

Remembering the Boston Marathon Tragedy

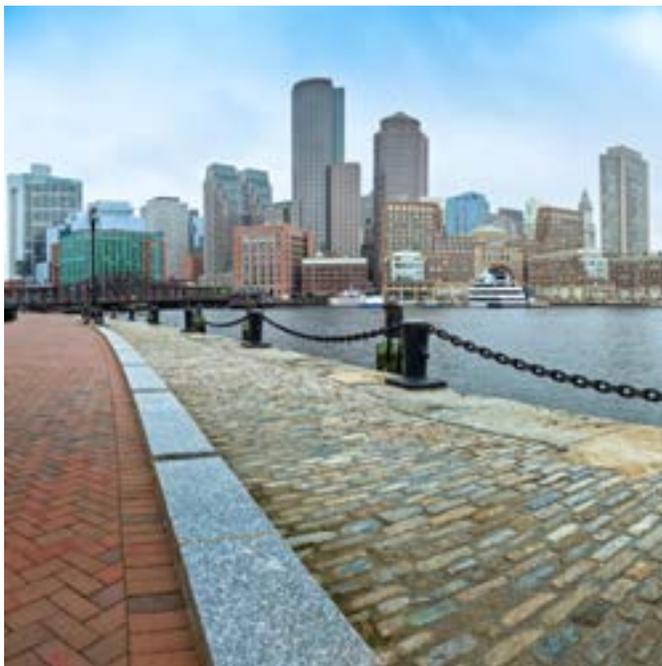
A special edition of Balanced Living, April 2014

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Tips for Coping Before, During, and After Disaster



The Boston Skyline

If you or someone you care about feels emotional distress before (for example, during a forecast for severe weather or if there are 'terror alerts' issued), during or after (whether immediately after, days, weeks, months or even years) a natural or human-caused disaster - you are not alone.

For yourself or loved ones, practice the healthy coping that you have relied on in the past to get you through tough times or try the following tips:

1. Take care of yourself: Try to eat healthy, avoid using alcohol and drugs, and get some exercise when you can- even a walk around the block can make a difference.
2. Reach out to friends and family: Talk to someone you trust about how you are doing.
3. Talk to your children: They may feel scared, angry, sad, worried, and confused. Let them know it's okay to talk about what's on their mind. Limit their watching of TV news reports about the disaster. Help children and teens maintain normal routines to the extent possible.
4. Get enough "good" sleep: Some people have trouble falling asleep after a disaster, others keep waking up during the night. If you have trouble sleeping:
 - Only go to bed when you are ready to sleep
 - Don't watch TV or use your cell phone or laptop computer while you're in bed
 - Avoid eating (especially sugar) or drinking caffeine or alcohol at least one hour before going to bed
 - If you wake up and can't fall back to sleep, try writing in a journal or on a sheet of paper what's on your mind
5. Take care of pets or get outside into nature when it's safe: Nature and animals can help us to feel better when we are down. See if you can volunteer at a local animal shelter - they may need help after a disaster. Once it's safe to return to public parks or natural areas, find a quiet spot to sit in or go for a hike.
6. Know when to ask for help: Signs of stress can be normal, short-term reactions to any of life's unexpected events - not only after surviving a disaster, but also after a death in the family, the loss of a job, or a breakup.

It's important to pay attention to what's going on with you or with someone you care about, because what may seem like "everyday stress" can actually be:

- Depression (including having thoughts of suicide)
- Anxiety
- Alcohol or Drug Abuse

If you find that 'nothing seems to work' or that your daily routines are increasingly hard to accomplish (like taking care of kids, concentrating at school or work, etc.) OR if you are or think you or a loved one may be depressed, suffer from anxiety or abusing drugs or alcohol - reach out for help & call (1-800-985-5990) or SMS (text 'TalkWithUs' to 66746) the Disaster Distress Helpline 24/7 for crisis counseling and support.

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Healing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Someone who has experienced or witnessed a traumatic event, such as a car accident, military action, a terrorist attack, rape or some other act of violence, often suffers severe stress related to the incident. In time, many people recover on their own, but sometimes, professional help is needed.

People who feel they're unable to regain control of their lives because of their responses to the trauma may have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The symptoms vary and can appear immediately after the event or days, weeks, even months later. PTSD has been linked to other mental illnesses. It can occur

with depression or lead to depression, according to the American Psychiatric Association (APA). People with PTSD may not be aware that they are affected by it.

Anyone who experiences several of the following symptoms may have PTSD and should seek professional help, says the PTSD Alliance:

- Recurring thoughts or nightmares about the event; "flashbacks," accompanied by painful emotions
- Trouble sleeping because of nightmares
- Anxiety and fear, especially when exposed to situations reminiscent of the trauma
- Being on edge, being easily startled or overly alert
- Feeling depressed, sad and having low energy
- Feeling "scattered" and unable to focus on work or daily activities; difficulty making decisions
- Feeling irritable, easily agitated or resentful
- Feeling emotionally "numb," withdrawn or disconnected from others, and avoiding close emotional ties with family, friends and co-workers
- Spontaneously crying, feeling a sense of despair and hopelessness
- Feeling that danger is constantly near and being extremely protective of, or fearful for, the safety of loved ones

Hints for healing

Your reaction to trauma depends on a number of things, including your age and personality and whether you've been traumatized in the past.

The following actions can help you recover from PTSD:

- Seek professional help right away. The longer a person with PTSD goes without treatment, the harder it can be to heal. Employee assistance programs, police departments, doctors and crisis hotlines can recommend counselors in your area. A therapist may teach relaxation techniques and help you understand and change the mental processes that lead to PTSD. The therapist may prescribe medication and provide a safe place for you and your family to talk about and learn to cope with your PTSD.
- Be patient with yourself. Realize this will be a difficult time in your life. Allow yourself to mourn the losses you've experienced.
- Talk about it. People who have experienced tragedy need to work through their pain. Often this means telling the same story over and over for days, weeks or even months. Depending on the event that triggered your PTSD, however, it may be best to talk to a therapist about issues related to the experience itself. Counselors are more likely than friends or family to understand trauma and its effects.
- Spend time with others. Regularly attend a place of worship, book club, exercise class or other gatherings.
- Eat a healthful diet, get enough sleep and exercise. When you're stressed, you're more susceptible to illness. Eating a well-balanced diet and getting adequate sleep can help you stay well. Regular exercise can relieve depression and stress.
- Practice relaxation methods. These can include full-body relaxation or breathing exercises, meditation, stretching, yoga, listening to quiet music and spending time in nature.

- Join a support group. Being in a group with other people who have PTSD may help reduce isolation and rebuild your trust in others.
- Avoid negative coping actions such as using drugs or alcohol, workaholism, violent behavior and angry intimidation of others.
- Get involved. Volunteer to help at the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army, AmeriCares or other charitable organizations. Helping others can give you a sense of purpose in a time of uncertainty.

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