



# Toxic Turbulence

By Southeast Health Group

“Ladies and gentlemen, please be seated and buckle your seatbelts. It’s going to be a bumpy ride!”

If you have ever ridden in an airplane, you most likely have encountered some turbulence and heard a similar announcement over the loudspeaker. Perhaps you ignored the warning, and found yourself being knocked against other people’s seats on the way to the bathroom. And when the rough patch of sky was over, you remember the sigh of relief that spread through the plane.

Recent events—hurricanes, wildfires, mass shootings, hate crimes, global uncertainty—have left many of us in a toxic state of turbulence. If you or a family member are feeling unwell, it could

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be a normal reaction to an abnormal number of stressful experiences.

Disaster and conflict bring out the best and worst in human beings. We are hard-wired with a physical stress response that allows us to fight for survival, flee a dangerous situation, and protect the ones we love. Heroes arise from every negative situation, and families and communities often grow closer and



stronger. Children, in particular, can learn skills to make them more resilient.

**Here are a few ways to manage toxic turbulence and teach resilience:**

**Don’t take it personally.** What you are experiencing is most likely no fault of your own. It was not planned to ruin your week and you probably have no control over the outcome.

The thing you CAN control is your response to it. Turn off the television, quit checking social media, and focus on something more positive.

**Talk about feelings.** It’s important to process the emotions of what you are going through with the ones you love and trust. This is especially important if you have children in your care. Unspoken fears and anxieties can turn into nightmares, stomachaches, headaches, and feelings of loneliness. While your instinct might be to withdraw and “tough it out”, it’s healthier to reach out and connect with others to share the load.

**Take care of physical needs.** If you are a first responder, or in any way close to the trauma, remember to eat regular meals, stay hydrated, and try to sleep on your normal schedule.

Hunger, thirst and sleep deprivation will keep you from performing at your best. It will also slow your recovery from the physical and emotional impact of the event.

**Decompress gradually.** Don’t expect yourself to bounce back right after a series of traumatic events. Be kind to yourself if you feel fatigue or sadness. Take walks, call friends, engage in your hobbies. Indulge in a nap or a long soak in the tub. Start a journal or join a support group. Take the time you need to adjust to the new normal.

**Give recognition.** When you enter the “mop up” phase of a crisis, remember to recognize and acknowledge the helpers. TV show host Mr. Rogers said, “I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers — so many caring people in this world.” Expressing our gratitude in large and small ways restores our faith in humanity and gives us hope for the future.

**For more help managing toxic turbulence, call Southeast Health Group at 1-800-511-5446, or visit [www.southeasthealthgroup.org](http://www.southeasthealthgroup.org).**