

# Strategies for Coping with Disaster

During times of uncertainty and heightened anxiety it is especially important for us to focus on taking good care of ourselves physically, mentally and emotionally. You can make the choice to “act” constructively rather than “reacting” to what is happening. To “act” is to take responsibility for your well-being and choose effective coping strategies.

## Physical Coping Strategies

1. **Adequate rest** is the foundation of stress management. Establish a routine and get to bed at a reasonable hour.
2. **Exercise** is excellent for stress management and will also help you sleep better if it’s done several hours before bedtime. Talk to your doctor before starting any exercise routine.
3. Eat **well-balanced and regular meals**.
4. Choose activities that allow you to **relax** in your off-work time (fish, read, quilt, paint, hunt – whatever you like to do).
5. **Avoid alcohol and drugs** as a means to cope, unless your doctor gives you a needed prescription.

## Mental Coping Strategies

1. **Get the facts** about the problem from reliable sources, rather than relying on the rumor mill to provide information.
2. Recognize that **you have time** to form a plan, and that you may never have to activate it.
3. **Talk it out**. Brainstorm your problem-solving ideas with your loved ones to get their input and ideas.
4. Give your thoughts a break from constantly thinking about the “what if” that scares you. **Shift your focus** to the here-and-now needs of your loved ones, activities you enjoy, and the things you need to get done.
5. **Structure your time**. Large segments of unstructured time will tempt your thoughts to center endlessly around what troubles you most, and in doing this, your interpretation of what’s happening will become more catastrophic and less objective.
6. **Remind yourself of your abilities and strengths**. Self-statements such as “I can handle this uncertainty” get you back in touch with the fact that you’re steering your own ship – you’re not a bottle tossing and turning on life’s seas.
7. **Rely on your spirituality**. Turn the problem over to your higher power for guidance and strength. We know that the human spirit is very strong.
8. **Read inspirational writings to find meaning** in what is happening. In *The Road Less Traveled*, Scott Peck conveys the message that one can manage their life. The context in which we see our life experience makes all the difference.

9. **Set short-term goals.** What are some things that you want to accomplish in the near future?

### **Emotional Coping Strategies**

1. **Reach out to people who care**, identifying your feelings and fears. Talk out your thoughts and feelings with loved ones.
2. **Spend time in enjoyable activities with friends and family.**
3. **Write out your feelings.** You're dealing with an abstract but very powerful loss – *the loss of expectations and assumptions*. There's a grief process that accomplishes loss, and that process consists of stages of shock, denial, bargaining, anger, depression and acceptance. Those stages are not smooth and orderly. They surface, retreat and resurface in a disorderly fashion. It helps to recognize what stage of grief you're in. We base much of our lives on the belief that life is reasonably predictable and controllable. We live our lives based upon our expectations for the future. When our beliefs and expectations are challenged or removed, we lose our equilibrium, and our worlds are shaken. You know from previous crises in your life, however, that you will eventually regain your equilibrium.
4. **Recognize anger as a secondary emotion.** Anger is often a surface emotion that covers up a deeper emotion, such as fear, hurt, or feeling of powerlessness. When you find yourself feeling anger, search for the deeper emotion, and work with it instead. Write about it. Talk about it.
5. Be cautious **not to take out your anger on friends and relatives.** It'll be much harder for them to be emotionally supportive if they're feeling attacked by you, and snapping at them will cause you to feel worse about yourself. As stated in #4 above, talk with them about the emotions which underlie your anger, and ask for their cooperation and support.