

## KNOW THE SIGNS OF STRESS

### **Your Behavior:**

- An increase or decrease in your energy and activity levels.
- Trouble relaxing or sleeping.
- Crying frequently.
- Worrying excessively.
- Wanting to be alone most of the time.
- Having difficulty communicating or listening.
- Having difficulty giving or accepting help.

### **Your Body:**

- Having stomach aches or diarrhea.
- Having headaches and other pains.
- Losing your appetite or overeating.
- Sweating or having chills.



### **Your Emotions:**

- Being anxious or fearful.
- Feeling depressed.
- Feeling guilty.
- Feeling angry.
- Not caring about anything.
- Feeling overwhelmed by sadness.

### **Your Thinking:**

- Having trouble remembering things.
- Feeling confused.
- Having trouble thinking clearly and concentrating.
- Having difficulty making decisions.

If you or someone close to you has trouble coping with a traumatic situation, you can turn to the Department of Mental Health for assistance. Mental health counselors are available for crisis counseling, grief and loss counseling, stress counseling as well as referral for face-to-face mental health services.

Toll Free 24-Hour Access Help Line  
1-888-793-4357 or 1-888-7WE-HELP

Suicide Hotline  
1-800-273-8255 or 1-800-273-TALK

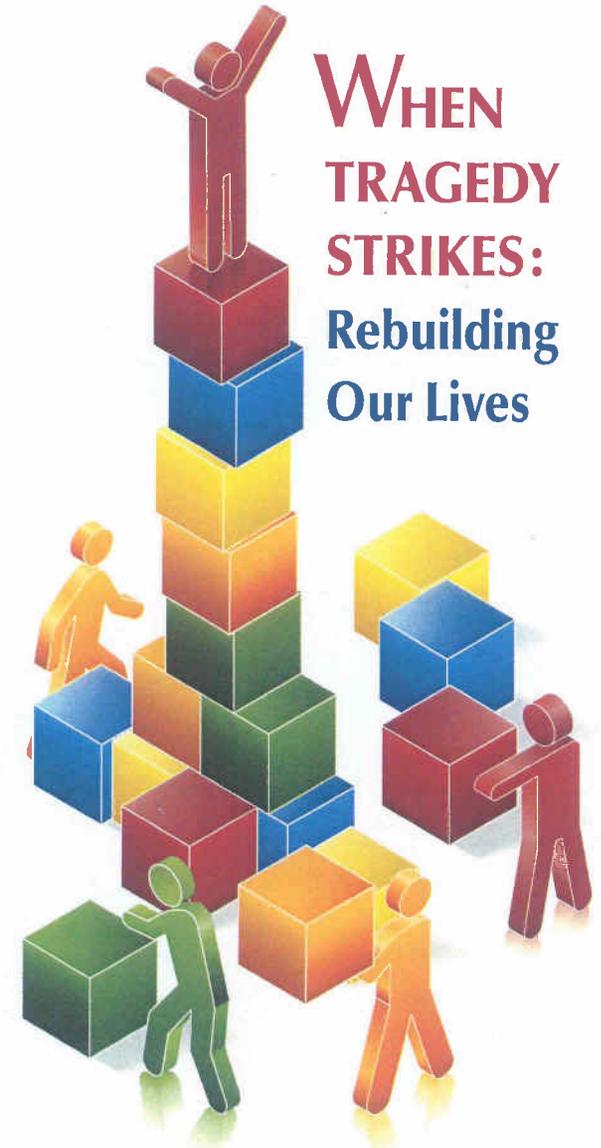
TDD Help Line  
202-673-7500

Government of the District of Columbia  
Vincent C. Gray, Mayor



Department of Mental Health  
Stephen T. Baron, Director  
www.dmh.dc.gov

# WHEN TRAGEDY STRIKES: Rebuilding Our Lives

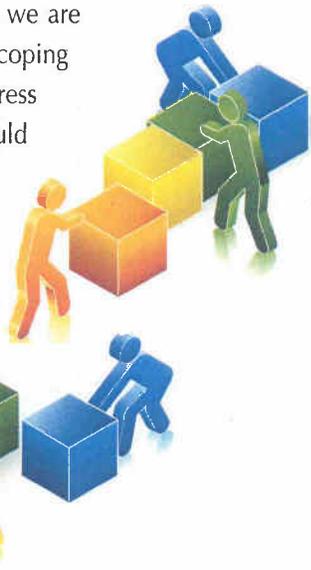


GOVERNMENT OF THE  
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
Department of Mental Health



It is normal to feel stressful in tragic situations, like a fire, hurricane, or violent death of a loved one. While these occurrences will forever change our lives, it is important not to allow constant worry to interrupt our lives. Everyone reacts to disasters or tragedy differently. Sometimes our reactions differ from those of our family members or friends. We are challenged to make sense of situations that are impossible to understand. Yet, no matter what happens, we must find ways to rebuild our lives to regain a sense of safety and security.

Begin the healing process by returning to your daily routine; learn the signs of stress in yourself and your loved ones; know what you can do to relieve stress and when to seek help. One of the best ways to achieve this is to speak openly about the things we are anxious about and use coping skills to help manage stress and uncertainty that could undermine our health and overall well-being if allowed to persist.



*When You Want to Talk, We'll Listen*

### KNOW HOW TO RELIEVE STRESS

- Limit your exposure to graphic media stories.
- Get accurate, timely information from reliable sources.
- Educate yourself about the specific health hazard.
- Maintain your normal daily routine, if possible.
- Exercise, eat well and rest.
- Stay active – physically and mentally.
- Stay in touch with family and friends.
- Keep a sense of humor.
- Share your concerns with others.

### KNOW WHEN TO GET HELP

- Seek professional help if tragedy-related emotional or psychological problems persist or become severe.
- You may want to talk to your doctor or a counselor if stress is causing you to experience physical symptoms or worsening of a chronic medical condition.
- Finally, seek professional help if you find yourself “treating” your stress by misuse or abuse of alcohol or drugs, or by engaging in other unhealthy behaviors.

### HOW CAN YOU HELP YOUR CHILDREN AND TEENS?

Young children of all ages from pre-school through elementary and teenagers in middle school and high school can be anxious about tragic events.

It is important to:

- Talk regularly with children and teens to keep their fears in check. Let them know that it is fine to pursue normal activities without concern of immediate danger. Reassure them that everything will be okay.
- Encourage them to talk about their experiences and feelings. Listen to their stories, even if they are repeated over and over, but respect their wishes if they choose not to talk.

- Monitor the amount of television coverage of the crisis that your children watch.
- Younger children (1-4 years old) should be shielded from media coverage.
- Use every opportunity to show your children and teens you love them.
- Seek professional advice if the problems persist or become severe.

### HOW TO BE A SURVIVOR

Regardless of individual circumstances, everyone needs to complete several steps to recovery from a disaster or traumatic event.

- Accept the reality of the loss.
- Allow yourself and other family members to feel sadness and grief over what has happened.
- Adjust to a new environment.
- Acknowledge that the person or possessions lost are gone forever.
- Put closure to the situation and move on.
- Do not continue to let the loss take its physical, emotional, or spiritual toll.
- Have faith in better times to come.

You and your family have survived a traumatic event. That doesn't mean your lives are over or that you don't deserve to be happy again.

- Return to doing things you enjoy with friends and as a family.
- Reestablish the routines of your life.
- Make commitments and keep them.
- If you or a member of your family still has trouble coping, ask for help. Consult a counselor or mental health professional.
- In the workplace, you may be able to get assistance from your human resources department or your company's Employee Assistance Program.
- For help with financial matters, contact a financial advisor.