If you are concerned about a loved one or co-worker who has been affected by a natural disaster, there are some things you can do to help them cope.

**When Friends and Co-Workers Experience Disaster**

When someone you know has been affected by a natural disaster or tragedy, it may be very difficult to know what to do or what to expect. Read the following guidelines about individuals coping with disaster from the Center for Mental Health Services.

- No one who sees a disaster is untouched by it.
- It is normal to feel anxious.
- Profound sadness, grief, and anger are normal reactions to an abnormal event.
- Acknowledging feelings helps a person recover.
- Focusing on strengths and abilities will help an individual heal.
- Accepting help from community programs and resources is healthy.
- Each person has different needs and different ways of coping.

**Talking With Co-Workers and Friends**

In addition to providing shelter and physical help for your friends and co-workers, it is important that you are available to listen and support. By sharing feelings and encouraging discussion, you are helping your friend or co-worker understand his feelings, learn to express them, and find ways to cope.

Because it may be difficult for individuals to think about everything that needs to be done at this time, check-in with your friend or co-worker regularly and offer to help. Give concrete examples of what you can do. Here are just a few examples:

- Provide a meal on a specific day
- Help complete paperwork for insurance forms or make phone calls
- Replace lost or destroyed items
- Shelter pets until the house is in order or until there is a more stable environment
- Clean the house
- Babysit their kids for an afternoon
Individuals who are coping with severe stress respond better to direct offers of help. When a co-worker returns to work, talk with your manager about how you may be able to help adjust the workload and ease back into the schedule. It may take some time for him to return to his normal routine, especially if he is still sorting through relocation challenges or insurance claims.

Talk to your manager about other ways that your workplace can provide support and assistance. You may offer to help make phone calls or complete forms during your breaks.

**When to Seek Help**
Sometimes the trauma of the disaster may be more than a person can handle alone. According to the Center for Mental Health Services, the behaviors listed below are signs that the individual needs additional assistance coping with the disaster.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulty communicating thoughts</th>
<th>Disorientation or confusion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty sleeping</td>
<td>Difficulty concentrating</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difficulty maintaining balance</td>
<td>Reluctance to leave home</td>
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<tr>
<td>Easily frustrated</td>
<td>Depression, sadness</td>
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<td>Increased use of drugs/alcohol</td>
<td>Feelings of hopelessness</td>
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<td>Limited attention span</td>
<td>Mood-swings</td>
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<td>Poor work performance</td>
<td>Crying easily</td>
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<td>Headaches/stomach problems</td>
<td>Overwhelming guilt and self-doubt</td>
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<td>Tunnel vision/muffled hearing</td>
<td>Fear of crowds, strangers, or being alone</td>
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<td>Colds or flu-like symptoms</td>
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When talking with your friend who exhibits severe signs of stress, consider broaching the subject with the following suggestions from the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine:

- Ask to speak to the person privately.
- Ask, "Are you having some difficulties? Do you want to talk about it?"
- Suggest the individual contact a counselor or his company's EAP professional.
- Encourage your friend to deal with the stress in healthy ways. Share with your friend these suggestions about easing stress from the Center for Mental Health Services. Suggest that your friend:
  - Talk about his feelings, such as anger and sorrow even though they may be difficult.
  - Not hold himself responsible for events out of his control.
  - Promote physical and emotional health by staying active in daily life patterns and making necessary adjustments.
  - Maintain normal routines as much as possible.
  - Spend time with family and friends.
  - Participate in memorials, rituals, and use symbols as a way to express feelings.
• Use existing support groups of family, friends, and church.

You shouldn't hesitate to contact a professional or family member if you believe the individual needs immediate help or attention.

Conclusion –
Experiencing a disaster can bring up a mixture of feelings and emotions. If a friend or co-worker has been directly affected, you can support him by listening to his fears and anxieties and helping with everyday tasks that might seem overwhelming. While all individuals cope with loss and tragedy differently, watch for signs that this person may need more assistance.

The information about educational or therapeutic approaches is provided for educational purposes only. Certain treatments may or may not be covered through your benefit plan. Coverage typically depends on your plan specifications and relevant guidelines maintained in relation to your benefit plan.

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