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Take Care of Your Mental and Emotional Health

The Vermont Health Department is concerned about the health and safety of those affected by the recent flooding and storm damage. Flood-related loss can cause a great deal of stress for affected individuals, communities and recovery workers. It is important to take care of yourself and your family throughout the storm recovery effort.

Immediately following a natural disaster, people typically respond with shock and denial, meaning that you may feel stunned, numb or disconnected. When the shock has passed, reactions will vary among different people, and may include:

- Intense and unpredictable moods
- Anxiety and nervousness; feeling out of control
- Difficulty concentrating and making decisions
- Disrupted sleep and eating patterns
- Stress-related headaches, nausea and chest pain

Remember that it is normal to experience these symptoms, and there are basic things that you can do to relieve some of the stress. In the days and weeks following a natural disaster, you may be so busy that you forget or ignore simple routines that can greatly impact your health. It is important to take care of yourself, and make time to do the following:

- Maintain your energy by eating healthy foods and avoid excess caffeine, junk food, alcohol, drugs and tobacco.
- Exercise and stretch your muscles frequently.
- Get adequate sleep and rest.
- Avoid injury during cleanup. Do not lift anything that is dangerously heavy.
- Practice stress reduction techniques such as deep breathing, meditation and mindfulness to calm your body and mind.
- Talk to friends, family and coworkers about your emotions.

Flood cleanup efforts will likely require a significant amount of time, and some days will be better than others. Use healthy coping skills to get yourself and your family through this experience. It can help to remind yourself of the following:

- Try to be patient because the cleanup and restoration will take time. Adjust your expectations and be realistic about what you can accomplish.
- Expect that you will experience a range of emotions and changing moods.
- People with a history of mental health problems may find their symptoms get worse during times of stress. Be sure to seek help as needed.
- Take time to help children cope with their feelings. Provide extra affection and reassurance.
- Focus on the big picture rather than the small details
- Make a list of things that need to be done, set priorities for tasks and try not to get overwhelmed.
- Don't focus too much attention those things that you cannot control and put your energy toward things that you can change.
- Set aside time for regular tasks that are unrelated to the flood cleanup.

For help dial 2-1-1 or check the website at www.211.org