

# Disaster Distress Helpline

PHONE: 1-800-985-5990 TEXT: "TalkWithUs" to 66746

## *Emotional Preparedness: Plan to Cope Before a Disaster*

From hurricanes to wildfires, flooding to earthquakes, it's important to consider emotional health when planning for disasters and other emergencies. The following five tips can help you and your loved ones feel calmer and more in control when disasters strike.

### **1: Practice Preparedness**

By developing an emergency plan ahead of time, you are more likely to feel calmer and in control before, during and after a disaster. Preparedness is a year-round activity that everyone in the family can participate in, including kids. Involving children and teens in planning may help them feel less anxious during an emergency and provide reassurance.

### **2: Be a Role Model for Children and Teens**

Children and teens look up to parents and caregivers for guidance during emergencies and stressful situations. Encourage your kids to ask questions about preparedness and emergency planning. Answering their questions can help minimize confusion and decrease anxiety and stress.

### **3: Help Others Prepare**

Preparedness extends beyond the household and is very much a community activity. A great way to help neighbors, family and friends better cope after a disaster is to help them create an emergency plan ahead of time. Show an older adult or family member how to text their emergency contact or use social media to 'check-in' with loved ones. A simple 'I'm OK' message can go a long way in easing anxiety and stress, and is sometimes the only way to communicate when phone lines are down or overwhelmed.

### **4: Balance Normal Routines with Preparedness**

Even during stressful moments, it's important to try to maintain your normal routines, especially during severe weather and when you may need to stay indoors for an extended period of time. Avoid "cabin fever" by cooking a favorite meal, playing a board game with the family, or watching a funny movie. Maintaining normal routines (to the extent possible) also can help ease children's anxiety and minimizes stress reactions.

### **5: Know When to Reach Out for Help**

Sometimes even after trying this you may still feel emotionally distressed after a disaster. If you or someone you care about shows any one or more of these symptoms, call the Disaster Distress Helpline toll-free at 1-800-985-5990 or text "TalkWithUs" to 66746. Support is available 24-7-365.

- Trouble getting through the day and performing regular tasks like concentrating at school, work or home, caregiving responsibilities, personal hygiene, etc.
- Too much or too little sleep; not eating enough or eating too much
- Feeling isolated, numb, or like you don't care about anything
- Worrying a lot; feelings of anxiety that seem like they stay with you all the time
- Substance abuse, including excessive use of prescription meds, alcohol and tobacco
- Thoughts of hurting or killing yourself and/or others.

For more information and resources, visit <http://disasterdistress.samhsa.gov>