



Mental Health Care After Disaster

Stress reactions and how to cope with them

Counseling Center





Special Thanks

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Objectives

- ❧ To understand psychological and physical reactions after disasters
- ❧ To understand how to cope with them
- ❧ To understand how to help those who have been affected
- ❧ To understand secondary victimization and secondary trauma
- ❧ To practice relaxation techniques

Stress Reactions to a disaster

- Stress: Physical and mental reactions to events and circumstances that frighten, confuse, endanger, irritate or excite
- Stress reactions: Normal reactions to an abnormal event
- Reactions to the event
 - ← Direct experience of the disaster
 - ← Exposure to media coverage
- Reactions to loss: Grief
 - ← Death of loved ones, losing home, personal belongings, job, etc.

1. Psychological and Physiological Changes

■ Physical Reactions

→ You may have various reactions because you're experiencing constant and strong stress and anxiety.

e.g. insomnia, losing appetite or eating too much, nightmares, problems with gastrointestinal system, stomachache, headache, shortness of breath, fatigue, dizziness, increased heart rate, motion sickness

1. Psychological and Physiological Changes (cont'd)

■ Mental Reactions

- ✓ Recalling the scene of the event
- ✓ Extremely anxious and fearful
- ✓ Feeling distressed when watching or hearing news related to the event
- ✓ Sensitive to any little sound or stimulus
- ✓ Being reminded of pre-existing issues
- ✓ Irritable, depressed, absent-minded
- ✓ Being high

1. Psychological and Physiological Changes (cont'd)

■ Changes in thoughts

- ✓ Blaming yourself and guilty for the event, being alive, and enjoying life
- ✓ Feeling helpless and feeling that you have no control
- ✓ Feeling that another disaster may occur
- ✓ Feeling you are alone
- ✓ Feeling detached from reality

1. Psychological and Physiological Changes (cont'd)

■ Daily Life

- ✓ Withdrawn from social interactions
- ✓ Fear of being alone
- ✓ Not wanting to go out
- ✓ Unable to sleep in a dark room
- ✓ Increased consumption of alcohol and tobacco consumption
- ✓ Unable to enjoy what you used to enjoy

1. Psychological and Physiological Changes (cont'd)

■ Reactions to Loss

- ✓ Crying out of sadness
- ✓ Feeling detached
- ✓ Feeling helpless
- ✓ Feeling angry for having to put up with something so unreasonable
- ✓ Recalling previous losses

2. How to Cope with Stress Reactions

■ Most Important:

* Safety:

- Restoring immediate physical safety

* Comfort:

- Knowing that you are not alone
- Understanding what you are experiencing
- Knowing resources and getting appropriate information

2. How to Cope with Stress Reactions

(cont'd)

* Comfort (cont'd):

Preparing for an emergency

- Know what to do in case of emergency

e.g. evacuation procedure, how to contact your family and how they can contact you, emergency supplies

* Adequate rest and maintaining daily routines:

- Eating and sleeping adequately as much as possible and maintaining daily routines

2. How to Cope with Stress Reactions

(cont'd)

“What you are experiencing is not unusual. Anyone can experience physical and psychological reactions because what has happened was something extraordinary for anyone to deal with.”

“Most of the reactions will gradually disappear as time passes.”

2. How to Cope with Stress Reactions

(cont'd)

■ If ...

- * If you feel overwhelmed and want to talk about your feelings, talk to someone who will listen to you. However, don't feel obligated to talk.
- * Don't pressure yourself to feel better. While it may feel better to pretend the event didn't happen, in the long run, it is better to be honest about your feelings and to allow yourself to acknowledge the sense of loss and uncertainty.
- * Try not to avoid recurrent thoughts or images of the incident.

2. How to Cope with Stress Reactions

(cont'd)

■ For more comfort

- * It may help you alleviate fear, sadness, and anger to spend time with your friends and family.
- * Set aside time to relax.
- * Utilizing relaxation techniques can be helpful.

2. How to Cope with Stress Reactions (cont'd)

■ Seek professional help when

- * you keep having sleepless nights
- * you want to talk to someone
- * you cannot relax at all
- * you feel extremely depressed
- * you feel you are out of control
- * use of alcohol/cigarette increases
- * distress is interfering with your life

3. Giving Support

■ Basic Principles

- * Try to promote safety and comfort.
- * Offer practical assistance.
- * Attend to their physical comfort.
e.g. “Are you eating okay?” “Can you sleep well?”
- * Don’t pathologize them.

3. Giving Support

(cont'd)

■ What else you can do

- * Don't pressure them to talk.
- * If they want to talk, listen to them in a non-judgmental manner.
- * If they show consistent extreme signs of stress (e.g. insomnia, loss of appetite, emotional instability, physical reactions, or suicidal thoughts), help them seek professional assistance.

3. Giving Support

(cont'd)

■ Secondary Traumatization

→ Be mindful about it

■ How to give information

→ People experiencing extreme stress may temporarily be unable to comprehend well

→ Give them info in writing

→ Tell them more than once

■ Numbness or hypomania

→ They may appear fine, but they may not

→ They may show signs of distress later on

3. Giving Support

(cont'd)

- Show sincere care but don't be overprotective

- * It is important to promote their self-esteem and sense of control for feeling better.

- Be mindful of their anger and despair

- * They can be irritable and may show intense anger.

- * They may be in despair, but it can be a healthy reaction.

- * They are under much stress and may be more vulnerable

4. Secondary Victimization and Secondary Trauma

■ Secondary Victimization

- * Additional trauma caused by inappropriate or thoughtless responses
- ✓ It can be by family members, friends, significant others, media, authority, neighbors, co-workers, medical staff, etc.
- ✓ Remarks meant to encourage them can be taken as inconsiderate and hurtful.
- ✓ They are being more vulnerable.

4. Secondary Victimization and Secondary Trauma (cont'd)

■ Statements potentially taken as hurtful:

- * Questions or responses out of curiosity
 - “You’re survivor of the earthquake, aren’t you?”
 - “How was it like over there?”
- * Unwanted conversation about the earthquake or the nuclear accident.
- * Other comments include:
 - “It could have been worse.” “It’s good that you’re alive.” “You should forget about it.” “Enough time has passed.” “God gives us only what we can handle.” “Ganbatte”

4. Secondary Victimization and Secondary Trauma (cont'd)

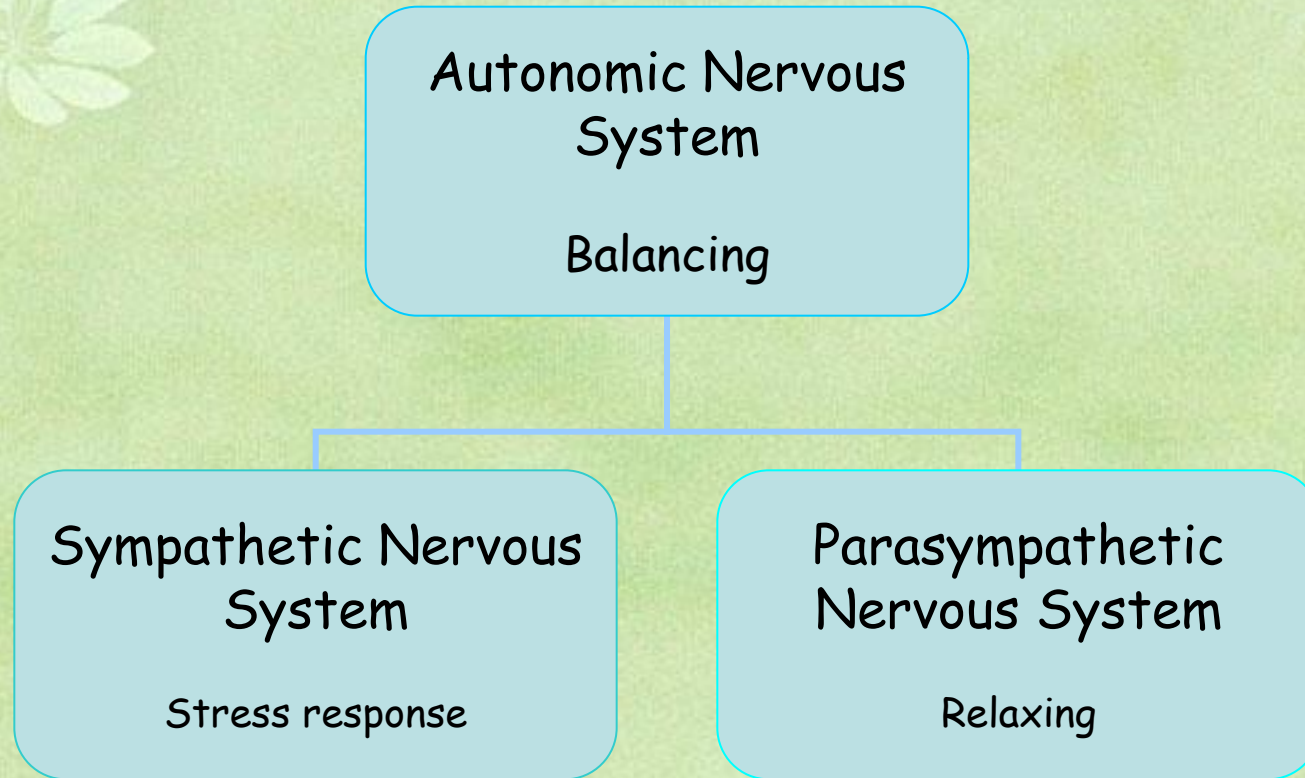
■ Secondary Trauma / Vicarious Trauma

- * Stress reactions experienced by help-providers (e.g. trauma responders, health care workers, friends, family, volunteers, etc.) when they listen empathetically to traumatic experience
- * Feelings of helplessness and self-blame are prevalent
- * You may experience compassion fatigue, burnout, and vicarious trauma; therefore you may experience stress reactions

4. Secondary Victimization and Secondary Trauma (cont'd)

- * Monitor your stress level.
- * Know your limit.
- * Take care of yourself and live a balanced-life.
- * Seek peer support or professional help if necessary.

3. Why relaxation helps



Preparing for quick response

- tense
- increased heart rate
- alert

Resting

- relaxed
- slower heart rate
- calm



When You Need Professional Help

☞ Counseling Center (For those who are member of Sophia University community)

<http://www.sophia.ac.jp/eng/studentlife/support/counseling>

☞ Health Center

☞ Sophia Psychology Clinic (For your friends and family)

<http://www.info.sophia.ac.jp/helping/>



Reference

☞ Sophia University Website

Useful Information

http://www.sophia.ac.jp/eng/info/news/2010/3/global_news_204/110318_Info?kind=0

☞ In the Wake of Trauma: “Tips for College Students”

<http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content//KEN01-0092R/KEN01-0092R.pdf>

☞ Tips for Survivors of a Traumatic Event: Managing Your Stress

http://www.samhsa.gov/MentalHealth/Tips_Survivors_Managing_Your_Stress.pdf