

**WHY DO I
FEEL LIKE THIS?**



**American
Red Cross**

There are two types of disaster: natural disasters like the damage that results from a hurricane, a tornado, floods, forest fires, volcanoes erupting and earthquakes, and disasters that result from an intentional action of a human. This second type includes the intentional acts of terrorism that were just committed in our country. When the disaster is human caused, our reactions are more severe and become much more complicated and difficult to overcome.

This disaster has probably caused you to question a number of things that you previously believed about your own safety, the safety of your family and friends, and moral issues of right and wrong behavior. This questioning is a normal reaction to a disaster caused by another human being and it is important that you give yourself time to sort out your feelings and thoughts. Don't expect easy answers.

This brochure will provide you with information about the emotional and physical reactions you may be experiencing. It also contains some thoughts that we hope will help you put in clearer perspective the impact this event has had, and will have, on your life and on the lives of the people around you. We hope this will help you put this event in its proper place in YOUR life.

Why was this event so disturbing and stressful?

Disaster research tells us why some disasters are more stressful than others. The reasons include:

- **Lack of warning.** If we can prepare for something, even a disaster, the event is less frightening than if we have no warning.
- **Abrupt change of reality.** A safe area suddenly becomes unsafe.
- **Type of destructive agent used.** The power of a bomb or gun or whatever was used to harm others is frightening. In this disaster, the use of a common means of safe transportation is very upsetting.
- **Fear of additional destruction.** We don't know what will happen next so we are in a state of alert.
- **Outcome of rescue attempts.** Fears that no one or few people will be found alive or that the rescue crews, themselves, can be hurt.
- **Trauma associated with seeing death so close at hand.** Seeing the dead and critically injured is especially disturbing.
- **Feelings that there should have been some way to prevent such a disaster from happening.**

- **Media coverage.** When we view and review the damage repeatedly we all become victims of the disaster. Anyone who watches the disaster coverage can become what is called a secondary victim and can suffer emotional and physical problems. However, don't be surprised if others don't seem to be affected in the same way you are by what they have seen and heard. Not everyone has immediate reactions; some people have delayed reactions that show up days, weeks, or even months later, and some people may never have a reaction.

What kinds of emotions are "normal" and when will they go away?

There is a natural anger, even rage, that goes along with the feeling that we are unprotected from events like this, and that our way of life could be changed so abruptly. There is also fear that the same thing could happen to us and those we love.

You may find that loud noises startle you more easily, or that smells or objects associated with the event can create an emotional reaction. Don't be surprised by these reactions. Over time, when nothing dangerous happens, they will disappear on their own.

You may feel overwhelming sadness and depression, have problems thinking things through, have trouble sleeping, or experience nightmares. These feelings may go away and then return when something triggers thoughts of the disaster.

As a response to this stress, you may feel that you should do something to prove that you're alive that you might not ordinarily do. Please think carefully about the possible consequences of your actions, and know that your feelings will pass. Or, you may want to avoid your friends, miss school, and be alone or spend extra time with your family. These are all common reactions of teenagers to disaster events.

These feelings and reactions should disappear within four to six weeks or less as you resume your daily activities and focus your attention on other things. Everyone feels stress in different ways, so don't compare yourself with friends and family members, or judge their reactions or lack of reactions.

Can stress cause physical problems?

Stress often causes physical problems. The most common include:

- Headaches
- Stomachaches

- Body aches and pains
- Flare-up of allergies
- Problems falling asleep or staying asleep
- Excessive hunger or lack of appetite
- Rashes. As your level of stress is reduced, you will find your physical problems will disappear.

What can I do?

- Talk it out! Bottling up feelings and thoughts restricts your ability to work through what happened and cope with the pain and insecurity.
- Listen to others.
- Perform random acts of kindness. Reassure yourself there is tenderness and thoughtfulness in the world. Volunteer your services to someone in need.
- Spend time with your family.
- Return to your usual routine.
- Sit under a tree, look at a brook, lake, river or ocean.
- Remind yourself of other times you have felt strong emotions and how they resolved themselves. They will always be part of you and will guide who you become and what you do, but they do not rule your life.
- Ask for help when you need it. Talk about your feelings with someone you trust, such as your parents or another relative, a school counselor or a spiritual leader. If your feelings continue to remain as strong or last longer than four to six weeks, you may want to seek professional help to help you sort through your feelings.
- Do something that could help others — for example, take a first aid or CPR class.



**American
Red Cross**

Disaster Services