For Adults Recovering From the Emotional Toll of

THE COVID-19 DISASTER

MDHHS
Michigan Department of Health & Human Services



The COVID-19 pandemic has created a state of disaster in our communities, leaving lives changed and futures uncertain. Even if you have not suffered directly from the coronavirus, no one who experiences a disaster is untouched by it.

For many, a disaster continues as a very real presence even long after it has passed. Feelings of sadness, depression, frustration, anger, and anxiety are common. It is not unusual for these feelings to last for many months.

Learning to recognize the normal reactions and emotions that occur can help you better understand these feelings and become more comfortable and effective in coping with them.

The following information explains the range of feelings and behaviors you can expect and how you, your family, friends, and neighbors can best help yourselves and each other during this time of recovery. Suggestions for coping with your feelings are offered throughout this document.

YOUR HEALTH

As you endure long-term stress, your health can be adversely affected. It is common for people to have headaches, stomach or intestinal problems, colds, infections, and allergies more frequently. In addition, preexisting medical conditions such as heart problems and high blood pressure may be exacerbated by the prolonged stress.

MIXED EMOTIONS

Re-engaging with people after a period of COVID-19-imposed isolation can bring mixed emotions such as relief and joy as well as sadness and fear. These are normal feelings and reactions. Sadness is often due to the reminders of loved ones who died from the coronavirus, or businesses/jobs that were lost. Feelings of fear and anxiety are common upon returning to activities and gatherings that once felt normal.

TALK TO CHILDREN

Take time to talk with children about their experience. Listen to what they have to say and let them freely express their feelings. This is a confusing and frightening time for them. Remember children do not have the same level of coping or understanding as adults.

SEASONAL EVENTS

During the first year following a disaster, many calendar events such as birthdays, holidays, and the change of seasons can arouse emotions such as sadness and distress. It is normal for certain events to remind you of "how things used to be," and of things that were changed or lost. Recovery and healing involves letting yourself grieve the loss of these things.

STAY WELL

Michigan.gov/StayWell

If stress, anxiety, depression, or physical problems increase, persist, or interfere with your regular activities, you should consult a physician or a mental health professional, or access helpful resources at Michigan.gov/StayWell.

Stay Well Counseling available through COVID-19 hotline.

Dial 1-888-535-6136 (Press "8")

The Stay Well Crisis Counseling and Training Program is funded by a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant and directed by emergency behavioral health staff within the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. Brochure content adapted from FEMA, the Center for Mental Health Services, and Victim Services of the Texas Department of Public Safety.

WHY DO I FEEL THE WAY I DO?

It is very common for people to experience a wide range of emotional reactions to a disaster. These reactions are experienced through thoughts, feelings, and actions, and are often very upsetting to you and those around you.

However, it is extremely important to remember that they are **NORMAL REACTIONS TO AN ABNORMAL EVENT**. You have been through an exceptionally stressful situation and these emotional reactions may continue for many months following the disaster.



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THINGS TO LOOK FOR

YOUR BEHAVIORS

Having problems falling or staying asleep • Isolating yourself or withdrawing from others • Keeping excessively busy and preoccupied to avoid the unpleasant effects of the disaster • At times, becoming overly alert or easily startled • Avoiding activities, places, or even people that remind you of the disaster • Experiencing more conflicts or tension with family members or other people/more anger • Crying easily or becoming tearful for no apparent reason • Experiencing an increase or decrease in your normal appetite • Drinking more alcoholic beverages

YOUR FEELINGS

"Just not yourself," out of balance, or easily upset • Loss of interest in everyday activities • A sense of despair, hopelessness, or emptiness about the future • Anxiety or fear, especially when things remind you of the disaster • Irritability, shortness of temper, or anger and resentment • Depression, sadness, or feeling down much of the time

YOUR THOUGHTS

Trouble concentrating or remembering things • Difficulty with making decisions • Frequent replaying of the events and circumstances of the disaster in your mind • Recurring dreams or nightmares about the disaster • Questioning of your spiritual or religious beliefs

HOW TO COPE AND WHAT WORKS

FOR YOURSELF

Talk to others about how you are feeling; it is important to talk about your experiences; you need to express sadness, grief, anger, and fears over what has happened and what you face • Do not overwork yourself; find time for recreation, relaxation, or a favorite hobby • Do not let yourself become isolated; seek out and maintain connections with your community, friends, relatives, neighbors, coworkers, or people who attend your place of worship; talk about your experiences with them

• Pay close attention to your physical health, as prolonged stress takes its toll on your body; maintain a good diet and make sure you are getting enough sleep; it is also helpful to be physically active or exercise • Upsetting times can cause some people to use alcohol or drugs to cope with the stress; it does not help in the long run and will likely cause other problems

FOR YOUR FAMILY

Families should keep some routines in place such as regular meals, certain enjoyable activities, and other family rituals; this will help you feel as though life has some sense of order and normalcy • Couples should take time to be alone, as a couple, to talk about how you are feeling, and to have fun together

WHAT CAN I EXPECT?

There are many concerns, adjustments, and ordeals that follow the experience of a disaster. Generally, within a short time there is the reality of financial setbacks and personal devastation from the loss of loved ones. The endless adjustments that you and your family must make will put additional stress on your relationships and daily living. You may also grow physically and mentally weary from continuing requirements to wear face coverings in public and keep a safe distance from others. All of these factors can hinder your ability to move forward.

In the aftermath of a disaster, it is important to remember that it will take time to heal and recover from the emotional effects of the event. However, with the passing of time, your efforts to cope will begin to reduce the intensity and duration of these reactions and behaviors.



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SOURCES OF SUPPORT

STAY WELL COUNSELING VIA THE COVID-19 HOTLINE

If you are experiencing emotional distress in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, get help from **Michigan Stay Well Counseling** via the COVID-19 Hotline. Call 1-888-535-6136 and press "8" to talk to a Michigan Stay Well counselor. Counselors available 24/7 – confidential and free. Foreign language interpreters available.

MICHIGAN PEER WARMLINE

If you are living with serious mental illness or substance use challenges and feel it will help lower your stress if you talk with someone who understands these issues, get help from the **Michigan PEER Warmline**. Call 1-888-PEER-753 (888-733-7753). Available every day from 10 a.m. to 2 a.m.

MICHIGAN CRISIS TEXT LINE

If you are experiencing emotional stress and anxiety but are more comfortable texting than talking, get help from the **Michigan Crisis Text Line**. Text the keyword "RESTORE" to 741741. Available 24/7.

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE

If you are thinking of taking your life, get help from the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**. Call 1-800-273-8255 – available 24/7. You can also text the keyword "TALK" to 741741, or visit suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING HOTLINE

Access 24/7 video relay service. Call 1-800-273-8255 (TTY 1-800-799-4889).

HEADSPACE WEB SERVICE

If you would like to manage feelings of COVID-19 stress and anxiety through meditation, sleep, and movement exercises, get help from **Headspace Web Service**. Free to all Michiganders (normally a paid service). Visit headspace.com/mi.