



Iowa Department of Public Health  
Division of Behavioral Health

## Frequently Asked Questions About Coping with Stress After a Disaster

**Overview:** Recent storms and rainfall have caused flooding throughout Iowa. Certain communities have also been impacted by tornados. While the immediate crisis will stabilize, many Iowans face long hours of clean-up and disaster recovery. This fact sheet answers questions about how to cope with emotional stress related to disaster and disaster recovery.

### **What should I know about disaster and stress?**

No one who witnesses a disaster is untouched by it. In the middle of the crisis, it's normal to be anxious about your safety and the safety of your family and friends. It is also normal to be worried about your property. As the crisis passes and recovery begins, you may begin to wonder about the impact on work or school and the community around you and on your daily activities. You may face many frustrations as you try to get things back to normal. It is important to believe that you will get through this. It helps if you follow a few basic tips to manage your stress.

### **What should I do to take care of myself and support others?**

Different people react in different ways -- there is no one right way to feel or to respond to disaster! Taking care of yourself is the right thing to do for yourself and for those who count on you. Here are things to do:

- Watch out for emotional exhaustion or strain. Signs may include:
  - general anxiety or nervousness
  - feeling numb or having difficulty communicating thoughts/feelings
  - confusion or difficulty concentrating
  - limited attention span
  - becoming easily frustrated or irritable
  - feeling depressed or crying easily
  - poor work performance
  - physical problems like increased heart rate/blood pressure, headaches, stomach problems, or cold/flu symptoms

- Spend time with family and friends. If your normal supports are not available, do not hesitate to turn to:
  - community health centers
  - mental health organizations
  - substance abuse counselors
  - 12-Step or other self help groups
  - your church, mosque, synagogue, or clergy
  
- Resume a normal sleep schedule as quickly as possible. Get plenty of rest and take frequent rest breaks before exhaustion builds up.
  
- Pay attention to any change in your use of alcohol and/or drugs. Avoid increasing your use. Continue to take prescription medications as prescribed.
  
- Set priorities for clean-up and recovery. Pace yourself to avoid physical or mental exhaustion.
  
- Take advantage of disaster relief programs and services in your community. Learn as much as you can!