

## HANDLING DISASTER-RELATED STRESS<sup>1</sup>

Disasters create a tremendous amount of stress. If this stress goes unrecognized and unmanaged, it can increase until it feels impossible to cope with everyday problems. If you recognize and handle stress properly, however, it can become something healthy that gets you through the challenges of each day and the trauma of another disaster.

### ***What is stress?***

Stress is a unique and personal response from our bodies and minds to meet the demands of different situations. These situations trigger an instinctive "fight or flight" response that increases blood pressure, heart rate, respiration, and blood flow to muscles. Originally, these reactions helped people prepare for a physical conflict, or to escape from one. Now, they usually serve to direct our mental and physical resources to a particularly difficult or trying situation with positive results.

### ***Managing Stress***

- **Talk about it.** You're not in this alone.
- **Try physical activity.** Release the tension of stress by walking or some other type of exercise
- **Know your limits and make time for relaxation.** Try to reduce the amount of time you spend worrying about the things you cannot change. Cut down or eliminate the activities that cause you stress.
- **Take control.** Find out what you can do to move your family or those you know to recovery.
- **It's a sign of strength to seek help when you need it.** If you feel your problem is more serious or if you're experiencing hopelessness or extreme anger, you may want to consider seeking help from a physician or mental health professional.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from <http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/dtac/HandlingDisaster.asp> 2004