

## 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
- 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

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

### 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.