

Coping with the Emotional Aftereffects of the Tsunami

Responses to the tsunami generated by an 8.9-magnitude earthquake in Japan will be felt across the country and across the globe. Individuals themselves will have various physical and emotional reactions to this event.

Some individuals may be exposed to, or witness events directly; others will be exposed to graphic scenes through the media, and stories from friends and family. Others still, may be caught in the chaos of trying to reach loved ones within the affected areas.

Events such as these can overwhelm people's coping skills and leave them vulnerable to feelings of helplessness and an inability to focus on daily activities.

The purpose of this handout is to help you understand the reactions you may be experiencing to this incident and give you some suggestions on how you can help yourself to begin feeling better.

What are the reactions?

Physical reactions

Headaches, loss of appetite, insomnia, persistent heart palpitations, fatigue, gastrointestinal problems.

Emotional reactions

Fear, anxiety, distress, anger, irritability, sadness, mistrust, guilt.

Behavioural reactions

Tearfulness, vigilance, withdrawal or isolation, increased tendency to blame or criticize people close to you, increased consumption of alcohol or medication.

Mental reactions

Loss of concentration, forgetfulness, indecisiveness, vivid memories about the event.

Are these reactions “normal”?

Absolutely. These are the reactions of a normal human being to an abnormal situation. Research has shown that when you acknowledge these stress reactions and take care of them, they will eventually diminish with time.

What can you do?

- 🌿 **Pay more attention to your feelings and reactions than to the event itself.**
- 🌿 **Don't judge or blame yourself.** Don't criticize yourself for having these reactions. Be patient with yourself. Think about how you'd talk to a friend in this situation, and then treat yourself the same way.
- 🌿 **Try to reduce other sources of stress in your life for a while.**
- 🌿 **Take the time to talk about your physical and emotional reactions to someone close to you** (friend, spouse, relative). You can also turn to coworkers.
- 🌿 **Get some physical exercise, no matter how light it is.**
- 🌿 **Find something that will help you forget the event for a while.** Some people find it helpful to keep busy (leisure activities, hobbies, manual activities, warm baths, physical exercise, etc.), while others find it helpful to relax or go out with friends.
- 🌿 **Take time to rest.**
- 🌿 If you find you're getting mental images of the event or other fears, **remind yourself that you're safe.** Then direct your attention to something else.

What should you do if your stress reactions don't diminish from week to week?

It's better not to keep the problem all to yourself. People close to you don't always know how to help, despite their best intentions. If these reactions have not diminished from week to week, don't hesitate to call your organization's Assistance Program to meet a professional.

Need more information or assistance? For more information, to book a counselling session, or to access any of your Assistance Program services our Client Services Representatives are ready to speak with you 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in English or French. All calls are completely confidential.

1.800.663.1142 | 1.866.398.9505 (French)
1.888.384.1152 Hearing assistance (TTY) | **604.689.1717** International (Call Collect)

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