

# Be Red Cross Ready

## Coping with Shelter-in-Place Emergencies

Sheltering in place can disrupt our routines and challenge our ability to tend to responsibilities, such as work and caring for loved ones. Understandably, we may become nervous or uncomfortable when sheltering in place. The following information can help you cope emotionally with this type of emergency.

*People are resilient, and most often bounce back after difficult times.*

### Understanding Sheltering in Place



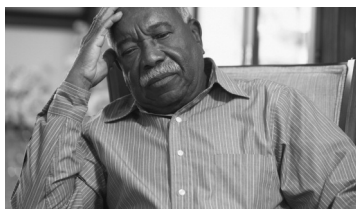
During certain emergencies, local authorities may ask or require you to shelter in place.

- Sheltering in place is taking immediate shelter wherever you are—at home, work, school or in between.
- Emergency personnel advise or require sheltering in place during rare instances when the safest action for you and others is to remain at your current location.
- These instances include events such as a gas leak, chemical spill or nuclear accident.
- Local officials or authorities on the scene are the best source of information for your particular situation. Following their instructions during a shelter-in-place emergency will help keep you and your loved ones safe.
- During a shelter-in-place emergency, authorities provide information on TV, the radio and other forms of electronic communication in order to help you understand how to remain safe.
- In spite of challenging circumstances, most individuals who have sheltered in place have successfully coped with the emergency. You can, too.

### Useful Resources

- Your local American Red Cross chapter: <http://www.redcross.org/where/where.html>
- Your state and local health departments: <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/international/relres.html>
- Your local emergency management agency: <http://www.ready.gov/america/local/index.html>
- Humane Society of the United States: <http://www.humanesociety.org/about/state>

### Typical Reactions



Understanding typical reactions to sheltering in place helps us recognize them and better cope.

- Our personal emotional reactions during difficult times are unique. Reactions of those who have experienced shelter-in-place emergencies have varied widely, ranging from feelings of stress to uncertainty or even fear.
- During a shelter-in-place emergency, emotional reactions may show themselves as:
  - Anxiety, particularly when separated from loved ones.
  - Uncertainty regarding how long we will need to shelter in place.
  - Concerns for the physical safety of ourselves and others.
  - Confusion or frustration regarding questions left unanswered by public officials or the media.
  - Guilt about not being able to fulfill responsibilities, such as work, parenting or caring for dependents.
  - Feelings of boredom or isolation.
  - Thoughts of blame, worry or fear.
- Those who have sheltered in place for more than a few hours have also reported having:
  - Concerns about meeting obligations and lost income.
  - Problems making decisions or staying focused on topics.
  - Changes in appetite or sleep patterns.

### What You Can Do



You can take actions that will help protect emotional well-being during a shelter-in-place emergency.

- Remain informed, if possible, by checking in with local news sources. However, also take care not to become overexposed. Excessive or repeated exposure to media can increase feelings of stress, uncertainty and fear, especially in children.
- Pay attention to your emotional health while sheltering in place, remembering that many different feelings are common. Know that others are also experiencing emotional reactions and may need your time and patience to put their feelings and thoughts in order. Try to recognize when you or those around you may need extra support.
- Monitor your physical health needs. When sheltering in place for more than a few hours, remember to eat, rest and take regularly prescribed medications. Avoid alcohol or substance use.
- Focus on positive actions you can take right away, such as taking an inventory of emergency supplies, obtaining accurate information and providing support to others.
- Try to maintain contact with family, friends and those around you. The telephone and the Internet can be helpful when physical separations become necessary.
- Hold a picture in your mind of the best possible outcome. Make a list of your personal strengths and use these to help both yourself and others stay emotionally strong.
- Maintain religious and/or spiritual practices that you have found to provide comfort and emotional strength.

### Special Situations

- Children: Be creative, and think of fun activities that will occupy your child's time. Keep a schedule, set appropriate limits and maintain usual rules of behavior.
- If you are alone: Know that the same tips for staying emotionally strong apply. If possible, try to connect with others and stay informed.
- Pets: Plan to shelter in place with them. If something is not safe for you, it is not safe for them. Like people, pets' behaviors may change. Keep track of their well-being and, as best you can, take care of their needs.

## Let Your Family Know You're Safe

If your community has experienced a disaster, register on the American Red Cross Safe and Well Web site, available through [RedCross.org/SafeandWell](http://www.redcross.org/SafeandWell), to let your family and friends know about your welfare. You may also call **1-866-GET-INFO** to register yourself and your family.



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