

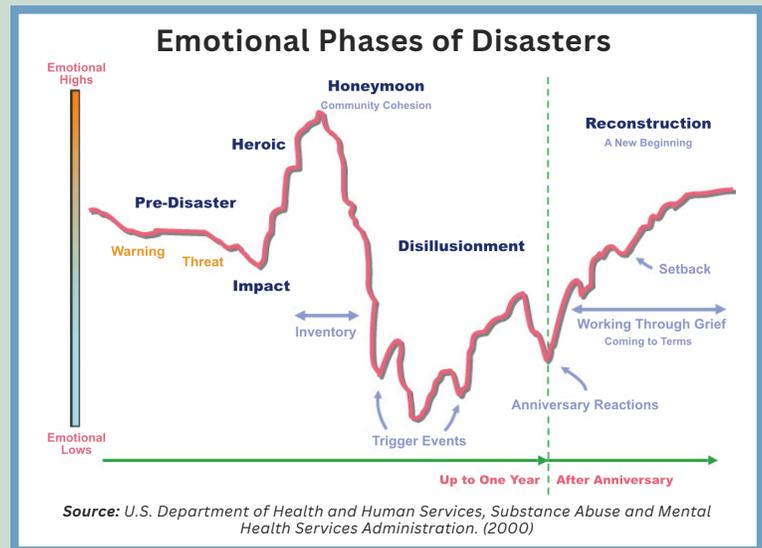
# NATURAL DISASTERS, STRESS, AND WELL-BEING



It is normal to feel stress before, during, and after a disaster. Most symptoms of stress are temporary; but for some people, stress can last for weeks, months, or even years. Your emotions will fluctuate throughout the disaster, and you might notice emotional lows during disaster anniversaries. Your emotions might cycle through phases, rather than following a linear path. There is no right or wrong way to feel during a disaster.

## Common Signs of Stress

- Changes in eating habits, energy, and activity levels.
- Sleeping too much or too little; nightmares.
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.
- Feeling sad, numb, helpless, hopeless, grief, guilt (without reason), anger, irritable, worried.
- Brain fog, fatigue, difficulty concentrating or making decisions.
- Physical reactions like headaches, back aches, pain, an upset stomach, skin rashes, and more.
- Feeling a need to keep busy; restlessness.



## Take Care of Yourself

- Establish routine and plan what you can control.
  - Take care of yourself: eat regularly, hydrate, take breaks, get enough sleep, practice self-care, and do activities.
- Reach out to family, friends, and neighbors. Talk about your feelings and check-in on how they are doing.
- Stay informed with reliable news services; but, limit your media consumption.
- Know when to ask for help. Join a support group, find a financial advisor, speak with your faith-based leader, call 211 (Essential Community Services), call 988 (the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline), call the Disaster Distress Helpline (1-800-985-5990).



You are not alone, and you don't have to get through this tough time by yourself.

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## Activity Suggestions

- Read a book
- Watch a movie
- Talk to a friend
- Journal
- Exercise
- Play a game
- Meditate
- Any activity that relaxes or grounds you



## Talking With Your Children

Some children might have a delayed reaction. Distress might show up weeks or months later. Support from family and other adults help children to cope.

- Reassure them and offer comfort.
- Encourage them to talk about their losses and express their feelings aloud during play.
- Monitor and limit their exposure to media reports about the disaster.
- Provide structure, but relax expectations.
- Listen to them, and let them speak about the disaster.
- Provide knowledge about future safety measures.



## Talking With Other Adults

- Check-in with them and show that you care and are thinking about them.
- Allow them to share their story, but don't directly ask them to recount their experience.
- Listen, offer empathy, and reassure them that their feelings are normal.
- Encourage stress management, and recognize their efforts to cope.
- Encourage tolerance for change.
- Instill hope and that it is okay to accept help.
- Ask them if they want you to listen, or want you to help them come up with solutions.



For natural disaster resources, visit: [agrisafe.org/weather](https://agrisafe.org/weather)

*This document was developed using the following resources:*

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2024, October 10). Coping tips for traumatic events and disasters. <https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/disaster-preparedness/coping-tips>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2024, October 10). Warning signs and risk factors for emotional distress. <https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/disaster-preparedness/warning-signs>
- Centers for Disease Control. (2024, August). Coping with a disaster or traumatic event. [https://www.cdc.gov/natural-disasters/media/pdfs/2024/08/Coping\\_with\\_Disaster\\_2\\_English.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/natural-disasters/media/pdfs/2024/08/Coping_with_Disaster_2_English.pdf)
- Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. (2022, January). Helpline children cope with disaster. <https://agrilifeextension.tamu.edu>