

Coping with the emotional effects of flooding in Cumbria



Worried about mental wellbeing after the floods? You're not alone. We're here to help.

Cumbria is known for its strong community spirit and we can all be proud of the way we've come together and helped each other through the recent floods. Now that we're getting to grips with the practical problems that are still affecting so many of us, we may be experiencing challenging thoughts and feelings.

This leaflet explains how events such as the recent floods can affect us emotionally and psychologically. It gives some advice on what to do and where to get help if you're concerned about your own or someone else.

In the first days and weeks

Many people will be experiencing strong reactions following the recent floods across our county. Everyone is unique and will react differently, but typical reactions to such an extreme event can include:

- Shock
- Disbelief
- Stress
- Nervousness, fear or anxiety
- Difficulty sleeping

- Worry
- Low mood
- Irritability
- Anger

These feelings are completely normal reactions.

For some people who have been flooded previously, these reactions may be compounded and might lead to feelings of hopelessness or helplessness.

People who have been exposed to highly threatening situations can also experience flashbacks or nightmares. This is normal in the days and weeks following an extreme event.

We are all individuals and there is no right or wrong way to be coping or feeling.

We all have different ways of responding and circumstances can vary greatly, from those with strong extended networks to those who are more isolated or do not have friends and family in the area.



In the following weeks and months

For most of us, especially if we have never experienced problems with anxiety or low mood before, these psychological effects will gradually disappear over time and with support from the local community.

A period of 'watchful waiting' is advised, which means just keeping an eye on yourself and others and checking out how things are going, before assuming that any reactions won't go away on their own with time.

Research and local experience tells us a small number of people go on to experience problems that require additional help, including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and chronic worry.

What to do and where to get help if you're concerned about your own or someone else's mental wellbeing

There are things that can help you your family, and our community to recover:

- DO take time to sleep, rest, think, and be with those important to you

- DO try to keep your life as normal as possible
- DO understand that memories and feelings may stay with you for some time to come – this is your mind's way of trying to make sense of it all, to feel in control of it, even if you couldn't control it
- DO say what you need clearly and honestly to family, friends and others
- DO avoid excessive alcohol and drugs. They are often used as a way of coping but they tend to block the feelings that will emerge in the end. Alcohol and drugs often lead to more problems than they solve
- DO let children talk about their emotions and express themselves in games / drawing
- DON'T bottle feelings up. Express your emotions and let others share in your worries
- DON'T take on too much
- DON'T make any major life changes
- DON'T avoid talking about what's happened

- DON'T let your embarrassment stop you giving others the chance to talk.

You know yourself and the people you love best, so you are best placed to decide what works for you.

How to access local health services

If you feel that your reactions to the floods have got stuck or that you're feeling more low or anxious than you might expect, help is available.

Contact your GP or Cumbria health On Call out-of-hours on 111 (free to call)

Call **First Step** on 0300 123 9122 ((local rate phone call) Mon - Fri 8.30am 5.30pm

www.firststepcumbria.nhs.uk

First Step receives over 12,000 referrals a year. Most people will have friends or family that have accessed First Step in the past. If you are struggling with low mood or some form of anxiety, **seeking help is sensible and is not a sign of weakness.**

What to do and where to get help if you're concerned about suicide

For those of us already experiencing life difficulties or problems before the floods, the additional stress can be '*the straw that breaks the camel's back*'.

Some of us may feel as though there's no way out, especially if we've previously experienced depression and have felt suicidal in the past. This can trigger suicidal thoughts.

Talking openly, honestly and with respect, and listening without making judgements, can make all the difference.

Ask it won't harm. Listen it might help. Talking about suicide with someone does not increase the risk of suicidal behaviour.

If you are concerned about someone and they are in immediate danger and at high risk of suicide - **call 999**

Other places to get support and help

Samaritans – talk to a trained volunteer about whatever's getting to you. You don't have to be suicidal.

Call 116 123 (24 hours a day)

www.samaritans.org

ChildLine – helpline for children and young people up to 19 years, no problem is too big or too small

Call 0800 1111 (24 hours a day)

www.childline.org

Silver Line - helpline for older people offering information, friendship and advice

Call 0800 470 8090 (24 hours a day)

www.thesilverline.org.uk

Papyrus - offering support and advice to young people with thoughts of young suicide

Call their HOPELine 0800 068 41 41

www.papyrus-uk.org

National Mind Infoline

Call 0300 123 3393 or text 86463

www.mind.org.uk

CRUSE Bereavement Care – offers support after the death of someone close

Call 0844 477 9400

www.cruse.org.uk

Disaster Action - website provides resources and information for the bereaved and survivors of major disasters

www.disasteraction.org.uk

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide

John 07896 703757

Paul 07572 975721

hello@sobs-cumbria.org.uk

www.sobs-cumbria.org.uk/

Victim Support - helping people cope with the effects of crime

0845 3030900

www.victimsupport.org.uk