



COPING WITH TRAUMATIC EVENTS

Whether natural or man-made, traumatic events can upset our sense of stability and suddenly make life unpredictable and unfamiliar. And experiencing a series of traumatic events within a short time can make coping even more difficult.

As you cope with the effects of the recent wildfires in Southern California, know that you are not alone. You may be feeling stress or grief, which are normal reactions to this traumatic event. Or you may be experiencing a range of other common reactions including:

- » Emotions like fear, anger, disbelief, irritability, anxiety and insecurity
- » Physical responses such as palpitations, muscle aches, nausea, dizziness, changes in appetite and difficulty sleeping
- » Behaviors including the inability to stop thinking about the events, social withdrawal, forgetfulness, difficulty making decisions and heightened sensitivity to sound or other details

Reactions to traumatic events and the intensity of those reactions vary from person to person. Most people feel better within three months of a traumatic event. Sometimes, experiencing a traumatic event or a series of traumatic events, may lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a strong physical and emotional response that can last for months. PTSD symptoms include flashbacks, avoidance of thoughts, feelings or activities associated with the traumatic event, alcohol or drug use, detachment, depression and hypersensitivity. If your symptoms worsen or last longer than a month, please consult a mental health practitioner.

Rebuilding your life after the wildfire disasters will be challenging. Taking the following steps can make the process easier:

- » Acknowledge your emotions. Allowing yourself to feel sadness and other emotions is part of the healing process. Ignoring these feelings can cause problems from insomnia to eating disorders.
- » Avoid making major decisions. If possible, postpone making major decisions like moving or changing your job for as long as you can (e.g., four to six months).
- » Get the support you need. Talk to friends, family, clergy or a behavioral health professional about your experience and feelings. Consider joining a support group for people who have gone through a similar experience.
- » Take care of yourself. Make sure you are getting enough sleep, eating nutritious foods and exercising, even if it is simply going for a walk. Relaxation exercises like meditation or yoga may help to reduce your stress.
- » Avoid unprescribed drugs, excessive alcohol and even caffeine.
- » Keep a regular routine with familiar people and surroundings.
- » Give yourself extra time for tasks. And if you find yourself distracted in the workplace, try checking your work twice or asking a colleague for help.

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