

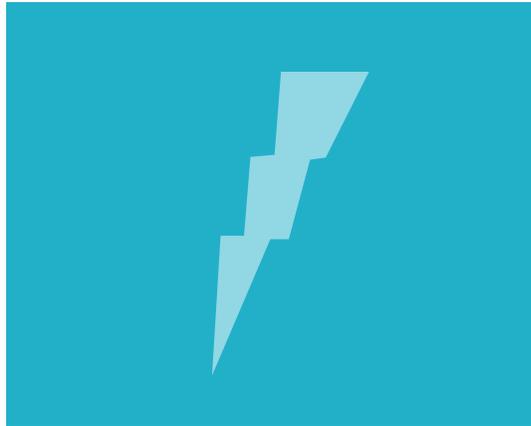


when it's too much
TOOLKIT

This toolkit has been modified slightly from its original version with permissions. See authors on page 7.

it's too much

- Fires, hurricanes, floods
- Shootings & terrorist attacks
- Job & housing transitions
- Illness, divorce, death

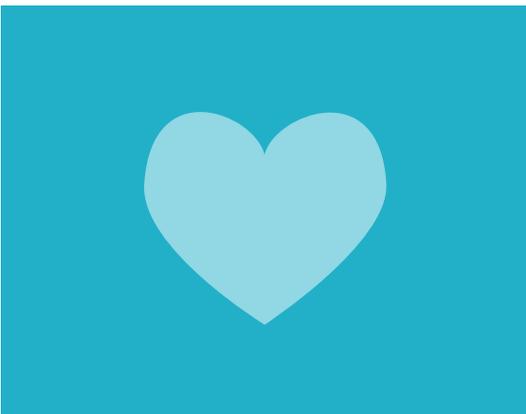


what happened to you?

- You experienced loss or damage
- Friends or family have lost something or are hurting
- You're okay but your community was damaged
- You and your community are okay; you're seeing events from afar

what was your first impulse?

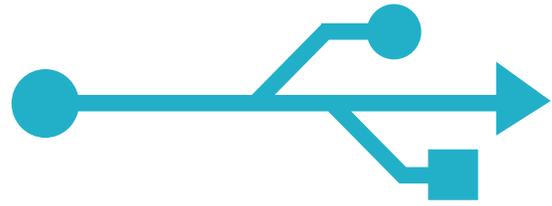
- Get to safety
- Help others
- Get stuff done
- Didn't want to do anything



what do you notice now?

- Numb or emotional: angry, sad, giddy, ...
- Feeling anxious or depressed
- Just have to keep moving and doing
- Physical pain like headaches
- Don't want to do anything
- Can't focus like I used to

it's all in our wiring...



when we're in it

While directly experiencing the event, our lizard brain generates survival energy whose sole purpose is to keep us alive. Our thinking brain takes a back seat. We may run on pure adrenaline looking for a way out or we may feel so overwhelmed by what's happening, we just freeze, unable to move any direction—or somewhere in between.

just after it's over

When we survive the immediate event, at first we are in a state of shock. What just happened? Sudden events are truly disorienting. We may feel frozen, numb, look pale and feel physically cold. We may struggle focusing on even simple tasks.

as time goes on

As the shock wears off, emotions like anger and grief may suddenly surface. You might physically shake as the survival energy discharges organically. For many people the hyper vigilance and survival energy remain, which may lead to feeling fear, anxiety and depression. We can get stuck in survival mode. We look for the slightest smell of smoke as a sign that fire might be around the corner. We track the weather report wondering if more flooding is on the way. We wonder if a stranger is going to hurt us. Part of us doesn't know the original experience is over.

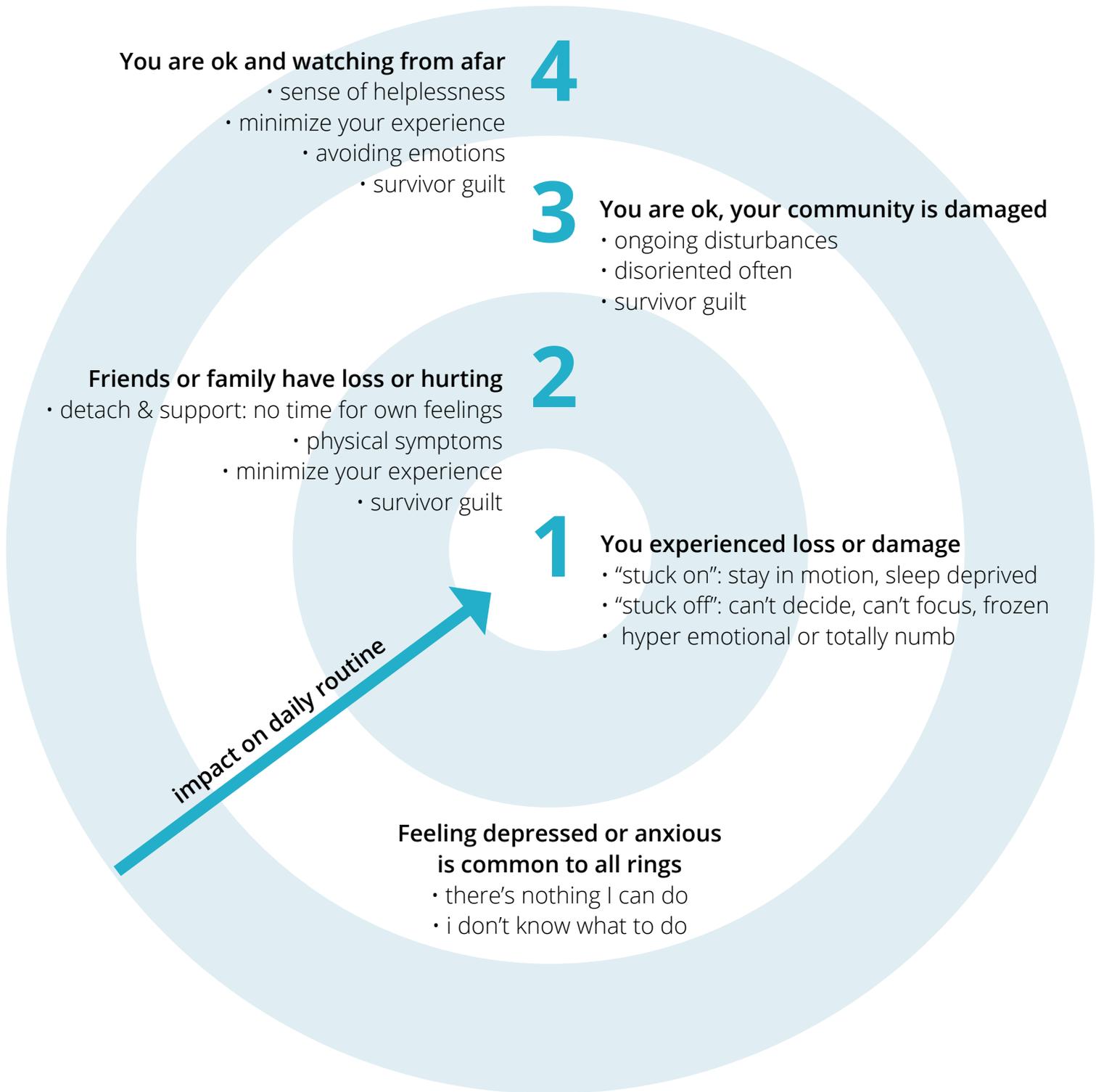
With something like a fire, "over" can have several stages including getting safe from the fire (minutes later), getting the immediate shelter and/or medical help you need (minutes/ hours later), moving into a new home (days later) and moving into your rebuilt home (years later). Each stage is a layer that will have it s own emotions and sensations to process.

in the long term

As time passes and there's nothing immediate to do, long term reality sets in. Natural disasters create sudden, unexpected changes to our immediate environment. Our daily routines are shattered. You and your environment are forever changed. You may feel grief or anger, anxiety or fear. You may notice unsettling feelings and memories from your past arise. You might experience unusual physical symptoms. You may want to find routine as fast as possible, skipping over all those messy feelings. All of this is a normal part of the aftermath of a disaster.

There is no going back. These events insist that we
increase our capacity for the unknown.

where are you?



In order for the effects of whatever is too much to become part of your history rather something that lingers, you must give yourself time and space to feel your emotions and discharge any survival energy that may be lingering. The emotions and discharge will come in waves and can come at inconvenient times and places. Have as much compassion for yourself and others as possible when you notice these experiences. It might look messy. You probably won't have it all together. That's okay. That's how disasters can impact your nervous system. When you invite feeling emotions rather than bracing against them, you support the release of body tension that can otherwise lead to physical symptoms later on.

it's about self care.

tools for stress relief



Orient to your surroundings - Pause for a moment and let your eyes go where they want to and let them land on something pleasing. Linger there and notice what happens in your body. Notice what changes. This is especially important if you now live in new surroundings.

Connect with yourself - Ask yourself if you feel safe in this moment. If you do feel safe, notice what sensations tell you that you feel safe. You might feel an ease in your breathing or an opening in your shoulders. If you don't feel safe, ask yourself what would help you feel even a little bit more safe right now and make that happen. You may need a hug, some food, a compassionate listener, prayer, a massage, favorite music or something else.

Timed breaths - Take a deep breath and slowly exhale while noticing any feelings or sensations you are experiencing. Inhale for four counts and exhale for four counts. Notice what changes.

Somatic methods – These all relate to being in the body, rather than the mind. This is a great way to help discharge all that survival energy. Notice what changes with each tool and use it only as long as feels comfortable.

- Feel your feet on the ground and your body in a chair. Feel the support beneath you, holding you. Feel that you are fully supported.
- Put your hands over your kidneys. These are behind you, in the area between your pelvic bone and your ribs.
- Put your hands on your occipital, which are those two knobby bumps at the top of your neck, at the base of your skull. This touch connects with and settles the lizard part of your brain, letting you know that you are safe.
- If you feel really anxious, try one of the following:
 - *Get one of those neoprene torso exercise bands and wear it for a while, noticing what changes. A band can help you feel a sense of containment when things feel chaotic.*
 - *Get a 5lb bag of beans or rice and sit with it in your lap. This can be very grounding.*

tools for stress relief



Make space for your emotions – Talk with someone, journal, create a ritual, express through art. Do this in some form daily if possible until you feel complete. Emotions come in waves. Get help if the emotions feel unending or overwhelming. Sometimes an event will trigger old emotions from other events.

Tell your story - One of the most important parts of the healing process is to express your story of what you've experienced. Start with when you knew you were safe and then go back. This sets the foundation inside your nervous system that you know you already survived the event. Choose a compassionate listener. Alternatively, journal, dance, draw or paint your story.

Connect with others - Do some of these self-care suggestions with another person. Doing the somatic tools with a friend can feel especially nurturing. Consider whether you prefer one-on-one, a small group or a large group. Track when you feel you have had enough connection. Sometimes we need more alone time after something major happens.

Limit your exposure to the news and videos of the events. Constant exposure can be re-traumatizing. It feeds that part of you that doesn't know the event is over and that you survived.

Work with a therapist or healing practitioner skilled in trauma resolution. Some trauma practitioners specialize in bodywork specifically designed to help people recover from trauma.

----- for kids -----

Notice if your kids are:

- Talking a lot
- Having difficulty focusing at school
- Sleeping more or less
- Easily sad or angry, feeling anxious and scared
- Unable to sit still

Kids also need an opportunity to discharge survival energy, tell their story and feel their feelings about what happened as described in these pages.

Got questions? want more info? Contact:

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...and please note that while we have total faith in your ability to heal, If any of the tools or information feels uncomfortable, stop immediately and seek help. All of the content here is educational in nature and not a substitute for diagnosis, advice and/or treatment from a licensed mental health or medical professional.

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