

# COPING WITH TRAUMA & DISASTERS



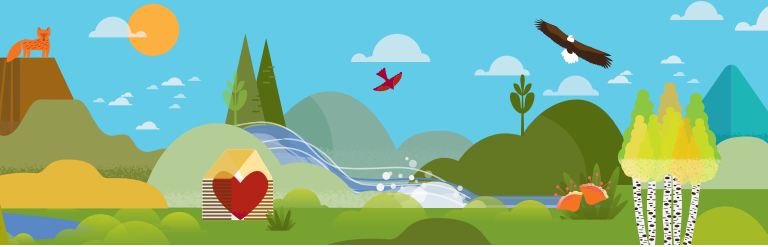
## TRAUMATIC EVENTS ARE SHOCKING AND EMOTIONALLY OVERWHELMING.

Surviving and living through traumatic situations, tragedies or natural disasters can be psychologically challenging. There is disruption, uncertainty and stress, and **everyone handles it differently**. Although many thoughts, feelings, behaviors and physical reactions can be very upsetting, it's important to remember that they are **common reactions to an extraordinary and stressful circumstance**. It is normal to experience intense feelings and reactions during times of heightened stress. They are signs of an overwhelming situation, not of personal weakness.



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## WHAT ADULTS CAN EXPECT AFTER TRAUMA

### PHYSICAL

- Fatigue, exhaustion, weakness
- Chest pain or rapid heart beat
- Startled reactions
- Insomnia or hypersomnia
- Nightmares
- Hyperactivity or under-activity
- Chills
- Nausea
- Dizziness

### COGNITIVE

- Difficulty concentrating & with abstract thinking
- Poor decision-making & problem-solving
- Overly alert and/or cautious
- Memory problems/forgetfulness
- Blaming self or others
- Distorted sense of time and/or place
- Flashbacks
- Disturbed thinking
- Intrusive images

### EMOTIONAL

- Anxiety or fear
- Guilt or denial
- Emotional numbing
- Severe panic
- Depression or agitation
- Feeling overwhelmed or irritable
- Amnesia of event
- Intense anger
- Uncertainty or helplessness

### BEHAVIORAL

- Change in activity level
- Withdrawal
- Emotional loss of control or outbursts
- Suspiciousness
- Increased drug & alcohol use
- Loss or increase in appetite
- Crying
- Inability to rest
- Pacing

- Pets may become disoriented, particularly if the disaster has affected scent markers that normally allow them to find their way home.
- Watch your animals closely and keep them under your direct control as fences and gates may have been damaged.
- Be aware of hazards at nose and paw or hoof level, particularly debris, spilled chemicals, fertilizers and other substances that might not seem to be dangerous to humans.
- Consult your veterinarian if any behavior problems persist.

For information on disaster planning and emergency actions to take for livestock, horses, birds, reptiles or other small animals such as gerbils or hamsters, please visit the Humane Society of the United States ([www.HSUS.org](http://www.HSUS.org)), [ready.gov](http://ready.gov) or [redcross.org](http://redcross.org).



## HELPING YOUR FAMILY COPE

- Spend time being available to talk with your children.
- Really listen. Listen twice as much as you talk, be aware of what their concerns might be, give clear, simple answers. If you don't know the answer to a question it's OK to say that.
- Ask them what they already know.
- Encourage children to talk about their feelings, worries, daydreams and distractions. Accept the feelings they share, listen carefully and remind them that these are normal reactions following a very scary event.
- Provide information in a simple, clear and age-appropriate manner. Answer questions without giving more information than is necessary.
- Help your children feel safe. Talk with them about their concerns over safety. Remind them of ways you keep them safe. Go over your family's communication plan and practice phone numbers.
- Limit media exposure. Protect them from too much media coverage. Explain that TV, radio, the internet and social media can spread rumors and trigger fears.
- Maintain reasonable expectations or 'rules'. Stick with family rules, such as bedtimes, curfews, checking in with you while with friends, and keeping up with homework and chores. Staying in familiar routines as best as possible is reassuring.
- Address 'acting out' behaviors. Help them understand that acting out behaviors are a dangerous way to express strong feelings like anger and grief. Talk about other ways of coping with these feelings, such as fun activities, exercise, writing in a journal, spending time with family and friends.
- Be patient. It is normal for everyone to have a stress response to any potential threat in the environment. This can lead to a lack of patience. Remember, your loved one is not your enemy.



# TAKING CARE OF PETS IN A DISASTER

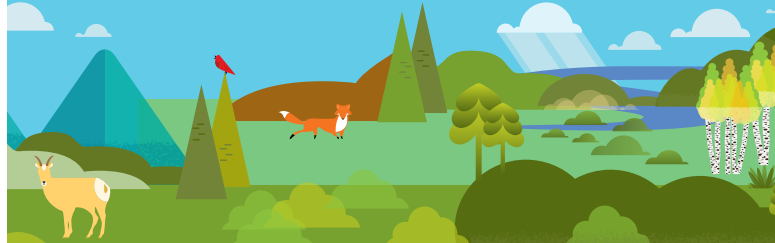
Our pets enrich our lives in more ways than we can count. In turn, they depend on us for their safety and well-being. Disaster planning should include your pets. Being prepared can help save their life.

If at all possible, plan to take your pets with you in an evacuation. If it's not safe for you to stay, it is not safe for them either.

- If applicable, bring pets inside so you won't have to search for them if you need to leave quickly.
- Know which hotels/motels in your evacuation route will accept you and your pets in an emergency. Call ahead for reservations if you know you may need to evacuate. Ask if no-pet policies could be waived in an emergency.
- Know which friends, relatives, boarding facilities, shelters or veterinarians can care for your animals in an emergency. Prepare a list with phone numbers.
- Although your animals may be more comfortable together, be prepared to house them separately.
- Include your pets in evacuation drills so that they become used to entering and traveling in their carriers calmly.
- Make sure all pet vaccinations are current and all dogs & cats are wearing collars with securely fastened, up-to-date identification. Many pet shelters require proof of current vaccinations to reduce the spread of disease.
- Consider having your pet 'micro-chipped' by your veterinarian.
- Learn First Aid for your Pets. Visit [RedCross.org](http://RedCross.org) for more info.
- Assemble a portable kit with emergency supplies for your pets, including:
  - Sturdy leashes, harnesses and/or carriers to transport pets safely and ensure they cannot escape.
  - Food, drinking water, bowls, cat litter/pan and a manual can opener.
  - Medications and copies of medical records stored in a waterproof container.
  - A first aid kit.
  - Current photos of you with your pets in case they get lost. Since many pets look alike, this will help eliminate mistaken identity & confusion.
  - Info on feeding schedules, medical conditions, behavior problems and the name & number of your veterinarian in case you have to foster or board your pets.
  - Pet beds & toys, if easily transportable.

## AFTERWARDS

- The behavior of your pet may change dramatically, becoming aggressive or defensive, so be aware of their well-being and protect them from hazards to ensure the safety of other people and animals.



## THINGS TO DO TO HELP YOURSELF:

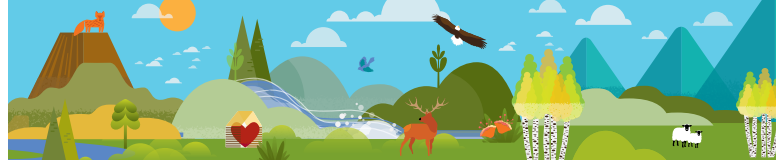
Recovering from the emotional effects of an event can take a long time but you can take steps to begin the healing.

- Remind yourself that you are having normal reactions. Give yourself a break, be kind to yourself.
- When you can, allow yourself to feel sadness & grief over what has happened. Give yourself permission to feel depressed or overwhelmed. Talking to others about how you are feeling is important.
- Try to keep daily decisions & family routines (like mealtimes) in place if possible, structure your time. This helps in feeling there is still a sense of control and order to your life.
- Alcohol and drug usage does not help in the long run. Try to limit your intake.
- Practice healthy habits like eating well and getting enough sleep, both very important in times of high stress. Relax and do things you enjoy, exercise moderately.
- Don't let yourself become isolated. Maintain connections with your friends, relatives and community. Talk about your experiences with them.
- Try to focus on the positive. There are caring people and acts of kindness all around us.
- Forgive yourself and others when you act out because of stress. This is a difficult time and everyone's emotions are closer to the surface. Do not let your stress become an excuse for child or spouse abuse.
- Avoid making big life decisions for a few months.

**Emotional Resilience** is the ability to adapt to stressful situations or crisis. Those who master resilience accept what comes at them with flexibility rather than rigidity – bending rather than breaking. Tap into your resilience by

- Seeking and surrounding yourself with other resilient people. They listen, giving space to grieve and work through emotions, calming rather than frustrating.
- Cultivating self-awareness, which allows one to get in touch with what's needed and when it may be time to reach out for some extra help.
- Practicing acceptance. Healing takes time and is part of all lives. Acceptance is about experiencing the full range of emotions and trusting one will bounce back.
- Willing to be mindful—present in the moment without avoidance or judgment.
- Practicing good self-care.
- Reaching out for help.

# FAMILY & CHILDREN'S RESPONSE TO TRAUMA



Children's responses to trauma vary according to their age. Generally, children respond by reverting to behavior typical of an earlier developmental stage. It is important to recognize some changes are considered 'normal' if they are brief (less than three weeks) in duration. If symptoms continue, you may consider seeking help.

AGE	COMMON REACTIONS	HELPFUL HINTS
1 - 4 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bed-wetting</li> <li>• Fear of darkness or being left alone</li> <li>• Excessive clinging</li> <li>• Nightmares</li> <li>• Crying</li> <li>• Loss of bladder or bowel control</li> <li>• Speech difficulties</li> <li>• Immobility</li> <li>• Confusion</li> <li>• Disobedience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide calming words &amp; physical comforting</li> <li>• Give frequent attention</li> <li>• Establish comforting bedtime routines</li> <li>• Encourage expression through re-enactment</li> </ul>
5 - 11 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thumb-sucking</li> <li>• Irritability, whining</li> <li>• Clinging</li> <li>• Nightmares or fear of darkness</li> <li>• Aggression, competition for attention at school or home</li> <li>• Withdrawal from peers</li> <li>• Loss of interest, poor concentration</li> <li>• Headaches or other physical complaints</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patience &amp; tolerance</li> <li>• Play sessions with adults &amp; peers</li> <li>• Discussions with adults &amp; peers</li> <li>• Slightly relaxed expectations temporarily</li> <li>• Opportunities for structured but not demanding chores &amp; responsibilities</li> <li>• Rehearse safety measures</li> </ul>
12 - 17 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Running away</li> <li>• Stealing</li> <li>• Sleeplessness</li> <li>• Difficulties with school or relationships</li> <li>• Drug or alcohol use</li> <li>• Inattentiveness or confusion</li> <li>• Aggressiveness, irritability</li> <li>• Radical changes in attitude</li> <li>• Premature entrance into adulthood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor media exposure</li> <li>• Spend time as a family talking about how everyone is feeling/doing</li> <li>• Bring friends &amp; families together</li> <li>• Encourage constructive activities</li> <li>• Encourage postponing major life decisions</li> <li>• Explain that strains on relationships &amp; changes in attitude are common but bounce back over time</li> </ul>

## WHEN TO SEEK SUPPORT FROM A MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL

A few general guidelines may be useful in deciding when normal reactions to disaster become issues requiring assistance:

- When disturbing emotions or behaviors last more than four to six weeks.
- When a person's emotions or behaviors make it difficult to function normally, whether at home, work, school or out in the community.
- Any time someone feels unstable or concerned about themselves.

MIND SPRINGS *health* is the largest provider of mental health counseling and therapy on the western slope. Therapists and licensed clinicians are available by scheduling an appointment at one of our 12 offices throughout the western slope. Location information can be found on the back of this brochure. If you or someone you know is in crisis help is available around the clock by calling Colorado Crisis Services at 844.493.8255 or texting TALK to 38255.

# DISASTER RESOURCES

## AMERICAN RED CROSS FAMILY WELFARE PROGRAM

Phone: **303.722.7474 / 970.242.4851**

## CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION / EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

Phone: **888.246.2675**

## FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

Phone: **800.621.FEMA**

## NATIONAL VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS ACTIVE IN DISASTERS

Phone: **301.890.2119**

## SAMHSA DISASTER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER (DTAC)

Phone: **800.308.3515**

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# OFFICE LOCATIONS AND NUMBERS

## ASPEN

0405 Castle Creek Road  
Suite 207

**970.920.5555**

## CRAIG

439 Breeze Street  
Suite 200

**970.824.6541**

## EAGLE

137 Howard Street

**970.328.6969**

## FRISCO

301 W Main Street  
Suite 201

**970.668.3478**

## GLENWOOD SPRINGS

2802 S Grand Avenue

**970.945.2583**

## GRANBY

244 E. Agate Avenue

**970.887.2179**

## GRAND JUNCTION

### OUTPATIENT

515 28<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> Road

**970.241.6023**

### WEST SPRINGS HOSPITAL

515 28<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> Road

**970.263.4918**

### MEEKER

267 6th Street

**970.878.5112**

### RANGELY

17497 West Highway 64

**970.675.8411**

### STEAMBOAT SPRINGS

407 South Lincoln Avenue

**970.879.2141**

### VAIL

395 East Lionshead Circle

**970.476.0930**

### WALDEN

350 McKinley Street

**970.723.0055**

Colorado Crisis Services Hotline  
844.493.TALK (8255) or text TALK to 38255



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[MINDSPRINGSHEALTH.ORG](http://MINDSPRINGSHEALTH.ORG)