

Tips on using the “Coping with Stress” fact sheet

for ATSDR & Health Department staff

Share and discuss the Coping with Stress fact sheet with individuals or small groups of community members who express interest in the topic.

Ways to use the fact sheet

Use it responsively

- Bring it with you whenever you are in a community: “keep it in your back pocket”
- Share it with individuals when they mention they are feeling stress
- Balance the stress fact sheet information with information on the site-specific health/exposure issue

Use it passively

- Put it out on a table along with other fact sheets at an Open House or community meeting about the site – and talk with people about it if they express interest

Keep in mind

- The intent of the fact sheet is to validate stress as a normal reaction to environmental contamination, suggest ways to cope with that stress, and point people to resources if stress is affecting their daily life.
- Communicate with empathy: put yourself in the shoes of the people you are working with.

Tips on talking with a community member, leader, or health provider

Responding

- If someone tells you they are stressed, ask if any of the issues on p. 1 are causing them stress
- If yes, ask if they have thought about ways to cope with stress and point them to the section “ways to cope” (see p. 2 of fact sheet, left side)
- If a person says that stress is negatively affecting their daily life, suggest resources for help (p. 2, right side, and local resources)

Initiating

- If you suspect that stress may be an issue for someone, and feel comfortable gently introducing the topic, then
 - State it is normal for people affected by environmental contamination to experience some stress.
 - Note that ATSDR has developed a fact sheet on this topic and ask if they are interested in looking at it with you.
- If you have a good relationship with a trusted leader and/or health provider in a community you think might be experiencing stress, consider sharing the fact sheet with them and asking if they think the information would be helpful to community members.
 - Encourage the leader or health provider to share the fact sheet with community members who may be interested in the topic. Follow up in a month to see if they’ve used it.

Tips on using the “Coping with Stress” fact sheet

Pitfalls

- Don't compare potential stress-related health effects with physical health effects related to exposure (e.g. “The stress you are feeling may be worse for your health than the exposures from the site.”)
- Don't attempt to
 - determine whether someone is showing signs of stress (box on p. 2 of fact sheet).
 - diagnose or treat mental health conditions.
- Don't force the conversation. Be careful when discussing personal behaviors. The statement “Take care of yourself” (pg. 2, left side) may provoke some people if you talk about changing behaviors like smoking, drinking alcohol, diet, and exercise in a way that is perceived as “blaming the victim.”
- Don't overpromise – ATSDR does not have the capacity to develop stress-specific community interventions at this time.

Don't use the stress fact sheet...

- ...In a large group setting when it is difficult to judge how people are reacting to the information (e.g. community presentation, conference call).
- ...To respond to concerns about possible physical health effects of exposures to site-related contaminants.
- ...When someone wants answers to other questions.
- ...When someone is expressing outrage or anger.

Make your own site-specific stress fact sheet

- Use this fact sheet as a template and source of general information.
- Modify the reasons for stress to reflect concerns you've heard from the community (p. 1).
- Modify the “Ways to cope” section (p. 2, left side).
 - To include information on advisory groups (e.g. CAPs or CAGs) or other ways to get involved.
 - Include references (e.g. web addresses, repository) where people can get information about possible physical health concerns of site-related contaminants (e.g. ToxFAQs, site-related fact sheets).
- Modify the “Get in touch” section to include locally available mental health resources that would resonate with the community (p. 2, right side).
- After you use the stress fact sheet with community members, please fill out the feedback form.
- Your responses will help ATSDR improve the stress materials and help staff use them more effectively in communities.

Who to talk to at ATSDR about using the fact sheet

- Ben Gerhardstein, Environmental Health Scientist, ATSDR Region 9 (415.947.4316, bgerhardstein@cdc.gov)
- Jamie Rayman, Health Educator, ATSDR Region 9 (415.947.4318, jrayman@cdc.gov)
- Pam Tucker, MD, ATSDR/DTHHS (770.488.3458, pgt0@cdc.gov)