

## TOPIC WATCH

**Each month we will feature a different topic; expanding the knowledge, resources, and peer networking in targeted areas. These target areas will include workforce development, transition, supported education, leadership, organizational development, sustainability, and others as they are identified.**



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*"There are many concerns, adjustments, and ordeals that follow the experience of a disaster. Generally, within a short time there is the reality of financial setbacks and the loss of property and personal possessions. The endless adjustments that you and your family must make will put additional stress on your relationships and daily living. You may also grow physically and mentally weary from the enormous task of cleaning up and rebuilding. All of these factors can hinder your ability to move forward." Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA)*

## Disaster Toolkit

Disaster can strike quickly and without warning. It can force you to evacuate your neighborhood or confine you to your home. Where will you or your family be when disaster strikes? You or your loved ones could be anywhere—at work, at school, or in the car. How will you find each other? What would you do if basic services—water, gas, electricity or telephones—were cut off? Local officials and relief workers will be on the scene after a disaster, but they cannot reach everyone right away. In addition, after the disaster there will be chaos, confusion, disruptions in services and supports, and triggers that can cause emotional reactions. Additionally, the emotions brought about by a disaster can continue as a very real presence long after the actual event has passed. Feelings of sadness, depression, frustration, anger, and anxiety are common. It is not unusual for these feelings to last for many months.

The good news is that it's possible to get through a disaster and recover fully. All it takes is proper planning, and an understanding of what is involved in the disaster planning, response, and recovery stages of the overall disaster experience. Each component contributes to the overall safety and recovery of an individual, their family, and their community.

- ☒ The **planning stage** is the period BEFORE a disaster strikes, where people, organizations, companies, and communities develop disaster plans and do everything they can to be prepared IN CASE a disaster strikes.
- ☒ The **response stage** is when people and their communities put their plans into action. This is the period during and immediately after the disaster.
- ☒ The **recovery stage** is after the critical incident or disaster. It's the period when most help has left and people begin to rebuild their lives.

There are multiple resources available for people, families, organizations, and communities to promote their safety and recovery. This Focus highlights some of the actions that can assist you during the planning, response, and recovery stages of a disaster. You are encouraged to explore the resources provided to ensure the mental, emotional, and physical safety of you and those you love.

## Planning

During the planning stage:



- Consider why you need to prepare for disaster.
- Understand the types of disasters that are most likely to happen in your area, including natural as well as man-made or terrorist activities.
- Select two places to meet in the event you are separated from those you love and make sure everyone knows the address of the “meeting place” and how to contact one another.
- Ask an out-of-state friend to be your “contact” and check in with them after the immediate danger has passed.
- Discuss what to do in an evacuation. Plan how to take care of your pets.
- Post emergency telephone numbers by phones (fire, police, ambulance, hospital, doctor, poison control, etc.).
- Make sure everyone in your home knows how and when to call 9-1-1 or your local Emergency Medical Services number for emergency help.
- Know how and when to turn off the water, gas, and electricity at the main switches.
- Decide the best evacuation routes from your home.

For more information on developing a disaster plan see the resources below.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has a website dedicated to helping individuals, families, communities, businesses, and states prepare for a disaster. They also include information that details how and where to locate help throughout the planning, response, and recovery processes. <http://www.fema.gov/plan-prepare-mitigate>

## Response

During the disaster response stage:



- Stay calm. Put your plan into action.
- If you were in a public place, move to the safest location available and stay there until you are told it is safe to leave.
- Stay off the streets and do not drive around to “see what happened.” Avoid unfamiliar places.
- Evacuate, if advised to do so, and follow the instructions of First Responders.
- If you are home, put a sign on your home that shows you have chosen to stay so officials can locate you after the emergency passes.
- Check for injuries and give first aid to, or get help for, seriously injured people.
- Listen to your battery powered radio or cell phone for news and instructions.
- Check for fires, fire hazards and other hazards.
- Check (smell) for gas leaks, starting at the water heater. If you smell gas or suspect a leak, turn off the main gas valve, open windows, and get everyone outside quickly.
- Clean up spilled medicines, bleaches, gasoline and other flammable liquids immediately.
- Put your pets in a safe place and watch animals as they will be confused and scared and may be dangerous.
- Call your family contact, then avoid using the telephone again unless it is a life-threatening emergency.
- Check on your neighbors, especially the elderly or other persons with special needs.
- Stay away from downed power lines and structures that look unstable.

These are few general tips for protecting yourself and others. For more detailed information, please check into the resources below.

Most people are familiar with the work that the Red Cross does in communities and areas hit by a disaster. They also provide excellent information and resources to help you become better prepared and to encourage safe and healthy responses to a disaster. <http://newsroom.redcross.org/disaster-response-guide/>

## Recovery

During recovery the following can help:

- Return home only when you have been advised it is safe. Follow professional recommendations regarding safety precautions.
- Allow others to help you in the recovery process.
- Make every attempt to return to or establish a routine in your life, such as returning to work or school, or engaging in social events that provide you with comfort.
- Take care of yourself and acknowledge the emotional impact of your disaster experience.
  - It is normal to feel anxious about your own safety and that of your family and close friends.
  - Profound sadness, grief and anger are normal reactions to an abnormal event.
  - Acknowledging your feelings helps you recover.
  - Focusing on your strengths and abilities helps you heal.
  - Accepting help from community programs and resources is healthy.
  - Everyone has different needs and different ways of coping.
  - It is common to want to strike back at people who have caused great pain.
- Seek professional assistance for any feelings that are not getting better, which continue to overwhelm you, or that interfere with your ability to cope with everyday life.
- Pay special attention to information regarding community support from agencies and programs and take advantage of assistance that will help you get back on your feet again.



This Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has developed a Disaster Response Template Toolkit that features public education materials that disaster behavioral health response programs can use to create resources for reaching people affected by a disaster. The Template Toolkit includes print, website, audio, video, and multimedia materials that disaster behavioral health response programs can use to provide outreach, psycho-education, and recovery news for disaster survivors. Many of the links contain sample materials and online tools that have been used in previous disaster situations across the country. The templates can also be adapted for future use as desired.

[http://www.samhsa.gov/dtac/dbhis/dbhis\\_templates\\_intro.asp](http://www.samhsa.gov/dtac/dbhis/dbhis_templates_intro.asp)

FEMA has produced a number of documents regarding planning, response, and recovery. Recovering from a disaster is usually a gradual process. Safety is a primary issue, as are mental and physical well-being. If assistance is available, knowing how to access it makes the process faster and less stressful. This booklet offers some general advice on steps to take after disaster strikes in order to begin getting your home, your community, and your life back to normal.

[http://www.fema.gov/pdf/areyouready/recovering\\_from\\_disaster.pdf](http://www.fema.gov/pdf/areyouready/recovering_from_disaster.pdf)

