



From Disaster to Recovery: Rebuilding from the Inside Out

A natural disaster can strike without a moment's notice. Left in the aftermath is destruction, devastation, pain and deep sorrow. Survivors are forced to face a difficult reality--release what was and embrace the uncertainty of what lies ahead. Simply stated, grief is a natural manifestation of disaster.

Navigating the emotional hurdles

Lately, tornadoes, floods, and tsunamis have become a regular part of the world's discourse. From the South to the Midwest to points abroad, thousands of people have been displaced, separated from loved ones, injured and killed. Those who survive are faced with a sobering cliché: life goes on.

"Everyone who experiences a disaster is affected in one way or another," said Barbara Gray, EdD, Director of Crisis Services for Pathways. "It's important to know that certain emotions are normal...anxiety about your safety and those you love and profound sadness and grief are normal reactions."

Other common reactions to trauma and disaster

- Shock and disbelief
- Fear
- Helplessness
- Guilt
- Anger

Tips for recovery

What follows are a few tips to help the recovery process in the aftermath of a disaster.

1. Seek comfort and support
2. Minimize media exposure
3. Acknowledge and accept your feelings
4. Make stress reduction a focal point

Seek comfort and support

- Re-establish a routine. Finding a new normal builds comfort over time even if it means bits and pieces of the routine prior to the disaster.
- Find constructive ways to keep occupied.
- Connect with others. Try to resist the urge to withdraw from others or social activities. Spend time with loved ones. Connect with other survivors. Take advantage of support groups.
- Confront any feelings of helplessness. Be mindful of strengths and abilities. Volunteer to provide support to others affected by the disaster.

Minimize media exposure

- Visual exposure to the disaster can cause retraumatization. Try to avoid watching the news at bedtime. Avoid it completely if the media coverage affects you emotionally.
- Protect children from seeing graphic news video or newspaper articles.
- Communicate how you feel about what you see

Acknowledge and accept your feelings

- Give yourself time to heal and to mourn losses
- Allow the healing process to come naturally (don't force it)
- Strive to be patient with pace in which recovery is taking place
- Prepare for emotions that may be foreign to you or even volatile
- Feel whatever you feel without remorse, judgment or guilt
- Talk about what's on your mind and heart

Make stress reduction a focal point

- Find relaxing activities that you enjoy and make a point to do them as much as possible
- Schedule rest and relaxation activities just as you would a doctor's appointment
- Savor relaxing moments by being mindful of how these activities make you feel

If daily activities become increasingly difficult, seek the help of a mental health provider.

Traumatic stress warning signs:

- Six weeks after the disaster and there is no sign of emotional relief
- Daily activities become increasingly difficult
- Terrifying memories, nightmares and flashbacks re-occur
- Connecting with others becomes increasingly difficult

- Suicidal thoughts are feelings
- Increased avoidance of things associated with the disaster

“It’s important for survivors to know that seeking help—whether it’s community support services or emotional support—is not a sign of weakness,” Dr. Gray said. “One of the first steps in recovery is acknowledging what you need to get back on course and then taking advantage of the help that’s available to you.”

To seek help for yourself or for someone you know, call **660.885.8131** or visit *PathwaysOnline.org* for a location near you. Pathways’ crisis hotlines are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week: **1-888-279-8188** (Johnson, Cass & Lafayette counties) or **1-800-833-3915** (Bates, Benton, Camden, Cedar, Cole, Crawford, Dent, Gasconade, Henry, Hickory, Maries, Miller, Laclede, Osage, Pulaski, Phelps, St. Clair and Vernon counties).

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About Us

Midwest Behavioral Healthcare Management, Inc. is the parent company of Pathways Community Behavioral Healthcare, Inc., and Royal Oaks Hospital, located in Windsor, MO. Together, the non-profit community behavioral healthcare center with 32 offices throughout 36 counties in Missouri and the 41-bed behavioral health hospital, provide a full continuum of evidence-based behavioral health services for children, adolescents and adults. Services include comprehensive psychiatric treatment, addiction recovery, and crisis & prevention services. Pathways has been providing behavioral health services for over 30 years. For the Children Foundation, the primary funding-raising arm of Midwest Behavioral Healthcare Management, Inc., raises money for children who suffer with behavioral issues but have no way to pay for treatment. Funds raised by the Foundation help children receive needed services at Pathways and Royal Oaks.