



After the earthquake: Tips on supporting adults

Source: *Psychological First Aid Operations Guide*, 2006.

<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/manuals/psych-first-aid.asp>

Concern/issue	Responses	Tips
High anxiety/arousal. Tension and anxiety are common after an earthquake. Adults might be excessively worried about the future, have difficulties sleeping, problems concentrating and feel jumpy and nervous. These reactions can include rapid heart beat and sweating.	Use breathing and/or other relaxation skills.	Take time during the day to calm yourself through relaxation exercises to make it easier to sleep, concentrate and give you energy. Try a breathing exercise as follows (five times slowly and as many times a day as needed): <ul style="list-style-type: none">• inhale slowly through your nose and comfortably fill your lungs all the way down to your stomach, while saying to yourself, "My body is filled with calmness."• exhale slowly through your mouth and comfortably empty your lungs, while silently saying to yourself, "My body is releasing the tension." Do this five times slowly and as many times a day as needed
Concern or shame over your own reactions. Many people have strong reactions after an earthquake, including fear and anxiety, difficulty concentrating, shame over how you reacted and feeling guilty about something. It is expected and understandable to feel many things in the aftermath of an event such as an earthquake.	Find a good time to discuss your reactions with a family/whānau member or trusted friend. Remember that these reactions are common and it takes time for them to subside. Correct excessive self-blame with a realistic assessment of what actually could have been done.	When talking with someone, find the right time and place and ask if it is okay to talk about your feelings. Remind yourself that your feelings are expected and you are not going crazy and that you are not at fault for the disaster. If these feelings persist for a month or more you might wish to seek professional help.
Feeling overwhelmed by tasks that need to be accomplished (eg, housing, food, paperwork for insurance, cleaning up, washing, child care, parenting).	Identify what your top priorities are. Find out what services are available to help get your needs met. Make a plan that breaks down the tasks into manageable steps.	Make a list of your concerns and decide what to tackle first. Take it one step at a time. Find out which agencies can help with your needs and how to access them. Where appropriate, rely on your family/whānau, friends and community for assistance.

Concern/issue	Understand	Tips
Fears of recurrence and reactions to reminders. It is common for survivors to fear that another big earthquake will occur and to react to things that are reminders of what happened.	Be aware that reminders can include people, places, sounds, smells, feelings, time of day. Remember that media coverage of the earthquake can be a reminder and keep triggering fears.	When you are reminded, try saying to yourself, "I'm upset because I'm being reminded of the earthquake, but it's different now because the tremors are smaller and I'm safe now." Monitor and limit your viewing of news reports so you just get the information that you need.
Changes in attitude, view of the world and of oneself. Strong changes in people's attitudes after an earthquake are common. These can include questioning one's spiritual beliefs, trust in others and social agencies and concerns about one's own effectiveness and dedication to helping others.	Postpone any major unnecessary life changes in the immediate future. Remember that dealing with post-earthquake difficulties increases your sense of courage and effectiveness. Get involved with community recovery efforts.	Remember that getting back to a more structured routine can help improve decision-making. Remind yourself that going through an earthquake can have positive effects on what you value and how you spend your time. Consider engaging in community recovery projects.
Using alcohol and drugs, or engaging in gambling or high-risk sexual behaviours. Many people feel out of control, scared, hopeless or angry after an incident and engage in these behaviours to feel better. This can especially be a problem if there was pre-existing substance abuse or addiction.	Understand that using substances and engaging in addictive behaviours can be a dangerous way to cope with what happened. Get information about local support agencies.	Remember that substance use and other addictive behaviours can lead to problems with sleep, relationships, jobs and physical health. Get appropriate help.
Excessive anger. Some degree of anger is understandable and expected after an earthquake, especially when something feels unfair. However, when it leads to violent behaviour, extreme anger is a serious problem.	Find ways to manage your anger in a way that helps you rather than hurts you.	Manage your behaviour by taking time to cool down, walk away from stressful situations, talk to a friend about what is making you angry, get involved in physical exercise, distract yourself with positive activities or problem-solve the situation that is making you angry. Remind yourself that being angry will not get you what you want and might harm important relationships. If you become violent, get immediate help.

Concern/issue	Understand	Tips
<p>Shifts in interpersonal relationships. People might feel differently towards family/whānau and friends, eg, they might feel overprotective and very concerned for each other's safety, frustrated by the reactions of a family/whānau member or friend or they might feel like pulling away from family/whānau and friends.</p>	<p>Understand that family and friends are a major form of support during the recovery period. It is important to understand and tolerate different ways that people respond and recover from the effects of earthquakes among family/whānau members. Rely on other family/whānau members for help with parenting or other daily activities when you are upset or under stress.</p>	<p>Don't withdraw from seeking support just because you feel you might burden someone else. Most people do better after earthquakes with good support from others.</p> <p>Don't be afraid to ask your friends and family/whānau how they're doing, rather than just giving advice or trying to get them to get over it. Let them know you understand and offer a supportive ear or lend a helping hand. Spend more time talking with family/whānau and friends about how everyone is doing.</p> <p>Say, "You know, the fact that we're grumpy with each other is completely normal, given what we've been through. I think we're handling this amazingly. It's a good thing we have each other."</p>
<p>Sleep difficulties. Sleep problems are common after an earthquake, as people are on edge and worried about their safety, possessions, house and future life changes. This can make it more difficult to fall asleep and lead to frequent awakenings during the night.</p>	<p>Make sure you have good sleep routines.</p>	<p>Make a task list of things that you all need to achieve together. Make sure this list is realistic and agreed by members of your family.</p> <p>Try to go to sleep at the same time every day. Don't drink caffeinated beverages in the evening. Reduce alcohol consumption. Increase daytime exercise. Relax before bedtime. Limit daytime naps to 15 minutes and do not nap later than 4pm.</p>