



When Disaster Strikes Beyond the First Anniversary

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

Our aim is to enable you to understand the possible longer-term effects including the sort of ongoing legal processes and other issues that many 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 are likely to remain in touch with you about 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

From our experiences, we know that many of the legal procedures set in place after a disaster can seem lengthy, bureaucratic and impersonal. Claims for compensation, applications to disaster funds and other financial systems can be both complicated and difficult to understand, especially when experienced for the first time. Lawyers may be able to help. We have sometimes found that talking with others who have experienced the same or other disasters and are facing similar procedures can be helpful. 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 often take a very long time. These can include a public inquiry, inquests, Health and Safety inquiries, civil prosecutions and criminal trials. 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.

FLOs 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 access to an FLO, they may be able to help by filtering requests. Some people have also found it useful to have their own family spokesperson or produce their own short statements/photographs for the media. This will help to 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 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, it is important to bear in mind that you may well 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 in addition to 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 are listed below.

Disaster Action

Telephone: 01483 799 066.

www.disasteraction.org.uk

The Traumatic Stress Clinic

Specialists in Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Provides assessment and therapy for those who have been affected by traumatic events .

Telephone: 020 7530 3666.

ASSIST Trauma Support Care

Offers support and self-help in surviving trauma.

Trauma Support Line Answer Service: 01788 560 800.

www.traumatic-stress.freeserve.co.uk

Cruse - Bereavement Care

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

126 Sheen Road, Richmond, Surrey TW9 1UR.

Telephone: 0208 939 9530

Helpline: 0844 477 9400

www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Victim Support

Offers practical help and advice and emotional support to victims and their families following crime. (Monday-Friday 9.00am - 5.30pm).

www.victimsupport.org.uk

South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (Traumatic Stress service)

Provides a clinical service for people suffering from PTSD.

Telephone: 0203 228 6000

www.slam.nhs.uk

BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy)

Will give list of counselling organisations and practitioners in your area, their specialisation and fees (some do not charge). Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: 1 Regent Place, Rugby, Warwickshire. CD21 2PF.

Office: 01455 883300

Information on counsellors: 01455 883316

www.bacp.co.uk

The Samaritans

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

National telephone helpline: 08457 909090.

www.samaritans.org.uk

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