Cope with Violence and Disasters: What Parents Can Do www.nimh.nih.gov
- Parent Guidelines for Helping Children After an Earthquake
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network www.NCTSN.org
- Google person finder - <http://japan.person-finder.appspot.com/?lang=en>
- Volunteer help - <http://japanvolunteers.wordpress.com/japan-donations/>
- Red Cross family links
http://www.familylinks.icrc.org/wfl/wfl_jap.nsf/DocIndex/locate_eng?opendocument

