
Managing Your Distress About the Earthquake From Afar

For people with friends and family living in regions affected by earthquakes, watching news coverage of the earthquake's devastation can be very distressing, particularly if there is no news on their safety and well-being. Even for those without personal connections to the country, the news coverage can be overwhelming.

The American Psychological Association (APA) offers the following tips to manage your distress:

- **Take a news break.** Watching endless replays of footage from the disaster can make your stress even greater. Although you will want to keep informed—especially if you have loved ones in earthquake-affected areas—taking a break from watching the news can lessen your distress.
- **Control what you can.** There are routines in your life that you can continue such as going to work or school and making meals. It is helpful to maintain these routines and schedules to give yourself a break from constantly thinking about the earthquake.
- **Engage in healthy behaviors.** Eat well-balanced meals, engage in regular exercise like going for a long walk, and get plenty of rest. Bolstering your physical well-being is good for your emotional health and can enhance your ability to cope.
- **Keep things in perspective.** While an earthquake can bring tremendous hardship and loss, remember to focus on the things that are good in your life. Persevere and trust in your ability to get through the challenging days ahead.
- **Find a productive way to help if you can.** Many organizations are set up to provide various forms of aid to survivors. Contributing or volunteering is a positive action that can help you to make a difference.
- **Strive for a positive outlook.** Many people who have experienced tragedy find that they grow in some respect as a result of persevering through the hardship. Over time, people can discover personal strengths and develop a greater appreciation for life.

For many people, using the tips above may be sufficient to get them through current challenges. At times, however, an individual can have difficulty managing intense reactions. A licensed mental health professional such as a psychologist can assist you in developing an appropriate strategy for moving forward. It is important to get professional help if you feel like you are unable to function or perform basic activities of daily living. You can find psychologists near you by contacting your state psychological association. Many of these psychologists are trained in trauma and disaster work.

Psychologists are licensed by the state in which they practice. With doctoral degrees, they receive one of the highest levels of education of all health care professionals, spending an average of seven years in education and training after they receive their undergraduate degrees.

Special thanks for help from Raymond F. Hanbury, PhD, ABPP, and Eva D. Sivan, PhD. Adapted from *Managing Traumatic Stress: Dealing With the Hurricanes From Afar (2005)*, *Tips for Managing Your Distress Related to the Wildfires* and *Tips for College and University Students: Managing Your Distress in the Aftermath of School Shootings*.

The American Psychological Association (APA). (n.d.). *Managing your distress about the earthquake from afar*. Retrieved March 14, 2011, from the APA Help Center: <http://www.apahelpcenter.org>