

HELPING CHILDREN COPE

Similar to adults, children can also be upset following a flood. They may be frightened by the flood itself, or be upset by disruptions that it might cause in their daily routines.

It is not unusual for children to show changes in behaviours, such as: becoming more easily upset; getting angry; being afraid to sleep alone; difficulty separating from parents; behaving as they did when they were younger (e.g. thumb sucking, bedwetting); physical symptoms and concentration difficulties. They may also want to continue talking about the flood and show “flood” themes in their play. Younger children may also feel guilty that they “caused” the flood because of some previous behaviour.

- If you have young children it can be wise to make your coping plan as parents first before sharing with the children.
- Talk to your children about the flooding and plans for the future. Let them share any worries or fears with you. Reassure them about their safety and that of their family.
- Children may need more physical contact and cuddles at this time. Don't worry if they want to sleep in your room at night - they may need this extra security for a little while.
- Do keep to normal routines and activities where possible, e.g. going to school, meal and bedtime routines.
- Young children may not have words to describe their feelings, but they can work through them in imaginative play, drawing and painting.
- Give children something productive to do appropriate for their age e.g. help with cleaning up. Praise their efforts.
- If you've had to leave your home, make sure you allow your children, especially teenagers, to keep in touch with and have the support of their friends.

SUPPORT SERVICES IN The HSE

If you are feeling emotionally overwhelmed at the moment, or if after several weeks you or a family member continue to feel stressed and overwhelmed, and your mood or feelings disrupt your everyday life, consider making contact with the following services:

- **GP / Public Health Nurse** - to discuss possible referral to a local community support or mental health service.
- **The Samaritans** 1850 609 090 (24 hours)

If you have ongoing concerns about how your children have been emotionally affected by the floods, you can contact the H.S.E Child Psychology service through your local health centre.

Contact the HSE infoline on 1850 24 1850 for contact details for all HSE services nationwide, or visit www.HSE.ie

For information on practical advice/financial services, check your local authority website. For information on financial assistance contact your local Community Welfare Officer.

www.welfare.ie

Compiled by the Psychology Dept., HSE Galway.

COPING WITH FLOODING



Experiencing flooding in your home or business can be very distressing. It can come as a great shock and give rise to a range of emotions.

This leaflet outlines a few suggestions which may be helpful to you and your family during this difficult time.

COMMON REACTIONS FOLLOWING SEVERE FLOODING

- **Shock or disbelief** at what has happened, feeling numb or unreal.
- **Anxiety / Fear** - Worry about a range of practical issues, including finances, future housing, and whether you will be able to cope.
- **Sadness / Loss** - Distress at seeing a home or business damaged; loss of treasured possessions; and less sense of security and safety within one's home.
- **Flashbacks** - You may have repeated and vivid memories of the event which suddenly come into your mind for no apparent reason.
- **Anger** at what has happened; at the senselessness of it all or "Why it happened to me?" You may become more irritable than usual and your mood may be changeable.
- **Physical symptoms** such as aches and pains, tense muscles, headaches, upset stomach, etc.
- **Loss of sense of normality**, safety and predictability and a feeling of "the world as we know it" being changed.
- **Sleep problems** including getting to sleep, waking in the middle of the night, nightmares. Exhaustion and over-fatigue can set in following severe physical and psychological stress.
- **Problems with thinking**, and concentrating, or remembering things.
- **Strains in relationships may appear**, as everyone is under stress and there is a disruption to normal routines. On the other hand, new friendships and a stronger sense of community may come into being.

Everyone will not experience all of the reactions to the same degree and, in most cases, these reactions will be temporary.

If you were already experiencing stresses or problems before the flooding, this crisis could be a particularly difficult time for you.

Generally, research shows that people become more stressed and upset if they have less time to prepare, and if the period of flooding is longer and the damage more severe.

WHAT MAY HELP AT THIS TIME

- **"It's normal"** - Remind yourself that your reactions are normal in a situation like this and will lessen and pass in time. Think of times when you overcame difficult situations in the past and reassure yourself you can do it again.
- **Make a plan** - Make a list of what you need to do and getting in touch with relevant services can often help people to feel more in control.
At a time of high stress when you are out of your normal routine, it is easy to lose or forget things. Keeping all documents related to the flood together and making brief notes of any conversations with agencies can be helpful e.g. insurance company.
- **Talk about it** - Talking about what happened and sharing information and experiences with others usually helps you manage your feelings and can also help deal with practical problems.
- **Get back into routine** - Try to get back into a routine where possible. You may need to gradually introduce yourself to tasks that seem overwhelming (e.g. the cleanup, sorting out work affairs). Take it one step at a time.

• Self-Care

Eat regular meals. Try to eat something even if you do not feel like eating.

Try to get back into a regular sleep pattern. If you cannot sleep, get up and do something until you feel tired.

If you feel under stress or anxious, take some deep, slow breaths to help your body to relax and to calm your mind.

Get some physical exercise to help "burn off" tension and anxiety and help lift your mood.

Do something enjoyable for yourself and / or with the family even if you don't feel like it. In times of stress, we all need to do something we enjoy.

For some people, prayer, faith and spiritual reflection may be helpful at this time.

Be careful with the use of alcohol, tranquilizers or other medications. Sometimes people drink alcohol to deal with or forget about problems but this can make you feel worse as alcohol is a depressant.

During a stressful time, people often smoke more than usual and take more caffeine (e.g. tea, coffee, and certain fizzy drinks). Try to take these stimulants in moderation, because they can contribute to anxiety, agitation and sleep problems.

Accidents are more common after stress, please drive more carefully and be careful around the home and when using machinery.

- **Working Together** - Communities, neighbours and families often help each other in an incredible way in the early weeks. This positive experience of practical and emotional support can help everyone get through the crisis. Continue in this supportive manner and don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it.