

## Earthquake in Turkey and Syria: dealing with traumatic events

### Worrying about relatives

The severe earthquakes in Turkey and Syria have touched people all around the world. People who have relatives and friends in the areas affected by the earthquakes are particularly worried at the moment. This is especially so if no contact to them is possible because the mobile network is not working in all the regions. This does not necessarily mean, however, that something has happened to those friends and families. This is why it is important to stay calm, despite the huge shock, as well as to remain hopeful and support one another.

### Possible reactions to traumatic events

Uncertainty and concerns about the whereabouts of relatives and friends are a cause of stress, as is seeing and hearing about the terrible suffering of people in Turkey and Syria, all of which can produce strong reactions and feelings, at least temporarily. Images shown by the media can amplify these feelings. Many people are consumed by a powerful sense of helplessness, powerlessness and fear, which could leave them feeling “beside themselves”, unable to concentrate on anything else, suffering from serious mood swings, and feeling incapable of dealing with everyday life.

After such an extraordinary event, these and similar reactions are absolutely normal, especially among people who have a personal connection to that part of the world. Such emotions usually ease off after a few days.

### What can you do?

- It could be helpful to give yourself a break. Do not force yourself to carry on with your work and other demands as you normally would. Perhaps you just need a few days’ time to process these terrible events.
- Do not suppress your feelings, but talk about them to people you trust. Do not withdraw into your shell – stay in contact with others instead.
- Also try not to think only about what has happened, and see if you can find your way back to your daily routines.
- Do things that you enjoy and help you to relax.
- Make sure to give your day some structure – also by eating and drinking regularly. Drink as much as possible because that will bring more “flow” to your body.
- Take regular exercise – best of all outside.
- Do not hesitate to make use of psychological and spiritual help.

Being active can also help to drag us out of our feelings of powerlessness and become more decisive again. This enables us to help ourselves. Is there anything you can do to help the earthquake victims? Can you donate money or other useful items? Can you assist the people affected and offer them support? Can you help charities in their work?

### What can you do if you cannot concentrate at work?

First of all, it will do you good to understand that it is totally acceptable to feel upset and confused. In the second step, however, it is important to remain in control of your life and be active. So, what exactly will help right now?

- Even if you find this difficult, regulate your use of media and do not spend the whole day with your phone in your hand. Look at new messages just once or twice a day so that you are not

constantly confronted with them. Switch off any push notifications or news alerts on your computer or phone.

- Breathing exercises help to transport oxygen to the brain, thereby helping to lower your heartbeat and reduce the chaos in your mind.
- Talk to colleagues in the kitchen at work and look for distractions.
- Step outside for some fresh air or go to another floor in the building. Breaking up familiar patterns can help to stimulate the senses.
- Write your thoughts down in a book. Once you have done so, close the book and put it to one side. The idea here is to store your thoughts in the book and free up your mind.
- If your worries keep you awake at night, breaking up regular patterns can also help. Get up, sit on the sofa for a while, open the window, read a few pages, drink something warm and then go back to bed.

### What can you do if people close to you are worried about their relatives in Turkey or Syria, or are affected by the events themselves?

The understanding of friends and relatives can go a long way towards helping those affected by the earthquakes to cope better. In many cases, the feeling of not being alone can be very helpful. When the people affected speak about what they are going through, you should

- listen to them attentively;
- take time for them;
- take their feelings seriously.

After the conversation, it will also help to do something different together, such as go for a walk, cook something, or undertake something together.

Sometimes it is also necessary to organise things and get stuff done. Providing practical support can have a positive and stress-relieving effect. Basically, the important thing is to help the people affected to get back into their daily routines as quickly as possible.

### How can you deal with children's fear and anxieties?

Children also pick up on what is happening in Turkey and Syria from the conversations and media around them. This can unsettle them greatly. You should try to find out what the child or children already know. Have they heard others talking about the earthquakes in the nursery or school and now want to know more about it? You can explain what has happened to them without going into all the details, but by giving them the basic facts and information that they can understand. You can be truthful and need not attempt to keep it a secret or make it sound better because children will notice that and have a lively imagination that does not need to be stimulated even further in this context. It is also important to address children's feelings and help them to understand that they are safe. That will reassure children and bring you closer together.

### Professional help

Some events can be so troubling to people that it is advisable to seek professional assistance. This is especially the case if the normal reactions described below last for longer than four weeks and do not get better.

Special signs are if

- you have the impression that your feelings and emotions are not returning to normal even after a long time, and you feel dejected and down;

- you suffer from nightmares or lasting sleep disorders;
- you often find your thoughts returning to the event and keep seeing images of what happened in your mind;
- you avoid certain situations or places that remind you of the event;
- you smoke (more) since the event, drink alcohol, or take drugs or medicines;
- your performance at work declines lastingly;
- your relationships suffer badly and you are told that you have changed a lot;
- you cannot speak about your feelings, even though you feel a need to do so.

At the Fürstenberg Institut, qualified coaches are available to offer you support. And if necessary, we can also refer you to specialized doctors, therapists or other institutions.