

# 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 also 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 is in need of 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

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.