



Factsheet: Helping the elderly recover from the emotional aftermath of a disaster

Studies show that it often takes older adults longer to recover from a catastrophic event. Health problems, fixed incomes and lack of awareness about disaster aid are all contributing factors. The elderly are a preferred target of fraudulent contractors. During the aftermath of a disaster, it's important to be supportive of older family members and become aware of some of their special needs and vulnerabilities.

Common reactions that older adults may experience include:

- Confusion and disorientation
- Concealing or not wanting to know the full extent of damage
- Fear of losing independence or being sent to a nursing home
- Withdrawal and isolation
- Apathy or believing that they are too old to start over again
- Irritability, anger or suspicion
- Grief over losses from the past

Without proper help, older adults can decline rapidly following a disaster. Pay attention to changes that may indicate an older family member needs some extra help, such as:

- Increased memory loss
- Making poor decisions
- Being easily distracted
- Declining health
- Neglecting medical needs
- New physical symptoms that may be related to stress
- Decreased mobility
- Driving poorly
- Sleep disturbances or nightmares
- Increased vulnerability

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During the hectic period of recovery, older family members can be unintentionally overlooked. Be mindful of their special needs and make time to offer emotional support and practical help:

- Visit and phone your elderly loved-ones regularly.
- Listen to their concerns.
- Help them maintain daily routines as much as possible.
- Offer to provide transportation.
- Help them deal with insurance companies.
- Find out about disaster recovery aid they may qualify for.
- Help them fill out the paperwork and keep appointments.
- Be honest with them; if necessary, suggest alternatives to rebuilding.
- Connect them to social services for senior citizens.
- Help them stay involved with their social and faith communities.
- Encourage them to report fraud or abuse to authorities.

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