

Cumbria Flood Factsheet

Coping with crisis

You, or a friend or relative, have just been through a traumatic experience and may be wondering what is happening to you.

This leaflet does not intend to be the answer to everything. Every one of us is different, and when a crisis strikes we will all be affected in different ways.

When faced with a major trauma or personal crisis, it is common to experience strong emotional and physical reactions. This is normal and is a way of dealing with what has happened.

This leaflet has been designed by Heath and Care Services at Cumbria County Council. It is being given to you to help you understand what you are going through, and how you can help yourself.

Friends and family can help you but you may feel emotionally and physically exhausted or just want someone who isn't involved to talk to. Agencies have been established to provide emotional support to people, like you, who have been affected by a major incident and the telephone numbers are available on this leaflet.

Normal feelings you may experience

Each person's response to a crisis is different and feelings may vary in intensity and last for different amounts of time. The following are just some of the reactions you may be experiencing.

Fear and anxiety:

- of effects on yourself and others
- of a similar event happening again
- of 'breaking down' or losing control
- of being left alone, or having to leave loved ones
- of being overwhelmed by your feelings

Guilt:

- about being alive or not injured
- regret of things not done

Shame

- about the way you feel
- about needing support

Anger

- at what has happened
- at the injustice and senselessness of it all
- 'Why me?' or 'Why not me?'

Sadness

- For deaths, injuries and losses

Memories

- of people you knew and loved
- 'flashbacks' of the event

Helplessness

- of being vulnerable and powerless feeling overwhelmed of by what's happened

Numbness

- events may seem unreal
- can't take everything in
- don't feel anything

You may find that:

- you feel tired
- you have difficulty sleeping or have nightmares
- you find it difficult to concentrate
- you have a choking feeling in the throat
- you feel your heart beating fast
- you have headaches
- your muscles ache
- you lose interest in sex

These feeling and physical reactions are your body's way of protecting itself after a crisis. Over time, these will go.

Do ask for help if:

- You feel that you can't handle these feelings or physical reactions
- You continue to feel tense, confused, empty and exhausted
- You continue to have nightmares and can't sleep
- You have no-one to talk to
- Your work is suffering
- You are isolating yourself from people
- You are having accidents
- You are drinking or smoking too much, or using drugs to cope with your feelings
- Relationships with those close to you are suffering.

In most cases your GP will be best placed to advise you about what help you need.

Practical steps

- Be active, help other people. But not to the extent that it stops you from helping yourself feel better.
- Try to face up to the reality. Attend funerals. Return to the scene of the event.
- Allow yourself to think and talk about what has happened. Don't stop the feelings.
- If you want to be alone with your thoughts and feelings, give yourself this privilege.
- Don't be afraid to seek professional help.

Some dos and don'ts

DO understand that memories and feelings may stay with you for a long time to come – This is your mind's way of trying to make sense of it all, to feel in control of it, even if you couldn't control it

DO take time to sleep, to rest, to think, and be with those important to you

DO try to keep your life as normal as possible

DO drive more carefully and be more careful around the home

DO say what you need clearly and honestly to family, friends and officials

DO avoid alcohol and drugs – These are often used as a way of coping, but they tend to block the feelings that will come out in the end. Alcohol and drugs often also lead to more problems than they solve.

DO let children talk about their emotions and express themselves in games / drawing

DO learn to laugh again

DON'T bottle feelings up. Express your emotions and let others share in your grief.

DON'T take on too much.

DON'T make any major life changes.

DON'T avoid talking about what's happened.

DON'T let your embarrassment stop you giving others the chance to talk.

If you would like information of the work of agencies in Cumbria supporting emergencies please visit www.cumbriaresilience.info

In the event of a major incident, a helpline may be set up. The number will be publicised via the media.

Other help available

Samaritans

116123

www.samaritans.org

CRUSE

0844 477 9400

www.cruse.org.uk

Victim Support

0845 3030900

www.victimsupport.org.uk

Disaster Action

www.disasteraction.org.uk

Childline

0800 1111

www.childline.org

NHS Mental Health Services

www.cumbriapartnership.nhs.uk/our-services/mental-health