

## When Recovery is Ongoing

In the aftermath of a major natural disaster, people face enormous challenges, which can impact their physical and emotional well-being. Even with intense rebuilding and recovery efforts, affected individuals often endure:

- Displacement - separation from loved ones, no sense of “home”
- Workplaces forced to do more with less people
- Uncertainty of the future
- Loss of places of worship and other community centers – places of refuge for many
- Limited entertainment and relaxation options
- Uncertainty about jobs and housing, making it difficult to move forward
- Difficulty finding affordable housing
- Living in cramped and uncomfortable housing – crowded in with family or friends, sleeping on air mattresses, living in narrow trailers or small cabins on a ship

Those affected by disaster often experience a massive disruption of many things they hold dear. It is a period of uncertainty. After disasters like the Gulf Coast hurricanes, “normal” can become an elusive concept. And “recovery” seems never-ending.

People who have experienced a traumatic event often demonstrate changes in behavior. While there are many individual responses and no “cure all”, the following suggestions may reduce the probability of long-term stress reactions. If you experienced a traumatic event or work closely with those who have, these suggestions may also be useful in helping you maintain your emotional balance and perspective.

Stress is a normal reaction to abnormal situations like disasters. In the post-disaster period, ongoing crisis can intensify stress reactions. If you experience persistent or severe stress, ask for help from your Employee Assistance Program (EAP), a licensed mental health professional or your physician. Some signs include:

- Disorientation or poor concentration (e.g., dazed, memory loss, unable to recall recent events)
- Depression (e.g., pervasive feeling of hopelessness and despair, withdrawal from others)
- Anxiety (e.g., on edge, restless, constant fear of another disaster)
- Inability to care for self (e.g., not handling daily life, not eating, bathing)
- Unrelenting fatigue or excessive sleeping
- Crying easily; quick to anger; dramatic mood swings
- Suicidal or homicidal thoughts or plans

This information is not intended to serve as medical advice. If you experience physical symptoms which cause you concern, please consult your physician.

- Problematic use of alcohol or drugs
- Domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse
- Physical aches and pains, changes in vision or hearing

### **DOs**

- Get enough rest
- Maintain a good diet and exercise program
- Find time and talk to supportive peers and family about the incident
- Take time for leisure activities
- Follow a familiar routine
- Spend time with family and friends
- If you're willing, discuss the traumatic event with a professional individually or in a group setting
- Create a serene scene to escape to either visually or literally
- Take one thing at a time
- Expect the experience to bother you
- Seek professional help if your symptoms persist
- Seek medical assistance if your physical symptoms concern you

### **DON'Ts**

- Drink alcohol excessively or use drugs
- Let guilt stop you from asking for help because you may be "better off" than others
- Withdraw from significant others
- Reduce leisure activities
- Increase caffeine intake
- Have unrealistic expectations for recovery
- Look for easy answers
- Take on new major projects
- Pretend everything is ok – change can be scary
- Make major changes if you don't need to

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## **Call Your EAP**

If you want to speak with someone about your experiences, or if you would like a stress management consultation, contact your EAP.

Federal or federalized employees covered by Federal Occupational Health's EAP can call 1-800-222-0364 (TTY 1-888-262-7848) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



**Employee Assistance Program**

*We Care, Just Call*

**1-800-222-0364**

1-888-262-7848 TTY Users

[www.FOH4YOU.com](http://www.FOH4YOU.com)

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Doc#0187—1104