

## HUMAN EMOTIONS IN AN EMERGENCY

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Predicting exactly how one would face an emergency situation is impossible, since each person is unique. However, some general patterns of emotional behavior apply. Familiarity with these patterns and knowledge of what to expect from yourself and others in a crisis will better prepare you for any emergency situation.

### WHAT IS AN EMERGENCY?

An emergency may be defined as any unexpected situation which interrupts regular routine, is beyond normal control and requires definite action to counteract its effects.

In an emergency situation, individuals are subjected to such extreme stress that they may have difficulty controlling their emotional reactions. Those prepared to recognize the nature of their feelings can better understand these emotions and themselves.

### UNDERSTANDING YOUR EMOTIONS

Your own emotional stability is rooted in your self confidence to meet any emergency situation. This stability can help you face a crisis constructively, apply your past experience in controlling your emotions and help those around you.

However, in times of crisis it sometimes is possible even for those with a relatively stable emotional level to become so overwhelmed by events they are unable to regain control of their emotions. They may even require help from someone else.

Fear, anger or other similar emotional states can increase blood pressure, speed respiration and rate of heartbeat and give a feeling of added strength and aggressiveness. Fear can, in fact, often be useful and work for you. Fear sets the stage for maximum action. It spurs you to do things otherwise impossible. On the other hand, when extremely fearful, many stop thinking clearly. Planning and rehearsing for emergency situations with clear minds will help you to act automatically even under extreme stress.

### UNDERSTAND YOUR FAMILY'S EMOTIONS

As you strive to meet the stresses of everyday life, you constantly are building a steadier emotional framework that will help you in times of crisis. Knowledge of the nature of the emergencies you may face builds confidence in your ability to cope with them.

You can help your children handle many situations with less emotional strain. Parents who remain relatively free from fear and are not overwhelmed when faced with emergencies better prepare their children to muster the courage required.

Your children will be better prepared if able to act out anticipated procedures in advance. Do not place too much emphasis on these practice drills, however. Treat them as a normal occurrence. Talk with your children about what may happen, making the unknown more familiar and easier to face. Fear of the unknown may be increased when attempts are made to keep the truth from children. Informed children are more likely to be self-confident and display a higher degree of emotional security. This is true for all ages, but especially for youngsters.

When your family enters a new or strange situation, take along a familiar object for your child's reassurance. A toy or a blanket may do the trick, giving your child a sense of security. Reading a favorite book will help keep his attention from the emergency.

Elderly people tend to be more confused in an emergency situation than the young or middle-aged. Calm, realistic assurance and quiet supervision go far toward helping them regain composure.

### DEGREES OF EMOTIONAL REACTION

The following degrees of emotional reaction may be encountered during an emergency situation. These need to be alleviated in ways helpful to those affected.

1. Some people temporarily experience normal reactions such as nausea, sweating and muscular

weakness. Most regain some control of their emotions if given a little time. A few words of sympathy and encouragement are usually all that is necessary.

2. Others may feel numbed by the unexpected occurrence. They may welcome your taking a genuine interest in them. As each recovers in turn, he can be assigned a routine task to help him regain his confidence.

3. An individual may panic, needing restraint to keep his panic from spreading. If your gentle firmness and kindness do not succeed, ask others to help you. Restraint should be firm but patient. Extreme measures, such as dousing with cold water or slapping, bring only temporary relief and may cause unrest to others. Avoid using sedatives except as a last resort. Even then, consult a physician, if possible.

4. Overactive people who are not panicky need not be restrained. They want to contribute and are useful, if guided. Compared to panicky people, their attention is easier to get, and their need for physical activity is satisfied by such jobs as rearranging supplies or helping others.

Alleviating tensions following an emergency situation is not simple. However, you can do certain things after an emergency that help lessen the strain on yourself and others.

1. Balance your workload.
2. Do one task at a time.
3. Get away from it all for awhile, if you feel as if you are going around in circles.
4. Talk about the situation, if this will help.
5. Try to accept what you cannot change.

### EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS HELPS

Plan and prepare now for the emotional security of your family. Pointless emotional strain can be avoided by giving some thought to the positive courses of action we can take "now" to make things better "then." Discuss with your family now, in the relaxation and quiet of normalcy, what you would do in an emergency situation, such as a fire, a flood or a tornado.

Remember, you may not have all of your faculties about you in a crisis. What would you do? Where would you go? Where would you turn for help? What could you learn now that might be useful then? Simple beforehand knowledge is often the difference between life and death in a crisis. If you are prepared you may avoid personal tragedy.