

Section 9

# Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Victims, Families, and Responders

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# Introduction

Experiencing a disaster can be one of the most serious traumatic events a person can endure, which can have both short- and long-term effects. Most people who experience a disaster, whether as a victim or responder, will have some type of psychological, physical, cognitive, and/or emotional response to the event. Most reactions are normal responses to severely abnormal circumstances. Disaster events that seem to have the most significant mental health impact are those that:

- Occur with little or no warning;
- Pose a serious threat to personal safety;
- Create fear of the unknown or delayed health effects;
- Occur with uncertain duration; and
- Result from malicious intent (eg, terrorism, which has an overriding objective to inflict psychological pain, trauma, anxiety, and panic).

Post-disaster responses are wide-ranging, from mild stress responses to more serious post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), major depression, or acute stress disorder. Although acute stress disorder and PTSD receive the most publicity following disasters, the majority of affected persons, including those referred to as the “worried well,” have somatic symptoms below the threshold of a diagnosable psychiatric disorder. Ideally, all affected people will be supported by a coordinated system of family and community mental health resources, as well as local primary care and psychological services.

Any large-scale emergency preparedness and response plan needs to consider the behavioral and emotional factors underlying human responses to trauma. Children are particularly at risk because they have not yet developed adult coping strategies and do not yet have the life experiences to help them understand what has happened. This section provides resources to help physicians and other health professionals with the treatment or referral of victims, families, and responders affected by stress and anxiety from disasters and other traumatic events.

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# Key Elements for Addressing the Psychosocial Effects of Disaster

- Provide basic resources including food, shelter, communication, transportation, information, guidance, medical, and mental health services for victims and responders
- Create a local infrastructure to address the mental health needs of children and their families in times of disaster or crisis; this includes interventions and programs to promote individual and community resilience and prevent adverse psychological effects
- Implement surveillance systems for psychological consequences, including distress responses, behavior changes, and psychiatric illness, and markers of individual and community functioning before, during, and after a disaster or other traumatic event
- Screen for psychological symptoms at the individual level
- Provide for treatment of acute and long-term effects of trauma
- Provide resources for longer-term general human service needs that contribute to psychological functioning (eg, housing, financial assistance when the event creates job loss)
- Develop effective risk communication protocols for the dissemination of information to the public, media, political leaders, and service providers
- Train service providers (in medical, public health, emergency, and mental health systems) to respond to disasters and to protect themselves against psychological trauma
- Review local and regional capacity to handle large increase in demand for services to address psychological consequences in the event of a disaster or other public health emergency
- Integrate case-finding ability to locate individuals who have not utilized mental health services but need them, including underserved, marginalized, and unrecognized groups of people (eg, undocumented immigrants, homebound persons) and others with unidentified needs

Adapted from: Institute of Medicine, Board on Neuroscience and Behavioral Health. [\*Preparing for the Psychological Consequences of Terrorism: A Public Health Strategy\*](#). Washington, DC: National Academy Press; 2003.

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# Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Children

## American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP)

### *Facts for Families*

- [Children and Grief](#)
- [Children and the News](#)
- [Helping Children After a Disaster](#)
- [Posttraumatic Stress Disorder \(PTSD\) and Children](#)
- [Talking to Children about Terrorism and War](#)

## American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)

### [Children, Terrorism & Disasters](#)

Seeks to ensure: (1) that pediatricians and other pediatric providers have the information they need about terrorism and disasters as fast as it becomes available; (2) that children's needs are considered in all terrorism and disaster planning and response efforts; and (3) functioning linkages with all national, state and local governmental and private entities working on issues concerning terrorism and disasters.

### [How Pediatricians Can Respond to the Psychosocial Implications of Disasters](#)

AAP policy statement calls for pediatricians to serve as important resources to the community in preparing for disasters, as well as acting in its behalf during and after such events

### [Psychosocial Issues for Children and Families in Disasters. A Guide for the Primary Care Physician](#)

A joint publication of the AAP and the Center for Mental Health Services, this manual assists primary care health professionals to better prepare, assess, and treat children and their families in the event of a disaster

### [The Youngest Victims: Disaster Preparedness to Meet Children's Needs: Physician's Sheet](#)

A fact sheet on meeting the unique needs of infants and children in the event of a disaster

## American Psychiatric Association

### [Talking to Children about War and Terrorism: Talking Points for Parents and Teachers](#)

## American Psychological Association (APA)

### [Working with Children](#)

A fact sheet produced by the APA Task Force on Promoting Resilience in Response to Terrorism as part of a series for psychologists seeking to foster resilience in children and other populations

## American Red Cross

### [Facing Fear-Helping Young People Deal with Terrorism and Other Tragic Events](#)

Developed to address a demand by educators and caregivers of children for materials to help children cope in uncertain times

### [Helping Young Children Cope with Disaster](#)

A guide for adults on how to help children deal with fears and anxieties in the wake of disaster

### [Children and Disasters](#)

How to help children cope with a disaster

## Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

### [Coping With Traumatic Events](#)

Tips for talking with children about traumatic events

### [Disaster Technical Assistance Center](#)

A support center to help state agencies and local service providers prepare for and respond to a wide range of catastrophes. During the critical period when mobilization for disaster response and recovery begins, service providers can call a toll-free number (1-800-308-3515) for technical assistance.

### [Emergency Mental Health and Traumatic Stress](#)

Tips for talking with children about disaster

### [Managing Anxiety in Times of Crisis](#)

Tips for talking with children about stress and grief associated with disasters and tragedy

## Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

### [After the Disaster: A Children's Mental Health Checklist](#)

A checklist for parents and teachers to assess a child's mental health status following a disaster or traumatic experience

### [FEMA for Kids](#)

Teaches children how to be prepared for disasters and cope with disaster

## Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University

### [National Center for Pediatric Preparedness Consensus Report](#)

National consensus conference report and recommendations for ensuring the needs of children are met in planning and preparing for disasters and terrorist events

## National Advisory Committee on Children and Terrorism

### [National Advisory Committee on Children and Terrorism Recommendations](#)

Recommendations to the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services to assist in identifying and preparing a comprehensive public health strategy to ensure the safety of children and to meet their physical, medical, psychological, and social needs in the face of the threat of terrorism. Recommendations indicate that more attention should be given to safeguarding the mental health and well-being of children in the event of a terrorist attack.

### [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)

Funded by the Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, this network is designed to improve the quality, effectiveness, provision, and availability of therapeutic services delivered to all children and adolescents experiencing traumatic events. This network comprises 18 centers and represents a coalition of treatment centers nationwide.

### **National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)**

#### [Helping Children and Adolescents Cope with Violence and Disasters](#)

A booklet that describes the impact of violence and disasters on children and adolescents, with suggestions for minimizing long-term emotional harm

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# Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Adult Victims and Emergency Responders

## American Psychiatric Association (APA)

*APA's Let's Talk Facts About...*

- [Depression](#)
- [Panic Disorders](#)
- [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder](#)

### [Coping with Anxiety During High Risk Terrorist Alerts](#)

Advice on how to live with fear and anxiety elicited by recent terrorist events

### [Disaster Plan of Action](#)

Information on the psychological effects and treatment of persons affected by disasters and trauma

### [Disaster Psychiatry Handbook](#)

Developed by the APA Committee on Psychiatric Dimensions of Disaster to help health care workers deal with psychiatric consequences of disasters

### [The Role of Psychiatrists in Disaster](#)

Summary of a 1995 consensus conference to identify unique contributions that psychiatrists bring to disaster communities and their victims, with delineation of gaps in mental health aspects of disaster recovery

### [When Disaster Strikes](#)

Information to help adults better understand the mental health effects of traumatic events

## American Psychological Association

The following fact sheets are available to assist psychologists and others working with a variety of populations affected by disaster and trauma:

### [Fostering Resilience Among Mental Health Workers](#)

### [Fostering Resilience Among Primary Care Providers](#)

### [Managing Traumatic Stress: Tips for Recovering From Disasters and Other Traumatic Events](#)

### [Resilience and Disease Outbreaks](#)

### [Resilience in a Time of War](#)

### [Stress: When and How to Get Help](#)

### [The Road to Resilience](#)

### [Working with Adults](#)

### [Working with Adults with Serious Mental Illness](#)

### [Working with First Responders](#)

### [Working with Military Families](#)

### [Working with Older Adults](#)

### [Working with People of Color](#)

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**

[Coping with a Traumatic Event: Information for Health Professionals](#)

[Coping with a Traumatic Event: Information for the Public](#)

[Mental Health Survey Instrument](#)

Tool to facilitate assessment of psychological symptoms associated with a mass trauma event.

**Center for Health Information Preparedness, New York University (NYU) School of Medicine**

[Psychological Aspects of Terrorism and Disaster Medicine](#)

A free, online course developed by the NYU Center for Health Information Preparedness, a CDC-funded specialty center for public health preparedness

**Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**

[Communication in a Crisis: Risk Communication Guidelines for Public Officials](#)

Resource primer describing the basic skills and techniques for clear, effective crisis communications, information dissemination, and message delivery. It can help public officials prepare and deliver sound and thoughtful risk communication, which is vital to fostering trust with the public before, during, and after a crisis situation.

[Coping with Traumatic Events](#)

Tips for talking with emergency responders about traumatic events

[Disaster Technical Assistance Center](#)

A support center to help state agencies and local service providers prepare for and respond to a wide range of catastrophes. During the critical period when mobilization for disaster response and recovery begins, service providers can call a toll-free number (1-800-308-3515) for technical assistance.

[Emergency Mental Health and Traumatic Stress](#)

Tips for talking with emergency responders about disaster

[Field Manual for Mental Health and Human Service Workers in Major Disasters](#)

Developed for mental health workers and others who assist survivors following a disaster, this pocket reference provides the basics of disaster mental health with numerous specific and practical suggestions for workers

[Managing Anxiety in Times of Crisis](#)

Tips for talking with emergency responders about stress and grief associated with disasters and tragedy

[Mental Health All-Hazards Disaster Planning Guidance](#)

Provides guidance on integrating health and mental health responses into emergency planning efforts

[Mental Health Aspects of Terrorism](#)

Fact sheet describing typical reactions and intervention to help people cope with a terrorist attack

[Self-Care Mental Health Tips for Emergency and Disaster Response Workers](#)

Provides suggestions for emergency responders on stress management

### [Stress Prevention and Management Approaches For Rescue Workers in the Aftermath of Terrorist Acts](#)

Fact sheet for rescue workers on recovering from disaster-related stress with a hotline for more information

### [Training Manual for Mental Health and Human Service Workers in Major Disasters](#)

Explains how survivors respond to and recover from disasters and highlights the importance of tailoring disaster response to individual communities and populations. It describes effective interventions for responding to disasters and strategies for stress prevention and management among mental health and human services workers.

### [Disaster Psychiatry Outreach](#)

Serves as a disaster mental health team providing on-site psychotherapeutic and psychopharmacologic services in coordination with government agencies and public, private, and charitable organizations involved in disaster relief.

### **National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)**

#### [Mental Health and Mass Violence: Evidence-Based Early Psychological Intervention for Victims/Survivors of Mass Violence](#)

Consensus report targeted to those who deliver psychological interventions to emotionally distressed persons following mass violence, to those who research these issues, and to employers who want to help workers who have experienced this type of emotional trauma. It is also intended to aid officials who must decide what mental health help to include in the local, state, and national responses to survivors of mass violence and terrorism.

### **National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)**

#### [Traumatic Incident Stress: Information For Emergency Response Workers](#)

Describes the dangers and symptoms of traumatic incident stress with resources for coping

### **National Mental Health Association (NMHA)**

#### [Coping with War, Disasters, and Terrorism](#)

A series of facts sheets designed to help most people cope during crisis, loss, and other stressful situations

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# Suggested Reading List

**American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), Committee on Environmental Health and Committee on Infectious Diseases.** [Chemical-biological terrorism and its impact on children: a subject review.](#) *Pediatrics*. 2000;105:662-670.

Reviews key aspects of chemical and biological agents, the consequences of their use, the potential impact of a terrorist attack on children, and issues to consider in disaster planning and management for pediatric patients

**American Medical Association (AMA)**

[JAMA Terrorism Preparedness Collection](#)

Collection of articles from the *Journal of the American Medical Association* dealing with biological agents, emergency preparedness, and terrorism

**American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Emergency Preparedness.** [Developing Objectives, Content, and Competencies for the Training of Emergency Medical Technicians, Emergency Physicians, and Emergency Nurses to Care for Casualties Resulting from Nuclear, Biological, or Chemical \(NBC\) Incidents.](#) Dallas, Texas: American College of Emergency Physicians;2001.

**Institute of Medicine, Board on Neuroscience and Behavioral Health.** [Preparing for the Psychological Consequences of Terrorism: A Public Health Strategy.](#) Washington, DC: National Academy Press; 2003.  
Authoritative reference on the psychological consequences of traumatic events, disasters, and terrorism

**Leon G, Polusuy M, eds.** Special issue: psychosocial themes. *Prehosp Disaster Med*. 2004;19:2-127.

**Pastor LH, ed.** Psychiatry of mass disaster and terrorism part 1. *Psychiatric Annals*. 2004;34:597-649.  
First of a two-part series addresses normal psychological reactions to disaster, assessment of mental health needs following disasters, the effects of disaster and terrorism on culture, psychological resilience and psychological effects of handling human remains.

**Pastor LH, ed.** Psychiatry of mass disaster and terrorism part 2. *Psychiatric Annals*. 2004;34:679-727,  
Second of a two-part series addresses psychological aspects of weapons of mass destruction, potential effects of behavioral syndromes on the medical management of terrorism, countering the psychological consequence of suicide terrorism, psychological effects of terrorism on families and children, and psychological aspects of food chain contamination and agroterrorism.

**Ursano RJ, Norwood AE.** Trauma and disaster: response and management. *Rev Psychiatry* (Vol. 22). Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Press Publishing, Inc; 2003.  
Summarizes current understanding of the psychological, behavioral, and social responses to disaster and emphasizes the need for increased focus on service delivery and intervention efforts.

**Work Group on ASD and PTSD, American Psychiatric Association.** Practice guideline for the treatment of patients with acute stress disorder and posttraumatic stress disorder. *Am J Psychiatry.* 2004;161(November Supplement).

Practice guideline based on available evidence and clinical consensus with recommendations to help psychiatrists in assessing and treating adult patients with acute stress disorder (ASD) and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

**Yehuda R.** Post-traumatic stress disorder. *N Engl J Med.* 2002;346:108-14.

A brief, balanced review of PTSD: definition, epidemiology, psychological and biological aspects, and treatment. Discusses roles of primary physicians.

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