

TIPS FOR STAFF CARE

What to expect from yourself:

Disasters can stir up many different feelings and thoughts. It is normal to experience fear concerning your safety or that of a loved one, shock, disbelief, anger and guilt. Memory problems, anxiety, and/or depression are also possible after experiencing a disaster. Many caregivers can have a delayed response, which serves them well in the beginning, but then can be surprising when feelings and reactions surface weeks or months later. The more stress you are under, the less you perceive stress; the brain drug released under stress numbs the victim. Experiencing a stress response is not weak. It is a natural human reaction. How you deal with stress (attitudes and actions) can make it worse or alleviate its symptoms.

As caregivers, we often think of others before ourselves. It is important to understand that we can most effectively help our students and community when we care for ourselves first.

What you can do to care for yourself:

- Eat healthy meals regularly - avoid skipping meals, overeating, excess sugar, caffeine, or alcohol, drink plenty of fluids
- Exercise/Physical Fitness - consistent exercise can help you work out stress, deal with anger, improve sleep and physically feel better.
- Relaxation Exercises - slow, deep breathing in a quiet place, progressive muscle relaxation, guided imagery and meditation.
- Deal with overwhelming feelings - talk to someone who will listen without judging or giving advice, write a journal of your feelings, paint, draw, write a poem, music that soothes you, make time to cry, learn about grief.
- Coping with intense grief - find a quiet place to do some slow, deep breathing, focus on getting through an hour at a time, prioritize what really needs to get done and let the rest go, be gentle with yourself - grieving is hard work.
- Reach out to others - identify relatives and friends who are sensitive and supportive, seek out people who are helping resources such as counselors and religious leaders.
- Don't give up hope - the ability to enjoy humor and laugh is helpful and relieves stress even in times of sadness and pain, remember that although you have no control over the loss you've experienced, you do have control over your response to it. Everyone's grief journey is unique and with some effort you will find what best helps you.
- Recognize the signs that you may need professional help - feeling sad, hopeless and depressed consistently, significant change in eating and sleeping habits, having hardly any energy and interest in life, withdrawing from friends and family; becoming isolated, any thought or plans of hurting yourself; seek professional help.