

What Is “Skills for Psychological Recovery?”



Skills for Psychological Recovery (SPR) is a program to assist survivors in reducing post-disaster distress and moving forward in their lives. SPR uses handouts and worksheets to aid in the teaching of SPR skills. While survivors can use them on their own, the SPR handouts are most helpful when used in meetings with a counselor. The counselor can provide support and give suggestions for handling any issues that come up while the survivor learns and practices the skills in the handouts.

SPR teaches five main skills:

- **Building Problem-Solving Skills.** Survivors have continuing problems and ongoing adversities resulting from a disaster that can add significantly to their stress level, distract from self-care, and increase traumatic stress reactions. You will learn new skills to cope with any current or anticipated problems. Problem-solving skills give you a tool to break these problems down into more manageable chunks, give you a range of ways to respond, and help you thoughtfully decide what actions to take.
- **Promoting Positive Activities.** After a disaster, it is very common for people to stop doing things that used to be enjoyable, rewarding, or personally meaningful. People often become depressed or withdrawn when they no longer engage in pleasurable activities. You will make a plan to increase meaningful and positive activities in your schedule, to build your resilience, and to bring more fulfillment and enjoyment into your life.
- **Managing Reactions.** When people have been exposed to extreme stress and fear as a result of disaster, their bodies are often on alert and ready for danger. Even relaxing your body can make you feel too vulnerable. In the absence of real danger, these reactions are unnecessary and may have bad effects on your health, mood, and relationships. You will learn tools to better manage distressing physical and emotional reactions and how to put them into practice in your daily life to reduce anxiety and stress. You may also learn how to think through any memories that are especially troubling, so you can understand them better and master them more successfully.

- **Promoting Helpful Thinking.** After disaster, people’s thoughts about the world and themselves often change. It is common for survivors to see the world as dangerous, have difficulty trusting other people, or see themselves as unable to cope. In order for people to change their emotional reactions, they need to change the way they think about the things that happen to them. You will learn how your thoughts influence your emotions, become aware of what you’re saying to yourself, and replace negative thoughts with more helpful thoughts (which will lead to more positive emotions).
- **Building Healthy Social Connections.** Social support is one of the most consistently identified protective factors in studies of disaster survivors. Often the best way to cope is to have other people to talk and do things with. Disasters can result in people feeling isolated and alone. It can feel impossible to build new, or reestablish existing, relationships. This module will help you learn how to more effectively seek support and give support to others.

The goal of SPR is to teach you new ways to deal with all the changes resulting from the disaster by exploring new actions, thoughts, and ways to respond. Even if you are not able to change your situation, once you have learned the SPR skills you can change the way you think about and react to it, reduce your distress, and improve your resilience. If you meet with your counselor more than once, your counselor may suggest that you practice your new skills between visits. Practicing new skills can help you feel better faster. During follow-up visits, you can check in with your counselor about anything that seems difficult or needs adjustment.