TYPICAL REACTIONS TO STRESS AND TRAUMA:

There is a typical pattern of reaction and behavior that is common to all people who have been through a crisis, disaster or traumatic incident. This includes folks who have been through a series of more minor events and are experiencing a cumulative reaction. Notice these within yourself and others. Some of these are part of everyone’s normal experience. Notice if there is a change of intensity or frequency in yourself and others. Most of these are normal and not problems within themselves. They rise to the point of concern when they

1) last a long time (weeks into months),  
2) they impact health,  
3) become intrusive,  
4) limit the ability to function, and/or  
5) decrease a sense of stability and well being.

**EMOTIONAL RESPONSES**: Anxiety, Survivor guilt, Self Blame, Grief, Denial, Numbness, A sense of detachment from the situation you are in, Hypervigilence and overreaction to stimulus of the current moment, Fear of being overwhelmed by emotions, Fear of ‘going crazy’, Indecisiveness, Anger, Irritability, Anxiety, Agitation (got to keep moving), Helplessness, Depression, Apathy, Listless, Lowered threshold to intense emotional reactions, Sense of being overwhelmed,

**PHYSICAL RESPONSES**: Fatigue, Restlessness, Insomnia, Muscle Tremors, Twitches, Difficulty Breathing, Rapid Breathing, Elevated Blood Pressure, Rapid Heartbeat, Muscle tightness, Headaches, Nausea/vomiting, Thirst, Loss/ change of appetite, Dizziness, Chills, Excessive Sweating, Weakness, Fainting, Stiffness,

**MENTAL RESPONSES**: Tendency to Blame Others, Confusion, Indecision, Poor Attention span, Lowered Alertness to tasks of the moment, Heightened alertness to surroundings, Easily distracted, Trouble identifying known objects or people, Memory challenges, Loss of sense of time, place, person, Disturbing thoughts, Intrusive images and flashbacks (daydreams and nightmares), Suicidal thoughts, Disbelief, Overprotectiveness of self, possessions, others, Change in values,

**BEHAVIORAL RESPONSES**: Deviation from routine, change in speech patterns and choice of words, Withdrawal from others. Driven in to hyperactivity, Inability to take a break or get rest, Substance Abuse, Intensified Startle reaction, Pacing, Erratic movements, Less attention to hygiene, Appetite disturbance, Prolonged Silence, Accident prone,

**SPIRITUAL RESPONSES**: Feelings of Emptiness, Loss of sense of meaning, Discouragement and Hopelessness, Loss of sense of Purpose, Doubts, Anger at God, Guilt, Shame, Cynicism, Inability to participate in spiritual practices (worship, prayer, etc), Loss of connection to spiritual roots and community of faith.
Trusted Helpful Ways to Unload Stress

In stress, disaster and crisis nearly 180 chemicals are released into the blood stream and endocrine system. They’re helpful in the moment….not so much if they last a long time. The stats for the long term impact on clergy and crisis workers are a concern

1. Take a break…. Find time to step out of the action for short times throughout the day and for extended Sabbath breaks. People in disaster situations feel guilt if they aren’t staying active 24/7. Resist that need to be needed.

2. You’re important….you’re not that important…you will be important if your still around for the long haul.

3. Eat Well...In crisis situations people tend to eat high carb, sugar and fat diets. Its what’s available and it is what's appealing (in stress food can become less appealing in general) These foods are the least helpful for the body's ability to process stress....Eat healthy, drink plenty of fluids (maybe a little less coffee)

4. Get Sleep... This is a challenge as the noise and need make sleep a challenge and stress and trauma can make it hard for the brain and body to shut down for rest. Pay attention to this and if you have trouble sleeping talk it through with someone who can help.

5. Count to 10....Our threshold tolerance for routine annoyances is dramatically lowered during crisis. Blowing up is one way (not necessarily a helpful one) to blow off steam. Pay attention to your level of anger and frustration. Take a break, count to 10, take 3 deep breaths, center on God.

6. Comfort yourself.... Caregivers have a hard time receiving care. Sometimes they have difficulty being vulnerable (either they don’t want to risk letting the flood of emotion come out or they want to retain the façade of impervious strength) Your psyche and soul need moments when you care for yourself and let others care for you. Take some time each day to just do something you enjoy (except for that whole carbs thing)

7. Prayer....Jesus did it during stress times. You've heard it preached and possibly preached it. Find your Mount of Olives where you can pull away and rest in the embrace of God’s comfort.

8. Get it out....Ambulances don’t go back into service till they’ve been cleaned and restocked. No one wants to be transported in an ambulance that still has the remnants of the last patient’s care and treatment. Clean yourself out. Find a friend to talk with. TRUST trained help (therapist/spiritual director) to process your experience. Exercise (your favorite routine) helps tremendously to get the body processing and releasing the chemicals that were unleashed. Write it down. Pray it out...

9. Know you are normal. The emotional, physical and spiritual reactions listed here are typical...even the strongest healthiest people go through the same process. It’s OK to feel crappy

10. Avoid all those things people use to dull their pain and anxiety...drugs, alcohol, inane news shows and life changing decisions

11. Laugh.... If you can’t...see 8 above

12. Try to get back into a normal routine whenever possible. It helps re-anchor you.
About 6 months to a year after a natural disaster, one notices a rise in bullying in schools, or domestic abuse calls, or increasing assault and battery cases. This is because of the way the trauma of natural disasters impacts and changes our brains. Here are some simple techniques to alleviate anxiety, which can lead to a violent response.

The Brookfield Institute will also lead a trauma healing workshop on Saturday, September 10th (9-5 p.m.) and Sunday, September 11th (3-8 p.m.). The cost is $250 for participants for the first weekend, which includes materials. If you are from the affected areas, please ask us for scholarship aid. For more information about the workshop, call Beverly Prestwood-Taylor at 413-477-1015 or go to http://www.brookfieldinstitute.org/STAR_Fall_11.pdf

Emotional First Aid
(ideas from Peter Levine, Waking the Tiger)

Signs of Trauma: Trouble focusing and making decisions, difficulty eating and sleeping, feeling either lethargy/depression/hopelessness or hyperactivity, short-tempered.

1. Take care of yourself: Exercise, get enough sleep, eat regular, nutritious meals and keep to a regular schedule each day.

2. Using soothing techniques to calm down. Focus on and name everything in the room that is “blue”, for example. Add the number three to every number to 100. Practice the hand massage prayer (on page , first letting the person name the emotions silently, then allowing them to name specific events connected to the emotion (for example, I am sad because I lost my family photos in the tornado; or I am angry because people were looting in the street); Sing an uplifting hymn with exuberance. Pray with another person, allowing yourself to breathe deeply and feel the presence of God with you.

3. If you can’t sleep, sing a soothing hymn to yourself, over and over, focusing on the words and feeling them resonate in your whole body and soul.

4. Know that you will feel intense feelings of anger, sorrow, grief, confusion, shock and helplessness, hyper-vigilance or irritation. These feelings will pass as you move through them.

5. Be with people you care about. Sing together, pray together, laugh together, go for a walk together.

6. Telling the story helps to heal, but if it is told in a repetitious way, it can be re-traumatizing. Therefore, take breaks in telling the story. Interrupt the flow of the story. Find the humor or ways to laugh. Take a moment to focus on the things you are thankful for. Walk as you tell the story. Take productive actions that you choose to take.
7. Trembling, shaking or sweating; breathing deeply, crying or laughing are ways we can discharge the energy created when we have a trauma. Observe what is happening with your body without judgment. Our bodies have the innate ability to regain balance if we let ourselves to feel what we feel and give ourselves time.

8. Stay active: knit, garden, bike, cook, play with children or pets, fix something around the house. Make a list of three things that need to be done and do them. Taking action to help another is quite healing.

9. If symptoms persist after a few weeks, seek professional help, if possible.

Providing Support to a Child Who Has Experienced Trauma
Summarized from Peter Levine and Maggie Kline “It won’t hurt forever: guiding your child through trauma. Mothering (Jan-Feb. 2002)

1. Your child will look to you for cues about how to feel. If you are terrified or overwhelmed, your fears and anxieties will be transmitted to your child. Take time to calm yourself first. An overly emotional or smothering adult may frighten the child.

2. Children can usually rebound from stressful events. An adult’s role is to enable the child to have access to this ability to heal.

3. Let children know that any powerful emotions they may be having such as sadness, rage, fear or pain are normal. Children will move through their feelings rather quickly when they are not rushed.

4. If a child appears to be in shock (staring, slow in responding), hold a small child. For an older child, place a hand on the child’s back and allow the natural flow of tears, shaking, chills or trembling. Say, “That’s okay.” Or “It’s alright to feel that way.”

5. Ask the child how they feel in their body and wait for their response. Be more specific with the next questions. “How do you feel in your tummy (or arm or head) If the child mentions a specific feeling, ask about its location, size, shape, color. Keep guiding the child to stay in the present moment. Allow silence between questions.

6. Encourage your child to sleep, even if he or she doesn’t want to. Sleep is a healing time. Don’t stir up a discussion about the trauma before sleep.

7. Other ways of allowing a child to express emotions is through telling a story, drawing a picture or expressing it through play.

8. Continue to allow your child to express their responses. When they cry or tremble, allow it to happen and reassure the child with a calm voice and a reassuring hand.

9. Later, when your child is rested, set aside time to talk about the feelings of their experience. Let the child know it is normal. You might share a similar experience of yours or of someone you know.
Putting Our Hands in God’s Hands
A Prayer to Release Trauma Anxiety

1. Take the hand of another person. It doesn’t matter whether it is the right hand or left hand. Say a prayer for the person, acknowledging that you are in God’s hands.

2. Hold the THUMB of the other person and invite him or her to breathe in deeply and to recognize or acknowledge the strong or disturbing emotions of TEARS, EMOTIONAL PAIN OR GRIEF. Breathe out slowly.

   Follow the same approach as you hold the INDEX FINGER and acknowledge the emotions of FEAR or PANIC.

   For the middle finger, focus on ANGER, RAGE, and RESENTMENT.

   For the ring finger, reflect on WORRY, ANXIETY, and PREOCCUPATION.

   For the little finger, consider LACK OF SELF-ESTEEM.

3. Take the other hand and follow the same pattern. However, this time, invite the person to name out loud specific events or memories, as each finger is held. This may bring up emotions, so allow the emotions to be expressed and calmly receive the outpouring of crying, shaking or trembling that may be triggered by naming the specifics. As they finish naming the emotions, remind them to breathe out.

4. Hold both of the person’s hands in your hands and pray for the person and for their healing, naming the losses or emotions they've identified. As you finish the prayer, affirm that we are all held in God’s hands.