

Coping With the Aftermath of a Disaster

CARE Staff Support Team

After a natural disaster many people experience a wide variety of both positive and negative reactions. Some of the positive reactions that you may have noticed might include:

- Determination and resolve
- Courage and faith
- Feeling very connected to family, friends, and community
- Feeling involved, challenged and engaged in helping others

Many people also experience negative responses. Some of the things that you may have noticed in yourself might include:

- Shock and denial
- Confusion, feeling disoriented or having difficulty concentrating
- Guilt and shame
- Distressing images of the earthquake while awake or dreaming
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Being very irritable, not being able to stop crying, or feeling other very extreme emotions
- Feeling "numb"—not feeling anything at all

All of these reactions are very common and are reported by people all over the world after disasters. It is helpful to know that there is nothing wrong with you if you are experiencing any of these positive or negative reactions. You may notice other changes in your body, your emotions, your thoughts and relationships. Every person has their own reaction and pace of recovery and healing after a disaster. You may have some good days and bad days. All of these responses are very common and, for most people, will decrease over time.

What Helps?

- As much as possible, try to get enough rest and nutrition
- Talking to another person for support or spending time with others
- Trying to maintain a routine and resume normal activities
- Focusing on something practical that you can do right now to manage the situation better
- Finding ways to relax yourself—like deep breathing, saying calming words or phrases to yourself,

- listening to or singing calming music
- Taking breaks from work
- Praying, going to church or doing other spiritual practices that are important to you
- Reminiscing about a loved one who may have died
- Writing privately about your thoughts, feelings, and experiences

What Doesn't Help?

- Using alcohol or drugs to cope
- Working too much without a break
- Extreme withdrawal from family or friends
- Using violence or conflict
- Extreme avoidance of thinking or talking about the event or a death of a loved one
- Doing risky things (driving recklessly, substance abuse, not taking adequate precautions)
- Not taking care of yourself

How Can We Support Each Other?

- Remember that your colleagues may be anxious, distracted, and concerned. Make an extra effort to be patient with each other
- Encourage your co-workers to take breaks, drink enough water, take care of themselves and not work too many days without a rest
- Follow the instructions and guidance provided by the CO security advisor
- Make the time in team meetings to share information, ask questions or express concerns
- Be on the lookout for courage, resilience, and good work and acknowledge it when you see it