Coping with the Aftermath of a Flood

A flood can leave a trail of structural destruction, but what about the emotional impact? The full force of the disaster is often realized after the floodwaters recede and emergency crews go home. In addition to the clean-up efforts, it’s important that you devote time to restoring your own emotional wellness. Feelings of grief, despair and frustration are normal reactions to such events. Other emotions you may be experiencing include:

- Panic/Feeling out of control
- Despair
- Disorientation/Confusion
- Guilt
- Shock/Numbness
- Anger
- Anxiety/Uncertainty
- Grief

Helping Children Cope in the Wake of Disaster

Your children will never need your calm resolve more than during times of crisis. Among the most stressful events are uncontrollable natural disasters. Every parent hopes to shelter children from harm’s way, emotionally as well as physically.

Ironically, troubled times provide parents with teachable moments that can have positive outcomes for kids. With parents as role models and coaches, children can learn to cope constructively during crisis. Here are some tips for communicating with children who have experienced or witnessed a disaster.

During a Disaster and Immediately Following

- Remain calm. If you need your child’s quick cooperation, give them clear directions. Make them simple enough for children to understand according to their age and development.

- Give children a constructive example to believe in and follow. Children are extremely sensitive to your actions and words. They will notice your body language, tone of voice, etc.

- Limit children’s exposure to graphic details of crisis. Children often personalize information, believing crisis will affect their immediate family, even if it’s actually happening miles away.

- Explain disaster-related terms children hear. Describe what is happening so children can understand.

- Spend time together so questions can be asked. Children may understand some facts, but be confused by others. Clear up misconceptions to reduce anxiety.

- Respond to children’s questions calmly in language geared to your child’s age. Giving too little information can confuse children and giving too much can overwhelm them.
Coping Tips
Following the coping techniques outlined below can help you deal with the range of emotions you are most likely experiencing:

- Be extra patient. Don’t expect things to instantly restore themselves. Accept that restoration (both physical and emotional) takes time.
- Realize that you will experience a range of emotions, and moods can change unexpectedly.
- Don’t overlook the feelings of children as you deal with the situation. They need to feel that they can count on you for extra attention, love and support.
- Try to keep your family diet as nourishing as possible for needed energy.
- Focus on the big picture, instead of the little details and little problems. It will give you a sense of competency.
- Talk with friends, family, counselors or members of the clergy. In crisis situations, a supportive network is essential.
- Try to get at least seven to eight hours of sleep a night to refresh your mind and body for the next day’s activities.
- Make a list of things that need to be done and rank them by what needs to be done first, second, third, etc.
- Learn acceptance. Don’t worry about things you cannot control. Conserve your energies for things you can control.

Resources Are Available
Additional information, self-help tools and other resources are available online at www.MagellanHealth.com/member. Or call us for more information, help and support. Counselors are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to provide confidential assistance at no cost to you.

Helping Children Heal
- Provide ways for children to safely express their feelings, through drawing, painting, essays, etc.
- Children benefit from concrete ways of helping victims. It builds compassion and gives children some sense of control.
- Don’t assume this is short term. For years to come, kids will need your reassurance and guidance.
- The anniversary of tragedies will sometimes be remembered and publicized. Young children won’t be able to discern which events and images are from the past and which are current.
- Separate your feelings from your child’s. If you become overwhelmed by crisis, find others to whom you can safely express anxiety, such as family, friends, neighbors, or a counselor.

Symptoms of Children Over-Stressed by Crisis
During times of unrelenting stress, children may experience changes in behavior or attitude. If such signs don’t reduce over time, or in fact increase, consider taking children for counseling. Symptoms may include: changes in sleep patterns, appetite, or energy level; bedwetting; regression in toilet training; regression to thumb sucking; uncharacteristic separation problems from parents; excessive whining and irritability; long-term poor concentration; unusual, persistent aggression; and apathy, isolation, and depression.