

Mental and Emotional Coping Skills during Shelter-in-Place Emergencies

Typical Emotional Reactions to Shelter-in-Place Situations

- Anxiety, particularly when separated from loved ones.
- Uncertainty regarding how long you will need to shelter in place.
- Concerns for the physical safety of ourselves and others.
- Distress about physiological needs such as food, water, medications, and/or nicotine.
- Guilt about not fulfilling personal responsibilities, such as work, parenting or caring for dependents.

Remember that feelings of fear, stress, uncertainty or anxiety are normal reactions to an abnormal event

What You Can Do

- **Focus on positive actions you can take right away.**
 - Take an inventory of emergency supplies
 - Make a list of names and skills of those who are sheltering
 - Provide support to others
- **Stay informed.** If media sources are available, try to stay informed but avoid overexposing yourself.
- **Monitor your physical health needs.** When sheltering in place for more than a few hours, remember to eat and rest.
- **Try to maintain contact with family, friends and those around you.** The telephone and the Internet can be helpful when physical separations become necessary. Try text messages, emails, and social media if phone service is unavailable or sporadic.
- **Hold a picture in your mind of the best possible outcome.** Make a list of your personal strengths and use these to help yourself and others stay emotionally strong.

Tips on Managing Intense Emotions

DO:

Promote Safety

- Provide simple and accurate information on how people may be able to meet their basic needs for food and shelter and medical assistance.
- Repeat information often. Stress may alter how people process information.

Promote Calm

- Listen to people who wish to share their stories and emotions. Remember there is no wrong or right way to feel.
- Be friendly and compassionate even if people are being difficult.
- Help survivors understand the situation as accurately as possible. Obtain and offer information about the shelter-in-place emergency and the relief efforts underway.

Promote Connectedness

- Help people contact friends or loved ones. If possible, keep families together. Keep children with parents or other close relatives/friends.

Promote Self-Confidence

- Give practical suggestions on how people can help themselves (see previous tips).
- Help people regain their sense of control by engaging in activities, which help them meet their own needs.

Promote Hope

- Remind people (if you know) that more help and services are on the way when they express fear or worry.
- Emphasize that many individuals have survived shelter-in-place emergencies without encountering any long-term adverse physical and/or emotional effects.

DON'T:

- Do not force people to share their stories with you, especially very personal details.
- Do not give simple reassurances like “it will be OK” or “at least you survived”.
- Do not tell people what they should be feeling, thinking, doing or should have done
- Do not make promises that may not be kept such as “help will be here soon”.
- Do not criticize existing services or relief activities in front of people in need of these services.

Adapted from How to Cope with a SIP Emergency (S. Dailey, 2012)