



Sunshine After the Storm: Coping After a Natural Disaster

BY BETTY GREEN, EPA TRAINING SPECIALIST

PHOTO FRIEND/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

“When you come out of the storm, you won’t be the same person who walked in. That’s what this storm’s all about.”

– Haruki Murakami

THE DEFINITION OF a natural disaster is any catastrophic event that is caused by nature or the natural processes of the earth. The severity of a disaster is measured in the number of lives lost, economic loss and the ability of the population to rebuild. All natural disasters cause loss in some way. Depending on the severity, lives can be lost in any number of disasters. Falling buildings or trees, freezing to death, being washed away or heat stroke are just some of the deadly effects of a disaster.

Some disasters cause more loss of life than others, and population density affects the death count as well. Then there is loss of property, which affects people’s living quarters, transportation, livelihood and means to live. Homes destroyed by floods, hurricanes, cyclones, landslides and avalanches, a volcanic eruption, or an earthquake are often beyond repair and take a lot of time to become livable again. Personal effects, memorabilia, that non-replaceable family picture of your grandparents on the wall, vehicles and documents such as birth certificates, diplomas and social security cards are all destroyed after a natural disaster.

So how does one cope after a disaster? Everyone responds to crisis differently – some people may appear to be managing the situation, while others may struggle to cope. However, most people do experience healing and recovery and go on to rebuild their lives and develop new strengths. Trauma is a big after effect of

natural disasters and getting counseling has helped some people to heal emotionally as well as physically.

The frequency of storms has gone up considerably in the last few decades. Storm names from Irma to Michael have caused havoc on many livelihoods. Heavy population in areas that get hit by floods, cyclones and hurricanes has meant that more lives are lost. In some areas, the population has somewhat prepared for the eventuality of disasters and shelters are built for hurricanes and tornadoes. However, loss of property is still a problem, and predicting many natural disasters isn’t easy. With all the technology available, it’s become easier to predict major storms, blizzards, cyclones and other weather-related natural disasters.

Typical reactions following a natural disaster

- Physical symptoms, such as headaches, difficulty sleeping, loss of appetite, aches and pains, muscle tension, weight loss/gain, chest or back pain, diarrhea or constipation, injuries or accidents
- Always feeling tired, lacking energy or motivation
- Feeling angry, aggressive or irritable
- Increased worrying, nervousness, anxiety or fear
- Often feeling down or depressed
- Having difficulty concentrating or forgetfulness

- Disappointment, guilt, shame or feeling like “a failure”
- Feeling helpless or out of control
- Resentment or blaming others for the situation
- Withdrawing from friends and family, becoming distant
- No longer enjoying hobbies and interests
- Increased use of alcohol, cigarettes or other drugs to cope or escape the situation
- Feeling hopeless, worthless or like “life is not worth living”
- Thoughts of suicide or harming yourself.

It’s clear that natural disasters are a part of life. However, science is making it possible to predict natural disasters faster and more accurately. And now people are learning how to prepare, rebuild and cope with life uncertainties. Everyone deals with stressful circumstances differently, so it is important to find ways of managing stress that will work for you. The important thing to remember is, *“the sun will come out tomorrow. Bet your bottom dollar that tomorrow there’ll be sun!”*

“A rainbow is a rare flower of love from the rain and sun as a gift of hope for enduring the storm.” – Debasish Mridha, MD 🌧️

References:

- www.fema.gov
- www.basicplanet.com