

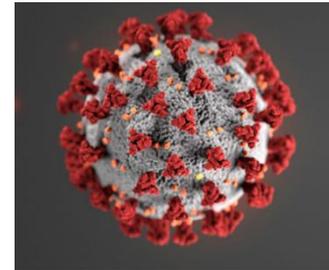


## Safety & Health Alert

### Protect Yourself from COVID-19 in the Workplace

**What is SARS-CoV-2?** It is the virus that causes coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

- SARS = severe acute respiratory distress syndrome.
- Spreads easily person-to-person particularly when someone sneezes.
- There is little if any immunity in humans.



**How is it spread?** COVID-19 is spread from person to person mainly through coughing, sneezing, and possibly talking, and breathing.

**When do symptoms appear?** Symptoms usually show 2-14 days after exposure. People who are infected are likely to be contagious before they develop symptoms or even if they never develop symptoms.

**What are the most common symptoms?** Fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Other symptoms may include: Sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue, and sometimes loss of taste and smell.

Most people will have mild symptoms and should recover at home and NOT go to the hospital or emergency room. **Get medical attention immediately** if you have:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath.
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest.
- New confusion or inability to arouse.
- Bluish lips or face.

**How long does the virus survive outside of the body?** Virus may persist on surfaces for a few hours or up to several days, depending on conditions and the type of surface. It is likely that it can be killed with simple disinfectant on the EPA registered list:

<https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>

**Who is at increased risk of severe illness?** People with underlying health conditions such as:

- Heart disease
- Lung disease such as asthma
- Diabetes
- Suppressed immune systems such as cancer or lupus

The elderly have higher rates of severe illness from COVID-19. Children and younger adults have had less severe illness and death.

**Are there treatments or a vaccine?** There are no treatments or vaccine for this virus.

**What are high risks settings for workers?** Working around people who are infected with the virus at hospitals or at settings with large numbers of people like nursing homes and correctional facilities poses a higher risk.

### **How do I protect myself?**

- Stay home when sick.
- Wash hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer frequently and after coughing, sneezing, blowing nose, and using the restroom. Wash thoroughly for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid shaking hands/wash hands after physical contact with others.
- Avoid touching your nose, mouth, & eyes.
- Cover coughs & sneezes with tissues or do it in your sleeve.
- Dispose of tissues in no-touch bins.
- Avoid close contact with coworkers and customers.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces such as cell phones.
- Avoid sharing equipment if possible.
- Minimize group meetings by using phone, email, and avoid close contact when meetings are necessary.
- Limit unnecessary visitors to the workplace.
- Maintain your physical and emotional health with rest, diet, exercise and relaxation.
- Be prepared if your child's school, daycare facility, or your worksite is temporarily closed.



### **How should I maintain mental health and deal with stress?**

- Use your phone to stay connected to family and friends. Shift from texting to voice or video calling to feel more connected.
- Keep comfortable. Do more of the things you enjoy doing at home.
- Practice stress relief whenever you feel anxiety building – do some deep breathing, exercise, read, dig in the garden, whatever works for you.
- Avoid unhealthy behavior such as excess drinking or drug use – that will just increase your anxiety afterwards.
- Keep looking forward. Make some plans for six months down the road.

### **What should I do if I have symptoms?**

- With mild symptoms you should stay home, isolate yourself from your family, and rest. DO NOT expose your family or co-workers.
- DO NOT go to the doctor or emergency room unless you develop severe symptoms.
- Call your family doctor or the emergency room before you go.



## Information for Families

### When a Family Member is Traumatized at Work

When a family member is traumatized at work, it also affects other family members. Although your loved one who experienced the traumatic event<sup>1</sup> may be experiencing normal reactions, their behavior may not seem normal to the family. It may take time to understand and cope with the event and family members can help. Two other factsheets in this series address 1) reactions to terrible events as well as coping strategies and 2) connecting with others, giving and receiving social support. Take a look at these factsheets.

Family members also may have strong reactions to the traumatic event such as fear, anger, sadness, protectiveness, or withdrawal. Whatever the reactions are, they are normal responses to a highly charged, abnormal traumatic event. This handout aims to provide some suggestions that may help family members help their loved one and themselves. The most important suggestions involve listening to feelings, not imposing a response or solution based on your feelings, and to remain emotionally present.

#### Remember

- Stress responses can occur right away at the scene, or within hours, days, or even within weeks after the event.
- Your loved one may experience a variety of stress symptoms or may not feel any of them.
- Most people recover from traumatic events and feeling safe in the support of family, friends, and co-workers is important to that recovery.
- Reactions and symptoms usually subside and disappear in time; often, by four to six weeks, symptoms are gone or greatly diminished in the majority of people.
- If the signs of distress and the intensity of the reactions have not subsided within four weeks, or if they intensify, your loved one should consider seeking further assistance.
- For most people, if you don't dwell on the symptoms and allow yourselves a chance to deal with the event, the suffering will lessen.
- Encourage, but do not pressure, your loved one to talk about what happened and their reactions to it. Talk is the best medicine. You can be most helpful if you listen and reassure.
- These events are usually upsetting to children. They will need to have some understanding of what happened; that mommy or daddy may be going through a difficult time, but that she or he will get better; and that they are safe and loved.
- If children are not coping well, child counselors or child psychologists can assist.
- Even if you don't fully understand what your loved one is going through, you can still offer your love and support. Don't be afraid to ask what you can do to help. Try not to be offended if they withdraw from the family or become overly protective of you or of children. These are normal reactions to trauma.
- Accept that life will go on. Maintain or return to a normal routine as soon as possible and maintain a healthy lifestyle. For children as well as adults, normal routines, especially for eating and sleeping, help us feel ourselves again.
- Be kind to yourselves.

See the companion factsheets entitled, "[Connecting with Others](#)" and "[When Terrible Things Happen](#)".

<sup>1</sup> Traumatic Event, defined: "An event that has the power to overwhelm the normal coping abilities of an individual or group such as a disaster, violence, serious injury, or death".



# When Terrible Things Happen

## What You May Experience—What Helps and What Doesn't

### Immediate Reactions

There are a wide variety of positive and negative reactions that workers can experience during and immediately after a traumatic event<sup>1</sup>.

These include:

Domain	Negative Responses	Positive Responses
Cognitive (thoughts)	Confusion, disorientation, worry, intrusive thoughts and images, self-blame	Determination and resolve, sharper perception, courage, optimism, faith
Emotional	Shock, sorrow, grief, sadness, fear, anger, numb, irritability, guilt, shame, and crying	Feeling involved, challenged, mobilized
Social	Extreme withdrawal, interpersonal conflict, risky behavior	Social connections, generous helping behaviors
Physical	Fatigue, headache, muscle tension, stomachache, increased heart rate, exaggerated startle response, difficulties sleeping	Alertness, readiness to respond, increased energy

### Common reactions that may continue include:

Intrusive reactions:

- Distressing thoughts or images of the traumatic event while awake or dreaming
- Upsetting emotional or physical reactions to reminders of the experience
- Feeling like the experience is happening all over again (flashback)

Avoidance and withdrawal reactions:

- Avoid talking, thinking, and having feelings about the traumatic event
- Avoid reminders of the event (places and people connected to what happened)
- Restricted emotions; feeling numb
- Feelings of detachment and estrangement from others; social withdrawal
- Loss of interest in usual pleasurable activities

Physical arousal reactions:

- Constantly being “on the lookout” for danger, startling easily, or being jumpy
- Irritability or outbursts of anger, feeling “on edge”
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep, problems concentrating or paying attention

### Reactions to trauma and loss reminders

- Reactions to places, people, sights, sounds, smells, and feelings that are reminders of the traumatic event
- Reminders can bring on distressing mental images, thoughts, and emotional/physical reactions
- Common examples include: sudden loud noises, sirens, locations where the event occurred, seeing people with disabilities, funerals, anniversaries of the traumatic event, and television/radio news about the event

<sup>1</sup>Traumatic Event, defined: “An event that has the power to overwhelm the normal coping abilities of an individual or group such as a disaster, violence, serious injury, or death”.

## Positive changes in priorities, worldview, and expectations

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- Enhanced appreciation that family and friends are precious and important
- Meeting the challenge of addressing difficulties (by taking positive action, changing the focus of thoughts, using humor, acceptance)
- Shifting expectations about what to expect from day to day and about what is considered a “good day”
- Shifting priorities to focus more on quality time with family or friends
- Increased commitment to self, family, friends, and spiritual/religious faith

## When a loved one dies, common reactions include:

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- Feeling confused, numb, disbelief, bewildered, or lost
- Feeling angry at the person who died or at people considered responsible for the death
- Strong physical reactions such as nausea, fatigue, shakiness, and muscle weakness
- Feeling guilty for still being alive
- Intense emotions such as extreme sadness, anger, or fear
- Increased risk for physical illness and injury
- Decreased productivity or difficulties making decisions
- Having thoughts about the person who died, even when you don’t want to
- Longing, missing, and wanting to search for the person who died
- Children and adolescents are particularly likely to worry that they or a parent might die
- Children and adolescents may become anxious when separated from caregivers or other loved ones

## What helps

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- Talking to another person for support or spending time with others
- Engaging in positive distracting activities (sports, hobbies, reading)
- Getting adequate rest and eating healthy meals
- Trying to maintain a normal schedule
- Scheduling pleasant activities
- Taking breaks
- Reminiscing about a loved one who has died
- Focusing on something practical that you can do right now to manage the situation better
- Using relaxation methods (breathing exercises, meditation, calming self-talk, soothing music)
- Participating in a support group
- Exercising in moderation
- Keeping a journal
- Seeking counseling

## What doesn't help

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- Using alcohol or drugs to cope
- Working too much
- Extreme avoidance of thinking or talking about the event or death of a loved one
- Extreme withdrawal from family or friends
- Violence or conflict
- Not taking care of yourself
- Overeating or failing to eat
- Withdrawal from pleasant activities
- Doing risky things (driving recklessly, substance abuse, not taking adequate precautions)
- Excessive TV or computer games
- Blaming others

## Summary

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These feelings, thoughts, behaviors, physical reactions, and challenges to your spirit may come and go. For most people, these reactions usually are resolved in four to eight weeks, depending on the nature of the traumatic event. See the companion factsheets entitled, “[Connecting with Others](#)” and “[Information for Families](#)”.



# Connecting with Others

## Giving and Receiving Social Support

### Seeking Social Support

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Making contact with others can help reduce feelings of distress and help people recover in the aftermath of traumatic events.

Connections can be with family, friends, clergy, or others who are coping with the same traumatic event<sup>1</sup>.

Children and adolescents can benefit from spending some time with other similar aged peers.

### Social Support Options

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- Spouse or partner
- Trusted family member
- Close friend
- Doctor or nurse
- Crisis counselor or other counselor
- Support group
- Co-worker, union representative
- Priest, Rabbi, or other clergy
- Pet

### Do

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- Decide carefully whom to talk to
- Decide ahead of time what you want to discuss
- Choose the right time
- Start by talking about practical things
- Let others know you need to talk or just to be with them
- Talk about painful thoughts and feelings when you are ready
- Ask others if it's a good time to talk
- Tell others you appreciate them listening
- Tell others what you need or how they could help explain one main thing that would help you right now

### Don't

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- Keep quiet because you don't want to upset others
- Keep quiet because you're worried about being a burden
- Assume that others don't want to listen
- Wait until you're so stressed or exhausted that you can't fully benefit from help

### Ways to Get Connected

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- Calling friends or family on the phone
- Increasing contact with existing acquaintances and friends
- Renewing or beginning involvement in church, synagogue, or other religious group activities
- Getting involved with a support group or in community activities

### Connecting with Others – Giving Social Support

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You can help family members and friends cope with the disaster by spending time with them and listening carefully. Most people recover better when they feel connected to others who care about them. Some people choose not to talk about their experiences very much, and others may need to discuss their experiences. For some, talking about things that happened because of the disaster can help them seem less overwhelming. For others, just spending time with people one feels close to and accepted by, without having to talk, can feel best. The next page contains some information about giving social support to other people.

<sup>1</sup>Traumatic Event, defined: "An event that has the power to overwhelm the normal coping abilities of an individual or group such as a disaster, violence, serious injury, or death".

## Reasons Why People May Avoid Social Support

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- Not knowing what they need
- Feeling embarrassed or weak
- Feeling they will lose control
- Not wanting to burden others
- Doubting it will be helpful, or that others won't understand
- Having tried to get help and felt that it wasn't there before
- Wanting to avoid thinking or feeling about the event
- Feeling that others will be disappointed or judgmental
- Not knowing where to get help

## Good Things to Do When Giving Support

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- Show interest, attention, and care
- Find an uninterrupted time and place to talk
- Be free of expectations or judgments
- Show respect for individuals' reactions and ways of coping
- Acknowledge that this type of stress can take time to resolve
- Help brainstorm positive ways to deal with their reactions
- Talk about expectable reactions to disasters, and healthy coping
- Believe that the person is capable of recovery
- Offer to talk or spend time together as often as needed

## Things that Interfere with Giving Support

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- Rushing to tell someone that he/she will be okay or that they should "get over it"
- Discussing your own personal experiences without listening to the other person's story
- Stopping the person from talking about what is bothering them
- Acting like someone is weak or exaggerating because he or she isn't coping as well as you are
- Giving advice without listening to the person's concerns or asking the person what works for him or her
- Telling them they were lucky it wasn't worse

## Summary

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Connecting with others and giving and receiving social support are very beneficial actions that help people recover from traumatic events. See the companion factsheets entitled, "[When Terrible Things Happen, What You May Experience—What Helps and What Doesn't](#)" and "[Information for Families.](#)"



# Self-Care During Times of Stress

## Caring For Yourself

This factsheet covers the basics of self-care for workers and families including healthy sleeping, eating, exercise, and social interaction. The bottom line is to avoid radical changes to normal life patterns.

### Sleep Deprivation is Hazardous?

Driving, operating heavy machinery or performing hazardous tasks while sleepy can be dangerous to you and your coworkers.

According to the National Institutes of Health's, National Heart, lung, and Blood Institute<sup>1</sup>, sleep deprivation occurs when you have one of the following:

You don't get enough sleep; 7 - 8 hours for adults.
You sleep at the wrong time of day.
You don't sleep well or deeply.
You have a sleep disorder.

Sleep deprivation is linked to many chronic diseases and depression. It is also linked to increased risk of injury. It is a common myth that people can learn to get by on little sleep with no negative effects. After losing 1-2 hours of sleep over a couple of nights, functioning suffers.

### Signs and Symptoms

How sleepy you feel during the day can help you figure out whether you're having symptoms of problem sleepiness. You might be sleep deficient if you often feel like you could doze off during normal activities.

### Tips

It is common for disaster workers and volunteers to work long hours. To the extent that you have control over your schedule, it is very important to practice healthy sleeping habits:

- If your accommodations are noisy, earplugs may be helpful.
- Eye covers may help if the sleeping area has too much light.
- Limiting 'screen time' (electronic device use and TV's) prior to sleep
- Avoid heavy meals, alcohol, tobacco or caffeine prior to bed.

<sup>1</sup> NIH website accessed 8/4/2014: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/sdd/>.

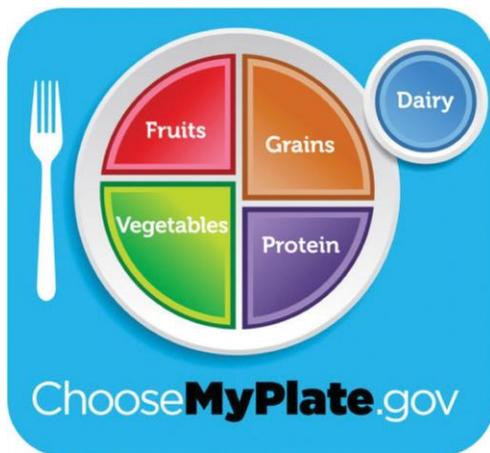
## Are you eating well?

Disaster workers and volunteers are often confronted with unhealthy eating choices such as donuts, the bottomless coffee pot, pizza, or just a lack of access to nutritious alternatives. Consuming large amounts of sugar, fat, and other unhealthy food and snacks can increase stress on our minds and bodies. Importantly, energy and caffeinated drinks may provide a temporary boost, but the let down is rapid and deep. These should be avoided if one is tired. The only thing that can cure sleep deficit is sleep.

The 2010 U.S. Dietary guidelines for Americans describe a healthy diet as one that:

Emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products.
Includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts.
Is low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, sodium (salt), and added sugars.
Stays within your calorie needs.

learn more about the Dietary guidelines for Americans at: <http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines>.



## Are You Getting Any Exercise?

Regular physical activity is one of the most important things you can do for your health. It is a very effective way of reducing stress and relaxing.

Fitting exercise into your schedule may be difficult, especially when you are doing exhausting disaster work. But even ten minutes at a time is fine. The key is to find the right exercise for you. It should be fun and should match your abilities. Brief walks are a great outlet for your mind and body.

## Are You Interacting With Others?

Making contact with others can help reduce feelings of distress and help people recover in the aftermath of traumatic events. Connections can be with family, friends, clergy, or others who are coping with the same traumatic event. For more detail see the accompanying factsheet entitled, "Connecting with Others, Giving and receiving Social Support".