



# Navigating Trauma After a Natural Disaster

## Facilitator's Guide

### TRAUMA

Trauma is your body's response when you experience an event that is life-threatening or emotionally hurtful. When you experience trauma, it can leave lasting effects on your mental and physical well-being. It could produce warning signs of physical or mental changes that you might not immediately recognize. A simple way to think about trauma is to consider the most stress you can handle in response to an uncontrollable event. In many cases, the event disrupts your ability to cope because of the significant loss of relationships and things necessary to meet your physical and emotional needs.

### SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM (FIGHT-FLIGHT-FREEZE)

Prepare community members to recognize, cope, and respond to trauma after a natural disaster.

**FACILITATOR NOTE:** This lesson fits in the preparedness and response phases of disaster management. In addition to information in this lesson, find more information about how to prepare for a natural disaster and keep your family and community safe after a natural disaster in the "In the Face of Disaster" toolkit which is available through Family and Consumer Sciences Extension.

### OBJECTIVES:

- Understanding trauma and its effect on the body
- Recognizing signs of trauma
- Coping with trauma

### RESOURCES FOR LEADERS

- Facilitator's Guide
- PowerPoint Presentation

### RESOURCES FOR PARTICIPANTS

- Trauma Facts Sheets
- Activity #1: Group discussion
- Activity #2: Survival Story
  - o **Note:** Leaders can use vignette one or two based on their audience.

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## **MATERIALS NEEDED**

- Computer screen or projector
- Copies of participant handouts
- Pens, crayons, and paper
- Flip chart or dry erase board with markers

## **ESTIMATED TIME**

This lesson is designed to take between 45 and 60 minutes to complete. You may shorten or lengthen the lesson by adjusting the discussion time as needed.

## **PROGRAM PREPARATION**

- Thoroughly review the publication, presentation, and facilitator's guide to familiarize yourself with the lesson and content.
- Prepare copies of participant handouts and resources.
- Obtain computer, projector, and PowerPoint visual resources.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Slide 1 – Title Slide**

Share the rationale and goal stated on page one of this guide.

### **Slide 2 – Lesson Objectives**

Review the lesson objectives.

### **Slide 3 – Difficult Content Warning**

- Share with participants that talking about trauma and corresponding events may bring up painful feelings and memories.
- Advise participants that it is OK to feel upset or uncomfortable.
- Tell participants that if they need to step away to care for themselves, then to do so at any time.

## **OBJECTIVE 1**

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*Understanding trauma and its effect on the body*

### **Slide 4 – Defining Trauma**

Trauma is our response to a physically life-threatening and/or emotionally hurtful event that is usually uncontrollable, such as a natural disaster. We can think of trauma as the largest amount of stress, but the event makes it difficult to cope because of the significant loss of relationships or things necessary to meet our basic needs.

People and communities are different and not everyone who survives a natural disaster experiences trauma. In many cases, the more devastation, and fewer social and physical resources, the more likely a person and community is to experience trauma.

### **Slide 5 – How Does Trauma Affect the Body?**

When we experience trauma because of an uncontrollable event, it activates our survival system, often called our fight-flight-freeze response. Once the survival system is activated, it remains active until we do something to calm it down.

**Sympathetic Nervous System (fight-flight-freeze):** The sympathetic nervous system involves part of our brain and spinal cord. We can think of it as our **survival system**. The **survival system** is responsible for our survival against things considered threatening. When activated, the survival system triggers a fight, flight, or freeze response in our body. A way to think about how the survival system functions is to consider the last time you were scared by something. During that time, you either jumped, ran, or stood still.

Review the effects of trauma on the body from the slide.

## OBJECTIVE 2

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*Recognizing signs of trauma*

### Slide 6 – Immediate vs. Long-term Signs of Trauma

Share the immediate signs of trauma listed on the slides. Point out that the immediate signs usually occur immediately after and within three months of the event.

Share the long-term signs of trauma listed on the slides. Point out that the long-term signs usually occur more than three months after the event and that people may experience these signs years afterward.

Activity #1 (5-7 minutes)

Materials: Crayons, markers, and paper.

Ask participants to consider the differences between immediate and long-term signs of trauma. Instruct participants to use different colored crayons or markers to describe the different feelings associated with immediate versus long-term signs of trauma. After the time allotted, ask one table to report the differences they noted and talk about their colors.

## OBJECTIVE 3

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*Coping with trauma*

### Slide 7 – Prioritize Basic Needs

Share: Prioritizing basic needs is important to maintaining safety, health, and resilience and to restoring a sense of normalcy. Basic needs are just that, the very basic things we need to survive and include food, water, safety, shelter, and clothing.

**Basic Needs:** Basic needs are the materials and resources needed to survive. Basic needs also include relationships to help us cope with our problems and obtain materials and resources to survive. In the image, you can see how our needs should be prioritized with basic needs serving as the foundation for our life.

Review the basic needs list from the slide.

### Slide 8 – Caring for Yourself and Others

Share: Caring is a concept that we may overlook when experiencing trauma that results from a natural disaster. However, caring for yourself and others is imperative to minimizing the effects of trauma and maximizing our ability to recover from the disaster.

Review the tips to care for yourself and others on the slide.

## Slide 9 – Restoring Routine

*Share:* Last, but certainly not least, is restoring your routine after a natural disaster. It is important to restore a routine because it helps deactivate the survival system and minimize the long-term effects of trauma. You can also restore your routine while meeting your basic needs like eating at the same time each day or with the same person.

Review the restore your routine tips.

*Ask* participants to share a routine that might help them recover.

## Slide 10 – Helping Others

*Share:* Helping others models the activities that you would use to cope with trauma with a few additions.

Review the four tips to helping others from the slide.

*Share:* People experiencing trauma after a natural disaster may have difficulty thinking and making decisions. They may be emotionally overwhelmed. Acting calm, showing compassion, and prioritizing basic needs are important to help minimize the effects of trauma and shut down the survival system. During the short-term and long-term periods after the disaster, we should look for signs of trauma in others while providing emotional and physical support.

It is also important to give information and not advice. Advice does not give the survivor any advantage but only minimizes their ability to recover. Think of it this way, advice is not clean, dry clothes, fresh water, or comforting. Advice will not restore the things or people that were lost. Instead, give information.

Information should be simple and tangible and provide for emotional and physical needs. Examples of simple information can be a phone number to call for support, the location of a shelter, or where to obtain food and water.

Lastly, **DO NOT** make promises such as, “We’ll find everyone,” “We will rebuild your house,” or “You will get all the help you need.”

*Activity #2* (7-10 minutes) Survival Story

*Materials:* Crayons, markers, and paper.

*Share:* The story is designed to get us thinking about how we can apply the knowledge and skills discussed in today’s lesson. Please take a few minutes to read the story and consider the questions at the bottom of it. Then, talk about your answers at the table.

Consider using some different colored markers or crayons to describe the trauma, the feelings, needs, and resource that the survivors may need.

## Slide 11 – Call or Text 988

*Share:* After a natural disaster, it is important to connect people who experience trauma with a professional.

Connecting with professionals can include working with first responders or primary care providers; however, it’s important to connect persons with mental health professionals. In Kentucky, you can call or text 988 to connect with a crisis counselor and mental health professional.

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