

FOR SENIORS . . .

Post-traumatic stress reaction is a normal response to a distressing event that is outside the range of usual human experience. Disasters are dramatic and intense experiences and may be especially frightening for the elderly.

Trauma and the sense of loss all occur. Most of us feel a loss of control over our lives when disaster strikes, particularly the elderly who may already feel impaired because of physical limitations. They may also be more isolated and alone.

Any disturbance heightens feelings of vulnerability and isolation. These responses are normal and will pass with time. Anxieties and fears also may translate into physical symptoms:

- ✧ Headaches/vomiting
- ✧ Aches and pains
- ✧ Overeating or loss of appetite
- ✧ Bowel, skin, or sleep problems
- ✧ Nightmares/excessive sleeping
- ✧ Sadness/depression
- ✧ Emotional & behavioral reactions
- ✧ Loss of interest in activities
- ✧ Irritability, confusion, forgetfulness

Providing someone to stay with an older adult is often helpful:

- ✧ Talk openly about their fear, anxiety, and irritability.
- ✧ If confusion is a problem, orient the older adult to the environment by frequent references to the date, time, and surroundings.
- ✧ Frequently touch and call the older adult by name. It enhances the ability to recover more quickly.
- ✧ Give additional attention and reassurance.
- ✧ Rehearse safety measures for future disasters.
- ✧ Encourage contact with friends and relatives.
- ✧ Remind them that drinking, abusing drugs and overeating are just ways of medicating your feelings. These types of coping will only add to the situation and aggravate the problem.

If problems persist, talk with a counselor or family therapist. With professional assistance, "adjustment reactions" can be dealt with relatively quickly and easily.

Putnam County Crisis Hotline (toll-free)
1.800.468.4357