



# MOVING THROUGH RECOVERY:

## A Guide for Holidays

If you have been affected by a disaster or emergency, holidays can be a time of both hope and increased stress. Taking small, positive steps will help you feel better and more in control.

The Red Cross has gathered some information on stress, and tips for taking care of yourself and others during holidays.

## WHAT YOU MAY BE EXPERIENCING:

A variety of emotions are common during the holidays, especially if you are recovering from a disaster or emergency. Most of these reactions are temporary.

### You may:

- Feel sad that a normally joyful time of year is burdened with re-establishing your life or with memories of lost or meaningful belongings
- Feel lonely, especially when holiday sights and sounds remind us of happier times or of those we will be missing from this year's rituals
- Feel overwhelmed or unable to plan daily activities
- Feel physically and mentally drained
- Have difficulty making decisions or staying focused on tasks at hand
- Become easily frustrated with daily tasks or with family and friends
- Argue more with those around us
- Feel tired, numb, or worried
- Experience changes in appetite or sleep patterns
- Increase alcohol or substance use

### Children may also:

- Behave aggressively
- Cling to caregivers
- Regress to the behaviour of younger children, such as thumb-sucking or bedwetting

Coping with and recovering from the effects of disaster can take a long time. Coping is the process of managing difficult circumstances and finding ways to tolerate the effects of stress. Acknowledge whatever reactions you may have. Look forward, one small step at a time, and focus on taking care of your needs and those of your friends and family.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO:

It is important to find ways of coping with stress. The following may help you take care of yourself and others:

- Ensure you have a safe place to stay and that your basic needs are met.
- Eat nutritiously and stay hydrated, as you're able to.
- Get enough rest. With so much to do around important holidays, it can be difficult to rest or get adequate sleep. Rest provides your body and mind a break, which will increase your ability to cope.
- Avoid isolation by reaching out. If you find yourself in new surroundings, reach out to those around you. Giving and receiving support is important.
- Be patient with yourself and with those close to you. Others may be struggling to cope with the disaster during holidays and may need your patience and support.
- Honour your traditions. Be flexible and prepared to engage in new activities to celebrate.
- Take it slow. Small steps are helpful when tasks seem overwhelming. Only do what you can.
- Seek out assistance and resources. Gather information that will help you and your family meet your needs through the holidays.
- Stay positive and make plans. Remind yourself of how you've successfully gotten through difficult times in the past.



## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP CHILDREN:

- Give extra time, hugs and patience.
- Provide reassurance of your family's safety and recovery plans.
- Involve them in activities to assist others; it can help them cope.
- Let them know how the holiday will look different this year. Ask for their feelings.

## WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP:

If you continue to feel overwhelmed, can't shake feelings of despair or find yourself or a loved one experiencing some of the feelings and reactions listed below for two weeks or more, this may be a sign that you need to reach out for additional support . Seek help through your family doctor, spiritual care or community organization. Asking for help is a sign of strength.

- Feelings of intense sadness, hopelessness and/or guilt
- Short temper or outbursts of anger
- Difficulty eating or sleeping
- Lost interest in things that were enjoyable
- Increased physical symptoms, such as headaches or stomachaches,
- Avoiding family and friends
- Increasing alcohol or substance use



## RESOURCES:

### **Acknowledgements:**

The Canadian Red Cross gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support, the Australian Red Cross, and American Red Cross materials to this booklet.

### **Disclaimer**

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