

# Making use of your TELUS Health EAP program when affected by natural disasters



Regrettably, we live in times of increasing turbulence ... every day around the world there are events that have significant human and environmental impact. Natural disasters often impact people across states. And people are sometimes surprised at how much a major event or trauma can affect us in our everyday life, even when we have not been directly impacted.

## Common reactions and emotions in adults affected by natural disasters:

- Anger over situations that can't be changed or influenced.
- Increased and / or ongoing anxiety or stress.
- Feeling alone or homesick – particularly for those not close by to family and friends.
- Concern for family or friends living away from them – whether in an area of direct concern or not.
- Needing to find a focus for feelings of anger.
- Emotional turbulence including fear, anxiety, helplessness and sadness.
- An awakening of memories or losses experienced at an earlier time.
- Experiencing changes to normal patterns including disturbance to eating and sleeping.
- Feeling drained, fatigued and exhausted.

## Looking after the needs of children and adolescents:

- Media images and reporting are widespread – it is difficult to escape the stories and images.
- Television and online footage often depict graphic images that may be distressing to children.
- Children may not understand the situation itself but will be aware of the impact on others.
- Fear (sometimes out of proportion) for friends and family not living nearby.
- In some situations, they may be exposed to peer pressure to conform to the views of others.
- There will be an increased need for routine and certainty.
- Encourage discussion – ask what the child understands.

## Possible reactions of employees at work:

- Concentration and interest may dissipate.
- Individual and / or team performance may be lowered.
- Difficulty, or reduced interest, in taking on new tasks or projects.

- Emotional distress – this may continue for some time following an incident.
- Increased focus on doing “what needs to be done” and going home to family as soon as possible.
- Risk taking behaviour may develop and employees may become more demanding.
- There may be a preoccupation with personal issues and problems.
- Employees may be more inwardly focused, and a pessimistic world view may emerge.

## How organisations can help employees

- Allow people to talk about the situation – allow some time to be spent discussing recent events.
- Recognise that employees may feel distracted and concerned.
- Ensure you have ongoing communication with all staff and ask how they are.
- If there is any concern about an employee, don't assume they are ok – ask them.
- Listen to individual stories and concerns but be cautious on giving too much advice.
- Understand that people are all different and may react in very different ways.
- Try to maintain established routines and processes and hold off introducing new systems if possible.

## How TELUS Health EAP can help:

- Providing an environment where individuals can express and discuss their feelings and concerns.
- Providing strategies to manage anxiety, stress and other reactions.
- Assisting individuals to normalise their feelings.
- Providing strategies on how best to assist children and adolescents.
- Offering a confidential, non-judgemental and supportive environment for discussion.
- Manager Hotline offers coaching and support for managers / supervisors to assist them with individuals and teams.