

# Disaster Preparedness and Your Mental Health

**There are ways to help you cope if you are exposed to a disaster or a traumatic event. Pay attention to preparing emotionally.**

When you or a loved one experiences a traumatic event it is natural to respond by focusing on your immediate survival needs. Your first priority is to ensure you and your family members are safe and secure.

It is also important to consider how to cope emotionally.

Traumatic experiences are **any situation that leaves you feeling overwhelmed, even if it doesn't involve physical harm**. The more frightened and helpless you feel, the more likely you are to feel traumatized.

Learning techniques to control how you respond emotionally to a situation can help you achieve a better outcome after a traumatic event. A stressful event is most likely to be traumatic if:

- It happened unexpectedly.
- You were unprepared for it.
- You felt powerless to prevent it.
- It happened repeatedly.
- Someone was intentionally cruel.
- It happened in childhood.

## **How can we prepare ourselves?**

Learn about your personal coping style. Learn what works for you in coping with stress. Learning relaxation exercises or mindfulness exercises, and building positive support networks can go a long way to helping you cope and help you to recover.

## **What can happen to our mental health after a traumatic event or disaster?**

When we have experienced a traumatic event we experience a number of losses, which can create uncertainty and anxiety about the future. Our natural environment might have changed a lot. Adjusting to new circumstances can be difficult. Here are some signs that you may want to reach out for help:

- Trouble coping with daily routines.
- Having a hard time making decisions.
- Avoiding people or regular activities.
- Thinking too much about and reliving the traumatic events.

If you or a loved one require more assistance or you want to know where to go to find help, call **Alberta Health Link Toll-Free 1-866-408-LINK (5465)**.