

When a Disaster Happens at Home: A Resource for International Students

When an unexpected event happens in your home country/community, it can be very challenging. This document can help you be aware of possible reactions you may have and how to access resources.

Common Reactions: Each of us is unique and will experience things differently. Not everyone will experience all of these reactions, and some may experience things that aren't listed here. However, common reactions include:

Physical Reactions

fatigue
changes in sleep patterns
changes in eating patterns
changes in other activities
digestion problems or stomachaches
headaches or dizziness
physical tension, shakiness or weakness

Cognitive Reactions

difficulty concentrating
difficulty making decisions
preoccupation with the event/news
memory problems
a sense that things aren't real
struggling with decision to stay here or go home
unsure what to believe in the news

Emotional Reactions

helplessness or meaninglessness
feeling numb or very sensitive
fear, panic, feeling unsafe
feeling sad, crying
feeling guilt or anger
isolation from other people
feeling that your thoughts or emotions are out of control
worry about family
worry about financial stability
feeling more disconnected from American students
"survivor's guilt," struggling with being safe

See reverse side for coping strategies

Tips for coping

Focus on basics: get plenty of rest, remember to eat well and drink water throughout the day. Stop or reduce your use of alcohol/drugs.

Try to get some exercise, especially within first 24 hours .

Try to maintain your normal routine; continue to attend your classes. While you continue your routine, give yourself permission to function closer to 50% capacity rather than expecting 100%, especially in the first few days.

Inform your professors or TAs when you're going through a challenging time.

Try to contact family and friends in your home country. Expect that your family/friends back home may "sound different" than usual.

Limit how much news you watch or read; for example, limit it to 15 minutes every 4 hours. Don't automatically believe everything you hear in the news.

If you're worried about money, investigate whether crisis funding might be available; for example, the Institute for International Education may have resources. The UW Financial Aid office may also be helpful.

Don't ignore signs that you might need help: illnesses, headaches, emotional symptoms not getting better with time.

Try breathing exercises or other relaxation techniques.

Consider keeping a journal; writing about your thoughts and feelings can help.

If you're trying to decide whether to return home, ask yourself: "What will I realistically be able to do to help if I go home?" and "Would the potential safety risk of travelling home be bigger than my ability to help?"

Explore ways you can help from Seattle, such as volunteering to package/ship food items.

Consult your ISS advisor if you are having problems, or if you feel you must leave the country.

Talk with other students who are going through the same thing you're going through.

Help organize a time to get together with other students from your home country so you can talk and support one another, consider inviting a guest speaker from the Counseling Center to help people understand their reactions.

Consider coming to the Counseling Center for individual consultation about your reactions.

Counseling Center/Schmitz Hall 401/206-543-1240
<http://counseling.uw.edu/>

This document compiled from materials created by the American University Counseling Center and by the Southwest Ohio Critical Incident Stress Management Team, Inc.