



Mental Health Resources For Those Affected By Earthquakes and Natural Disasters

The recent devastating earthquakes around the world are having an impact on individuals and families in the New York City metropolitan area and around the United States who are from the affected countries, or who have relatives or friends in Chile, Japan or Haiti who may have been killed, injured, or left homeless. The earthquakes may also upset others who have been affected by past traumas and may re-trigger a traumatic response in those who have been affected, even if the events were dissimilar in nature (such as 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, or aviation accidents).

It is expected that affected individuals will experience distressing emotional reactions to the earthquake. Some may be reluctant to seek help because of stigma associated with discussing emotional or behavioral problems. The Mental Health Association of New York City can assist by guiding people who may be affected by this disaster to available treatment and emotional support programs in the New York City area by calling **1-800-LIFENET**, or by going to **www.800lifenet.org**.

COMMON REACTIONS AFTER TRAUMA

- Emotional reactions:
 - Feelings of overwhelming grief, helplessness, frustration, impotency, frustration, overwhelming worry, anxiety, anger at authorities, loss of faith, irritability, depression or emotional numbness.
 - Children may experience feelings of separation anxiety.
- Physical reactions:
 - Insomnia (or sleeping too much or much more than usual), loss or increase of appetite, chest or throat tightness, shortness of breath or digestive problems.
- Cognitive reactions:
 - Recurrent, obsessive thoughts or fantasies about loved ones, inability to concentrate or work effectively, confusion, racing thoughts or forgetfulness.
- Behavioral reactions:
 - Increase in alcohol or drug use (especially regarding relapse for individuals in recovery), decreased/increased eating, suicidal gestures, having a short fuse with situations that might normally not upset or difficulty performing everyday functions.

THINGS YOU CAN DO TO FEEL BETTER

- Know that there may be a period during which you may not feel like yourself. Having intense feelings is normal and will decrease over time. Be patient with yourself.
- Seek social support from family, relatives, friends, clergy and coworkers. Accept help when offered.
- Be proactive. Volunteer time to relief efforts, and provide support to others.
- Keep to a routine as much as possible.



- Avoid excessive media exposure to earthquake-related segments.
- Use stress management tools:
 - Distraction methods when appropriate (non-news TV, internet, music, reading, yoga).
 - Relaxation techniques.
 - Exercise to moderate stress and depression.
 - Avoid excessive indulgence in alcohol, drugs, comfort foods.
- Remind yourself what coping skills you have used in the past that have helped during difficult times and use those skills now.
- If you notice signs of significant anxiety or depression, suicidal thoughts, acting out behaviors (drinking/drugging/gambling/sexual acting out), or difficulty functioning at home (e.g., losing patience with your children) or at work or school, seek help by contacting your current medical doctor, counselor or contact any of the resources mentioned below for assistance.

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

The Mental Health Association of New York City offers a number of resources available to those who are affected:

- In the New York City area, call **1-800-LIFENET** for free, confidential help with mental health and substance abuse problems, available 24 hours a day, year-round, and in almost every language. LifeNet can provide assistance in Creole, French, and Spanish at **1-877-AYUDESE**, and Cantonese, Mandarin, Japanese, Korean and Fujianese at **1-877-990-8585**.
- Anywhere in the U.S., call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline **1-800-273-TALK**, if you or someone you know is in emotional distress or suicidal crisis.
- Online, go to www.800lifenet.org or www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

Further information about the resources provided by the Mental Health Association of New York City can be found at www.mhaofnyc.org.