

Coping with Tragedy: Coping with Evacuation

Experiencing an emergency evacuation may have leave you and your family displaced, with feelings of loss – loss of loved ones, community, contact with family and friends and special belongings such as your home and family mementos. At this point, you may live in a stressful, overcrowded place without adequate food and water, sharing space with people you do not know.

You have probably suffered through distressing and alarming experiences, which may lead to shock, confusion, anxiety and alarm.

You may feel sad, angry, confused, worried about the future and even guilty. From one minute to the next, you may cry and then laugh. All feelings and reactions are normal; each person reacts uniquely. While these events will take a few weeks to fully process, here are some strategies to help you cope in the meantime:

- Stay with family members or other familiar people for comfort.
- Try to carve out a clean space for you and your family.
- Get involved in productive activities at your shelter or temporary community.
- Get older children involved by having them look after younger children.
- Help prepare food, construct shelters or help relay information to others.
- Volunteer your services if you have a special skill such as carpentry, nursing, masonry or teaching.
- Create play areas and organize games for children.
- Support one another – tell your story and listen to others tell theirs to help deal with all of the events that have happened.
- Continue your religious or centering practices such as prayer, meditation or exercise.
- Use counseling services, if they are available, even if you don't feel an immediate need. Sharing your story will help.

If you have children:

Your children will have strong feelings about this disaster. They may not show it, but they need your help in understanding and coping.

- Talk to your child every day. Ask them how they are doing and what worries them most.
- Let children know that it is okay to be upset or angry.
- Reassure them that you will be there and will take care of them.
- Be honest and open about the disaster. Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know" and keep discussions about their experiences open and honest.

For More Information:

For a free and confidential mental health screening, go on-line to www.mhacolorado.org.