**Mental Health support for flood affected individuals and communities**

Experiencing a flood can be frightening, traumatic, and cause major disruption to your daily activities and the lives of your family. If you aren’t directly affected by the flood, but your family members are, you are likely to experience anxiety and fear for them too. Research shows that after experiencing a flood people can have a variety of reaction, all of which are normal.

Initially after a flood you are likely to be caught up in practical tasks due to the disruption of:

• GP services and accessing necessary healthcare services and medication

• Food and drinking water access

• Regular household activities or having to move home and learn to live in a new area

• School facilities

• Home and personal belongings that may be damaged

People living through previous floods have commented that life can be disrupted by flooding, even if you do not have floodwater in your home, for example losing utility supply or health and social care services, can be just as stressful as the house being flooded. Plus events that occur as a result of a flood can also be stressful – common sources of stress include concerns about your own health or the health of others, concerns for the welfare of pets, added financial worries, repairing your home, insurance process and the loss of sentimental items. The effects of flooding are far reaching. Don’t assume that you haven’t been affected enough to be having a significant emotional reaction.

It is normal to experience tiredness, difficulty sleeping, and anxiety in these circumstances. It’s important not to underestimate the stress and strain of being affected so take the time to consider your and your loved ones’ mental health and wellbeing.

**Looking after yourself in the short term**

With all the disruption and stress it is easy to get caught up live life day to day, dealing with one difficult, frustrating or frightening issue after another. You are running on adrenalin – the natural body stress chemical that ‘kicks in’ to help us cope in difficult situations. But this makes it very easy to overlook how you may be personally feeling. Try to take a point in the day to be aware of your– and your family members’- physical and mental health.

When you last eat?...properly. When did you last sit and eat as a family? Are you getting enough sleep? Be mindful of your mood. Are you feeling hopeless or helpless? Are you increasingly irritable? Do you have a sense of dread? Is your heart racing? These are all normal reactions to an abnormal situation, but you don’t have to put up with them.

If you’re having any of these feelings persistently speak to your GP, or the NHS Talking Therapies Service and tell them about your symptoms, but also tell them you have been affected by flooding so they have the full picture of what you’re going through.

If you are feeling this way, also consider getting in touch with a local community support group, or neighbours, family and talk it through to help you cope and recover. Experience show that it will not just be you feeling this way. In fact the majority of people around you (including the ones you think are “dealing better with this” than you) may actually be feeling just like you.

**Ongoing coping after a flood**

There’s a lot to organise and you may feel like you can only cope with just one thing at a time. That’s fine. Chunk things up and just tackle the 3 most important things that day. It can help to start repair efforts as soon as you feel ready to remove flood water and reduce lasting damage where possible but do not overdo it when cleaning up.

Start clean-up efforts within your home when you feel ready, and don’t overdo it during the clean-up and recovery process.

You might also find it hard to retain information and things that you are told. Keep a pad and pen handy to write things down and remember to share information with a family member or friend.

Expect to feel stressed and find everyday things that you can usually deal with become hard to cope with. Imagine your ability to cope as a pot filled with sand. Right now, that pot is full anymore sand (stress) – even of you usually coped with it – overfills the pot. Be kind to yourself and spend time with family or others in the community. You may need to live from day-to-day and accept that future planning isn’t possible right now. Plan day to day and acknowledge your achievements. Get through the now of what’s going on.

If you have children, it can be really difficult to focus on day-to-day activities and their needs. Children can hear and see the stress that parents are under and they may become quieter and withdrawn. But they’re quietly listening in to the situation. Please see leaflet on Supporting Children after a Flood

**Mental and Physical Wellbeing**

Coping after a flood means taking the time to consider your mental health and wellbeing and making time for yourself.

Don’t force yourself to go over the events or pressure others to talk about their concerns. Research shows it is better to spend as much time as possible with others, and rather than go over the event specifically, talk about and share how you are feeling. Your friends and family are there to support you and making the time to talk to and support each other to get better is important.

Exercise can help you feel better: attempt something manageable such as walking. Walking can also help you to think and get things in perspective. So if it is possible go for regular walks. Walking with others is also a great way to check in with others. Remember: anxiety, stress, tiredness and difficulty sleeping are normal in these circumstances. So pace yourself.

Connecting with your local community is an important source of practical and psychological support. You may be able to access support groups, local recovery hubs and community centres in your area. Keep an eye out for these on Social Media and other media.

**Looking after yourself and others in the long term**

Initially after the flood it is normal to seek help and support from friends and family. And the many people will need no more than that. However, you should seek professional support if your distress lasts for more than 2 weeks without change

NHS Better Health also has advice on how to deal with stress or anxiety as well as information about where you can access further support.

If you think that you may require more support with your mental health. You can be referred of self-refer to the LLR local NHS Therapies Service. This service is a free and completely confidential service that provides psychological support on a one to one or group basis for residents of LLR aged 16 and over.

Need support? – Click here: [NHS Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Talking Therapies (vitahealthgroup.co.uk)](https://www.vitahealthgroup.co.uk/nhs-services/nhs-mental-health/leicester-leicestershire-rutland/)

In addition helplines, such as Samaritans, can provide support to anyone in emotional distress or struggling to cope. The Samaritans free helpline is available 24 hours a day on 116123.