

Beyond the First Anniversary

This guide has been written by members of Disaster Action, who are survivors and bereaved people from disasters. The disasters we have been affected by include the Zeebrugge ferry sinking, King's Cross underground fire, Lockerbie aircraft bombing, Hillsborough football stadium crush, Marchioness riverboat sinking, Dunblane shootings, Southall and Ladbroke Grove train crashes, the 11th September attacks, the South East Asian Tsunami and the Bali, London 7 July and Sharm El Sheikh bombings and other recent terrorist attacks and transportation disasters.

Our aim is to enable you to understand the possible longer-term effects including ongoing legal processes and other issues that people face after disaster. We also suggest organisations that may be able to help.

The Role of Family Liaison Officers (FLOs)

You may have had support from police family liaison officers and other authorities after the disaster. Their contact may have declined in the months after the disaster, though they may well stay in touch with you through the course of any investigations, events such as anniversaries and other disaster-related procedures. FLOs may be a useful referral point for other sources of information and advice.

Financial Issues

Many of the legal procedures set in motion after a disaster can seem lengthy, bureaucratic and impersonal. Claims for compensation, applications to disaster funds and other financial systems can be complicated and difficult to understand, especially when experienced for the first time. We have sometimes found that talking with others who have experienced the same or other disasters and are facing similar procedures can be helpful. Lawyers may be able to help. Although Disaster Action is unable to provide legal advice, we will be familiar with the issues and can make suggestions about what you can do.

Other Ongoing Legal Procedures

The legal and political aftermath of disasters is such that there may be separate investigations by different agencies and these can take a long time. These can include a public inquiry, inquest, Health and Safety Executive investigation, and civil and criminal cases. Where a disaster affects people from more than one country, investigative procedures can be further complicated by differing international systems and involve agencies such as embassies, consular departments and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The police and other authorities should keep you informed and up-to-date with ongoing developments and procedures. Again, we have found that talking with others who have experienced the same disaster or similar disasters may be able to help. Members of Disaster Action have experience of both UK and international disasters and their legal aftermath.

Continuing Media Interest

In the build-up to the first and subsequent anniversaries, the media are likely to take an interest in those directly affected by a disaster. You can prepare for this by deciding whether or not you might wish to participate in interviews or other media-driven activities. If you have an FLO, they may be able to help by filtering requests. Some people have found it useful to have their own family spokesperson or produce their own short statements/photographs for the media. This will help give

you more control over what goes out.

Some individuals and family/survivor support groups have found that the media can be allies in highlighting ongoing concerns and issues associated with the disaster. It is possible to produce press releases from time to time and it can be useful to keep contacts and build up working relationships with responsible journalists and reporters. At the same time, do bear in mind that you may not have control over the final content, interpretation and context of any communication.

On the Question of ‘Closure’

It is often assumed by others that with the passage of time those who have survived and/or been bereaved by disaster should ‘recover’ in neat phases, return to ‘normal’ and be able to put ‘closure’ on their experience. Such assumptions and comments often feel inappropriate and unhelpful to those with first-hand experience of disaster, reflecting the views and expectations of others rather than how it really feels.

Family and Survivor Support Groups

Many people affected by previous disasters have talked about finding a different or ‘new’ normality and have found that in the longer term relatively few people can understand or share their experience. Some get greater understanding and support through family or survivor support groups.

Even if being part of a group is not for you, long-lasting friendships can develop between people who have gone through a similar experience of disaster; such friendships can offer mutual support based on a special understanding.

When Disaster Strikes

There are a number of other leaflets in this series that you may find relevant to your longer-term experience, particularly the following:

- Interviews about Disaster Experience: Personal Reflections and Guidelines for Interviewers
- Legal Representation after a Disaster
- Setting up Family and Survivor Support Groups
- Setting up an E-forum Discussion Group
- Reflections on Personal Experience of Disaster
- Support Groups and Caring Organisations

Some people find that as well as self-help groups, longer-term counselling or therapy may help. It is not abnormal or unusual to have flashbacks or need specialist support from time to time over several years.

Although the direct experience of disaster is universally traumatic, the normal emotional and physical reactions usually diminish over time. (This is not to minimise the life-long impact of the death of a family member or close friend in a disaster, but to suggest that there may be ways to help you deal with the loss.) If these reactions persist or even intensify, it may be appropriate to refer to specialist help. Details of specialist support services follow.

Disaster Action would like to thank all those who contributed to the writing of this leaflet.

Further Information

Support Groups and Caring Organisations

Assist Trauma Care

Offer support and self-help in surviving trauma.

Helpline 01788 560 800
www.assisttraumacare.org.uk/contact

Compassionate Friends

Organisation of bereaved parents offering shared experience (with local groups throughout the country) and series of leaflets.

National UK helpline 0845 123 2304
www.compassionatefriends.org.uk

Cruse - Bereavement Care

Offers counselling, advice and the chance to meet other bereaved people throughout the UK through local groups.

Helpline 0844 477 9400
www.cruse.org.uk

Disaster Action

Disaster Action
www.disasteraction.org.uk

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE)

NICE publishes guidelines for the treatment of disorders and conditions on the NHS. One of these guidelines relates to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). You can access information on the PTSD guideline using the link <http://www.nice.org.uk/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd-cg26/guidance>

Samaritans

Provides confidential, non-judgemental emotional support 24 hours a day for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair. National helpline: 08457 909090.

Traumatic Stress Clinic

Specialists in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Provide assessment and therapy for those who have been affected by traumatic events such as disasters.

Telephone: 0207 530 3666 [http://www.traumatic-stress-clinic/](http://www.traumatic-stress-clinic.com/services/services/traumatic-stress-clinic/)

UK Psychological Trauma Society

The UKPTS is a multidisciplinary society which aims to promote evidence-based care for those who suffer traumatic stress related mental health and foster a greater understanding of the effects of traumatic events. Their website provides access to a selection of material for the general public and for health professionals about post-traumatic stress reactions and includes information about trauma [services across the UK](http://www.ukpts.org.uk)

Victim Support

Offers practical help and advice and emotional support to victims of crime and their families. Support
<http://08453030900support.org.uk>

Useful Contacts

Further Information