

Managing Stress During the Flood

Emergencies, like a flood, can cause great mental and emotional strain. They can disrupt your regular routines and there may be the potential of losing your home, property or income. People naturally have many different feelings and responses when they have to cope with this kind of stress, including:

- panic, anxiety, fear
- anger, disbelief
- generosity towards others
- helplessness, despair
- co-operation, teamwork
- sleeplessness
- lack of concentration
- exhaustion
- loneliness
- inspiration
- strength in connecting with others/community

You and your family

Families are better able to cope with the effects of flooding if they talk about what might happen and what action could be taken.

- Be clear about priorities. The health and safety of your family, friends and neighbors comes first.
- If your home is at risk of flooding, make an emergency plan that includes moving valuables and keepsakes to the highest floor of the house to protect them from flood damage.
- Discuss what will be taken if you need to evacuate and be realistic about it. Most people take items that can't be replaced, like photos, favourite toys, smaller family heirlooms and family treasures.
- Ensure everyone has a several-day supply of medications to take with you if you need to evacuate.
- Remind each other that strong feelings are normal under the circumstances.
- Acknowledge that you're all feeling stress and talk about how it may affect your relationships.
- Let each other know everyone's doing a good job in a difficult situation.
- Continue to laugh and enjoy each other's company.

If you need to evacuate

In some parts of the province, evacuation may be necessary. Your local authorities will give you as much notice as possible. If you must evacuate:

- Try to set up a routine with as many familiar activities as possible.
- Plan to do some basic school work with children for part of the day, if they are missing school.
- Understand and reassure yourself and family members that the disruption is only temporary.
- Talk to others who are having the same experience.
- Don't try to go home before local authorities tell you it is safe to do so.

After the flood

Recovery from the trauma of a flood can take weeks or even months.

- It's important to allow yourself, family and others to talk about the flood and their feelings for as long as is needed.
- Remember to take regular breaks during clean-up work; talk with your family, go out for a meal or entertainment or visit friends.

Five Steps for Staying Healthy

Step 1 – Know yourself

Learn the common signs of stress and be aware of how you usually deal with it. Signs can range from headaches, muscle tension, sleeplessness and trouble concentrating, to irritability, anger, anxiety and sadness. To learn more about the signs and effects of stress, go to: www.de-stress.ca. Everyone has resources that can help them cope with stress. It's important to remember what resources you can count on, including:

- family, friends, connection with others
- spirituality, faith
- awareness of own values
- sense of purpose
- exercise, leisure, creative activities
- ability to help others
- initiative to plan and prepare for future events/changes
- acknowledgement of good feelings, not just negative ones
- awareness of the world around you

Step 2 – Care for body and mind

When you're feeling stressed, take regular breaks and relax. Use relaxation techniques that help you slow down, stay calm and de-stress.

- An important stress indicator is shallow, fast breathing. Take slow, deep breaths (from your stomach) and focus your mind to calm it.
- Go for walks, stretch your muscles.
- Eat healthy food and eat regularly. Good nutrition is key to managing stress.
- Try to focus on the positive and show compassion for yourself and others.

For more information on simple relaxation exercises, go to: www.de-stress.ca.

Step 3 – Check in with yourself regularly

Self awareness is important and you can monitor your moods and attitudes at different times of the day. Make a point to stop to check in with yourself, often, and make sure you are doing things that support a healthy body, mind and spirit.

Step 4 – Stay informed

Keep on top of current news but don't spend the whole day tuned into media broadcasts. Try and keep as close to your normal daily routines as possible and only check the news occasionally, unless there's an imminent threat to your home.

Step 5 – Ask for help

Health and well-being must be supported by a network of people who can share your experiences with you. Don't try and manage by yourself. Talk to family and friends and use the resources in your community:

- health care providers
- spiritual care providers and advisors
- professional counsellors

Use outside support and resources if you need them

If you, your family, friends or neighbours are having a particularly hard time dealing with stress, you can get help from trained professionals:

- Health Links – Info Santé can help you find resources through your local regional health authority or community mental health services office. Call 204-788-8200 in Winnipeg; toll free 1-888-315-9257; 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Rural Manitobans can call the Farm and Rural Support Services Line at 1-866-367-3276 toll free; 10:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. weekdays. Or, go to www.ruralsupport.ca.
- Klinik Community Health Centre 24-hour Crisis Line can provide counselling and referrals for all Manitobans. Call 204-786-8686 in Winnipeg; toll free 1-888-322-3019; 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- If you or someone you know is thinking of suicide, the Manitoba Suicide Line is available to all Manitobans. Call 1-877-435-7170 toll free; 24 hours a day, seven days a week; or go to www.reasonstolive.ca.