Virginia Cooperative Extension
Knowledge for the CommonWealth

Dealing with Stress after a Disaster

General

A natural disaster not only leaves a trail of property destruction in its wake, many times it leaves thousands of its victims with a damaged sense of balance. In addition to restoring buildings and replacing material possessions, during the recovery period, victims may need to devote time to restoring their own emotional equilibrium. This can be especially important for children who do not have years of life experience to guide them.

Tips

- Be extra patient.

- Determine what's really important, keeping in mind that your spouse's viewpoint on what should be considered top priority may be different from yours.

- Don't expect things to instantly restore themselves. Accept that restoration (both physical and emotional) takes time.

- Realize that disaster victims have suffered losses and it's natural for them to express disbelief, anger, sadness, anxiety, and depression afterwards.

- Realize that the emotions of victims will roller-coaster 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 the extra attention, love and support needed to get through.

- Reassure them, making sure they understand they are not responsible for the problems you face.

- Try to keep your family diet as nourishing as possible under the circumstances.

- Refocusing on the big picture, instead of the little details and the little problems, 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.

- Be aware of the tendency to resort to bad habits when you are under stress.