



Stages of Disaster Recovery

(Adapted from Cohen and Ahearn 1980 and DeWolfe 2000)

HEROIC

Time of impact and immediate aftermath

Shell shocked

Emergency needs are the primary focus

Emotions

- Grief
- Loss
- Altruism
- Sense of the heroic (eg: increased donations, first responders heroism)

Behaviours

- Increase in heroic actions
- Increased energy into saving other's lives and property

Important Resources

- Family and Friend Groups
- Neighbours
- Emergency Teams/Services



HONEYMOON

Generally from a few days after the disaster through to around 3-6 months

Emotions

- Relief at survival
- Emotion “high” of “I survived...that’s what matters...the rest we can deal with”
- Shared community sense of having endured a terrible experience together
- Praise for public officials
- Increased fundraising drives
 - People are generous
 - Feel moved by intense media coverage of widespread suffering and touching tales of survival and rescue
- High expectations from survivors about the help they’ll get towards rebuilding (often lots of promises made at this stage)

Behaviours

- Easier to recruit volunteers – people want to know how to give help as well as donations of goods and money
- Survivors, with help of volunteers, usually clear out debris and await the promised help

Important Resources

- Community Groups which existed before the disaster as well as new groups which emerge to meet specific needs of the disaster



Disillusionment

Several months after disaster to 2 years

Reality sets in

Government conditions on assistance, Insurance find ways to not payout claims

Media and helping agencies go home

Emotions

- Strong sense of anger, resentment, bitterness, deep disappointment – survivors no longer the focus of attention, experience delays, failures and/or unfulfilled hopes or promises of aid
- People exhausted
- Worn out by extreme ongoing stress

Behaviours

- Question the aid and government agencies promises, intentions, service delivery, and/or achievements
- Grim reality of long, difficult road ahead
- Survivors begin to focus inward to their own individual lives and solving their own problems
- Feeling of shared community can be lost
- Community leaders and agencies need to keep correct information fed to the community – misinformation becomes rife

Important Resources

- Many agencies pull out and local agencies can appear weak without outside aid
- Alternative sources of funding and resources need to be explored by communities and families



Reconstruction

Lasts several years – long term phase of disaster recovery

Tends to proceed at a glacial pace

News / disaster not interesting to the media (until anniversary dates)

Emotions

- Can vary widely according to
 - Emotional and financial self-sufficiency/status of survivors
 - How the previous stages have been handled
 - Actual level of resources available - ++ resources = -- stress
- Survivors realise they are ultimately responsible for solving the problems of their own lives
- Sense of efficiency and empowerment if recover efforts are visible
- ++ PTSD likelihood if recovery efforts are slow / not visible

Behaviours

- Self-responsibility – individuals assume control of their own recovery
- If things are mishandled / few resource available for rebuilding -> lead to dysfunctional behaviours
- Apathy of depression perhaps appears instead of focused movement