



WHEN SOMETHING AWFUL HAS HAPPENED:

Advice for families and friends during a disaster

Massachusetts General Hospital is currently treating victims of a disaster. As a friend or family member of someone who may have been involved in this disaster, you have many questions and concerns.

What to do immediately after the disaster

MGH has mobilized all available resources to help victims of this disaster. By doing the following simple things, you will be able to obtain the most up-to-date information from hospital staff without interrupting the care of disaster victims.

HELPFUL THINGS	UNHELPFUL THINGS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elect a spokesperson for that will speak to hospital staff on behalf of the family. • Wait in the designated family/friend area for the most up to date information available from hospital staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having numerous family members call the Emergency Department with requests for information • Entering the emergency room if you are not injured

Dealing with the shock of a disaster

Even though you were not involved in the disaster directly, family members can experience extreme stress reactions. There is not one 'standard' pattern of reaction to the extreme stress of a traumatic experience, some people respond immediately, while others have delayed reactions. There are a number of steps you can take to help restore emotional well-being during this difficult time:

- **Give yourself time to heal.** Anticipate that this will be a difficult time in your life. Allow yourself to mourn the losses you have experienced.
- **Ask for support** from people who care about you and who will listen and empathize with your situation.
- **Communicate your experience** in whatever ways feel comfortable to you - such as by talking with family or close friends, or keeping a diary.
- **Engage in healthy behaviors** to enhance your ability to cope with excessive stress. Eat well-balanced meals and get plenty of rest. Avoid alcohol and drugs.
- **Establish or reestablish routines** such as eating meals at regular times and following an exercise program.

When to seek help

Sometimes family members and friends of a disaster victim need help too. Normal grief can become depression for some people. Indicators that you should seek medical attention include:

- You feel **trapped**, like there's nowhere to turn
- You **worry** excessively and can't concentrate
- The way you feel affects your sleep, your eating habits, your job, your relationships, your everyday life

Resources

- Your Primary Care Physician (PCP) / Your Pediatrician
- Boston Emergency Services Team (BEST) – Mental Health Crisis Line **800.981.4357**
- MGH Acute Psychiatry Service (APS) – 24hr psychiatrists. **617.724.7688**
- **911** or the nearest emergency room if suicidal or dangerous thoughts

More Information

- www.apahelpcenter.com
- www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov