

# Tips for Coping with Drought-related Stress

Disasters create stress in our lives. For people in agriculture, drought adds to other stresses already experienced by farm families. Studies show that stress may be even greater for young farmers, those holding an off-farm job and women in farm families.

Drought stress may be different than stress in other disasters because a drought is an extended event and does not have a single moment of impact. The anxiety builds over time and becomes chronic, making it less noticeable to ourselves and those around us. The drought may not be viewed as seriously as a tornado because the damage is not as visible. Its impact is worsened for already stressed farm families and communities.

## Signs of Stress

- Irritability and anger
- Feelings of anxiety and worry
- Headaches or gastrointestinal complaints
- Increased risk-taking behavior
- Changes in eating and sleep habits
- Increased alcohol or drug use
- Forgetfulness
- Fatigue
- Sense of helplessness
- Lack of concentration
- Avoidance or denial
- Sadness

## How to Deal with Stress

Farm families should remind themselves that these stress reactions are common and are normal responses to an unusual situation.

If stress goes unrecognized, it can affect our mental and physical health. If we learn to cope with stress, we can better face the challenges each day brings and can be even stronger when we face other difficult circumstances in life. Focusing on our own strengths and our community of support, we can take steps to help ourselves and our family:

- **Acknowledge and talk about feelings.** Family, friends and neighbors can be helpful listeners and may share some of the same worries. Participating in church or spiritual renewal activities also can be sources of comfort and assistance in difficult times.
- **Eat healthy and get adequate sleep.** Engaging in recreation or a favorite hobby, getting away for a few hours with friends, reading a good book, volunteering to help others, and finding time to laugh can help.
- **Nurture personal relationships.** Couples should make time to be alone, to talk and to have fun. Families should re-establish important rituals such as mealtimes and holiday celebrations. Children may need additional support — listen and be reassuring.

The good news is that, with time, we will return to what is normal or perhaps a “new” normal for us and our families.

## When and Where to Seek Help

If stress, anxiety, depression or physical problems continue for more than a few weeks or if someone is having feelings of extreme hopelessness or extreme anger, talking about suicide or is violent, it is important to seek help immediately. Contact a physician or community mental health center as soon as possible.

## For More Information, Contact:

### Disaster Distress Helpline:

**1-800-985-5990**

**Text: ‘TalkWithUs’ to 66746**

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available for you: **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

Visit: <http://www.dmh.mo.gov> or

Call: 1-800-364-9687 or 1-573-751-4122

### University of Missouri Extension:

<http://extension.missouri.edu/>