

Coping with the psychological effects of flooding



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In the first days and weeks

Many people will be experiencing strong reactions to the impact of the Cumbrian floods. 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

Such feelings are completely normal. For some people who have been flooded previously, their reactions may be compounded and might lead to feelings of hopelessness or helplessness.

For people who have been exposed to highly threatening situations, people can also experience flashbacks or nightmares. This is normal in the days and weeks following the events. 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.

For some people, they may have been experiencing a degree of life difficulties or problems before the floods; the additional stress of the flood can become 'the straw that breaks the camel's back'.

For most people, their first priorities will be practical around basic needs such as shelter, food, clothing, transport. During later stages, people are focussed on repairing the damage and trying to deal with builders and insurance companies to try and get their homes back in order.



In the following weeks and months

For most people affected who 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.

So 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 people might go on to experience problems that require additional help, this can include depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, chronic worry, etc. Based on previous floods, the numbers of people seeking talking therapies tends to peak 4-6 months after the flood (when practical tasks have been completed and people may be starting to realise that there has been a longer term psychological impact following the immediate reactions).

Getting help

We know from the previous floods that some people in Cumbria have said they didn't know where to seek help for such problems or they avoided discussing their problems with their GP or asking for help due to a worry about what other people might think.

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

First Step receives over 13,000 referrals a year from Cumbrian adults. 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**. If you are struggling with low mood, panic attacks, anxiety, chronic worry, flashbacks or obsessional thoughts then effective help is available.

How to access us

You can visit your GP, and ask them to refer you to us or you can refer yourself to us directly, by telephoning 0300 123 9122 (local rate phone call)

Mon-Fri 8.30am – 5.30pm

For more information on First Step, and to see if we would be able to help, please visit our website

www.firststepcumbria.nhs.uk

Depending on your problem, First Step can offer a range of effective options including:

- workshops to learn skills on how to improve your mood or deal with anxiety
- one-to-one talking therapy

Confidentiality

‘The Trust’s vision is to keep your information safe in our hands.’

We promise to use your information fairly and legally, and in-line with local and national policies. You have a right to understand how your information is used and you can request a copy of the information we hold about you at any time.

For further information contact the Information Governance Team on 01228 608998 or email Information.Governance@cumbria.nhs.uk

Feedback

We appreciate and encourage feedback, which helps us to improve our services. If you have any comments, compliments or complaints to make about your care, please contact the Patient Experience Team.

Email: PET@cumbria.nhs.uk Tel: 01228 602128 Freephone: 0800 633 5547

If you would like this factsheet in another language or format, for example Braille, large print or audio, please call: **01228 603890**

E: communications.helpdesk@cumbria.nhs.uk

Or write to Engagement and Communications
Voreda House | Portland Place | Penrith | CA11 7QQ



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