

# Delta Gamma Well Aware

Encompasses eight dimensions: Social, Spiritual, Physical, Emotional, Vocational, Intellectual, Financial and Leadership Development

## How to Cope



After a disaster, such as Hurricane Katrina, learning how to cope with traumatic stress is important to the healing process. Even those not directly affected by the disaster may be dealing with the resulting trauma and it is important to learn how to cope effectively along the path to recovery.

### Immediately after a disaster or traumatic event:

- Typical responses include **shock** and **denial**, which are normal, protective reactions.
- **Shock**, a sudden and intense disturbance of an emotional state, may leave you feeling stunned or dazed.
- **Denial**, not acknowledging that an extremely stressful event has occurred, may leave you feeling numb or disconnected.
- Those in close proximity to danger or who lost family members, even pets, may be particularly affected.

### Once the initial shock subsides:

- Feelings become unpredictable and intense, and you may experience mood swings, anxiousness, nervousness and/or depression.
- The trauma affects thoughts and behavior patterns, such as flashbacks, eliciting strong physical reactions such as sweating or rapid heartbeat.
- Concentration and decision making become difficult and sleep and eating patterns may be disrupted.
- Anniversaries of the traumatic event, along with reminders such as a rain or high winds, can trigger upsetting memories.
- Headaches, nausea and chest pains may result from extreme stress.

### Over time, people respond differently:

- There is no standard reaction to traumatic events; reactions can occur immediately or take months or years to manifest.
- Factors affecting emotional recovery include the degree and intensity of loss, the general ability of a person to cope and unrelated stressful events preceding the trauma.

### How to help yourself and your family:

- Allow time to heal and mourn your losses.

- Do not be afraid to ask for support from those who care about you.
- Keep the lines of communication open with your family, friends and yourself.
- Locate support groups in your area that are led by qualified professionals.
- Healthy behaviors enhance your ability to cope with extreme stress, so try to eat well-balanced meals and get plenty of rest.
- Establish routines to bring comfort, even if you are in a shelter or temporary location. Eat meals at a regular time, try to exercise daily, etc.

#### If you have or take care of children:

- Let them be dependent on you during the months following the trauma; spend more time with them.
- Relieve tension by providing play experiences such as drawing their ideas and feelings.
- To reduce anxiety, encourage older children to ask questions and share feelings.
- Regulate children's exposure to news, as repeatedly watching broadcasts of the disaster can re-traumatize them.

#### If you are trying to cope from afar:

- Watching constant news footage of the disaster can increase your stress level, so limit the amount of coverage watched.
- It is normal to feel relief OR guilt that the disaster did not touch you when so many others were affected.
- Keep things in perspective and find a productive way to help as a means of gaining some "control" in an uncontrollable situation.
- Recognize your strengths and see this as an opportunity for self-discovery and growth.

#### When to seek professional help:

- Consult a trained professional if overwhelming nervousness or sadness interferes with daily living.
- An experienced mental health provider or psychologist can help educate you about extreme stress and how to find constructive ways of dealing with the emotional impact.

**To learn more about what Delta Gamma is doing to help those affected by Hurricane Katrina, or to find out how you can help, please go to [www.deltagamma.org/hurricane\\_katrina.shtml](http://www.deltagamma.org/hurricane_katrina.shtml).**

#### Wellness Resources

*American Psychological Association, [www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)*

*National Mental Health Association, [www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org)*

*American Red Cross, [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)*

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