

# In the Aftermath of a Disturbing Event Strategies for Self-Care and Resilience

After a stressful event occurs, it is essential to take care of yourself. Just as you would tend to an acute physical injury by seeking support, alleviating symptoms of pain, and taking steps to ensure recovery, the same is true for an emotional or psychological injury following a disturbing event. And, just as the human body is often ingenious in the way it can mend itself, so too the mind and heart can be incredibly resilient. We just have to help them along.

Resilience has been defined by the American Psychological Association as “the human ability to adapt in the face of tragedy, trauma, adversity, hardship, and ongoing significant life stressors.”

## Building and Engaging Resilience

Below are some tips for taking care of yourself and engaging your resilience. Please feel free to use those ideas that you find most useful and continue to engage your own coping strategies.

### ■ Physical self-care

- Get enough sleep
- Get regular physical activity
- Eat healthful food
- Reduce alcohol and caffeine consumption
- Release tension in healthy ways
- Take deep breaths
- Balance work, play, and rest

### ■ Emotional self-care

- Know your vulnerabilities
- Get help early on if you are feeling overwhelmed
- Use relaxation skills that work best for you
- Listen to music that soothes you
- Engage socially to avoid feeling isolated
- Set limits, if necessary, when others are too demanding of your time or energy (Give yourself time to heal and renew.)
- Reestablish a routine, if possible

### ■ Social self-care

- Be aware of withdrawal and isolation
- Get nurturance/care from loved ones
- Use friends and family and community for support
- See how work can offer support
- Seek out others for social activities
- Recognize that humor can be a useful respite
- Make an effort to have fun

### ■ Spiritual self-care

- Use religious and/or spiritual resources and communities
- Read inspirational works
- Pray
- Practice gratitude
- Meditate
- Connect with nature
- Find creative ways to express yourself (i.e., drawing, painting, writing, etc.)

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## ■ Remember to:

- Recognize signs of stress and look after yourself
- Identify what you can and cannot change
- Keep expectations realistic
- Make deliberate plans to care for yourself
- Accept your limitations
- Allow others to give to you
- Find a reason to smile or laugh every day

## Checklist for Resilience: Ask Yourself These Questions

- What are my strengths?
- What has helped me endure previous difficult times?
- What healthy things can I do to soothe myself when I'm faced with uncertainty?
- Is there something I can do to influence what will happen next? If so, what?
- Who is there to offer support?
- How can I ask for what I need?

## Resilience and Acceptance: Riding the Waves

When you feel a wave of grief or anger or pain, often the impulse is to avoid or fight it, believing you can avoid or fight the surf. The advice often given by experienced surfers is that when the surf is strong dive into the wave. This can allow one to safely resurface without being tossed about by the full force of the wave. As you become more adept at dealing with the waves (more resilient), you'll eventually be able to surf on top of them, and thoroughly enjoy the ride.

Federal Occupational Health's (FOH) Employee Assistance (EAP) and WorkLife Program is available 24/7 to provide support to federal employees. Professionally trained counselors can help minimize the impact of a stressful or disturbing event and help promote resilience. The program provides counseling, problem solving, coaching, and support to assist employees and their family members with a wide range of issues or concerns. Contact us today to learn more.

WE CARE, JUST CALL

**FEDERAL OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH**

Employee Assistance Program

**1-800-222-0364** | (TTY: 1-888-262-7848)

[FOH4YOU.COM](http://FOH4YOU.COM)