



EMOTIONAL HEALTH After the Disaster

The devastation experienced from loss of life, homes and familiar surroundings continue to take their toll long after the traumatic experience of Hurricane Katrina has ended. The first consideration now for each person is to get stronger and rebuild by maintaining a healthy state of mind. If we first take care of ourselves, it is easier to then sort out our affairs and help others. Stress, grief, exhaustion, frustration and anger are normal reactions to an abnormal situation. The information in these sections are offered as consideration for first steps you might take to recover.

What you may be feeling now	Living with grief
<p>Uncertain times create mixed feelings. A disaster can leave our normal lives so changed that situations and relationships are strained. You may experience these feelings and reactions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Mentally drained and physically exhausted. ▲ A loss of self-esteem due to the loss of a home, business, or income. ▲ Past emotional problems and previous losses may come back. ▲ Relationships may become stressed. Emotions may be closer to the surface. Conflicts with family members can increase. ▲ Disrupted relationships and families may occur because of having to move out of the area. Normal support systems and familiar surroundings are changed, causing frustration and confusion. ▲ Parents may not be physically or emotionally available to their children following a disaster. They are busy cleaning up or are distracted and upset by difficulties related to the event. ▲ Financial worries and feelings of helplessness may occur due to loss of work. ▲ The hassles of dealing with bureaucracy can add to the already high levels of stress and cause further strain on relationships. ▲ The following feelings are normal: denial, disbelief, confusion, shock, sadness, yearning, anger, humiliation, despair and guilt. 	<p>Coping with loss is vital to your mental health. It is only natural to experience grief when you experience a major loss such as those experienced by the survivors of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The best thing you can do is allow yourself to grieve. There are many ways to cope effectively with your pain.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Seek out caring people. Find relatives and friends who can understand your feelings of loss. Join support groups with others who are experiencing similar losses. 2. Express your feelings. Tell others how you are feeling; it will help you to get through the grief. 3. Take care of your health. Be sure to eat well and get plenty of rest. If possible maintain regular contact with your family physician. Be aware of the danger of developing a dependence on medication or alcohol to deal with your grief. 4. Accept that life is for the living. It takes effort to begin to live again in the present and not dwell on the past. 5. Postpone major life changes. Try to hold off on making any major changes, such as moving, remarrying, changing jobs or having another child. You should give yourself time to adjust to your loss. 6. Be patient. It can take months or even years to absorb a major loss and accept your changed life. 7. Seek outside help when necessary. If your grief seems like it is too much to bear, seek professional assistance to help work through your grief. It's a sign of strength, not weakness, to seek help.
Getting back on track	Getting through this difficult time
<p>It makes sense that rebuilding will not be easy. As you feel ready, you can begin taking these actions.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Build safety. After the basic needs, medical attention, and housing needs are met, what else do you need to know to help you feel safe? Get those answers and plan what you will do in another emergency. Knowing what you know now, what plans and supplies will help protect your safety in the event of another emergency? Building safety means being prepared. 2. Be patient. People are better at rebuilding, when they remain calm and patient. Everyone has similar frustrations. 3. Take small steps. Make lists of items that need attention and keep working to resolve them. Try not to be overwhelmed by how big the job seems. Rejoice each evening at what you managed to do today. 4. Connect with others. It is difficult work getting through all the changes. Both helping others and asking for help make us realize that we aren't alone in this. 5. Gain courage. Know that as you strive for improvements, you will succeed. You may not get exactly what you want and may have to be flexible as you go along, but you will move forward. 	<p>It will take time to rebuild from these losses, both emotionally and physically. However, you have survived the event and can reestablish routines. You can find positive reasons to move forward and keep moving, even when you get discouraged. As a survivor, these steps can help you on your way:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Accept the reality of the loss. ▲ Allow yourself and other family members to feel sadness and grief over what has happened. ▲ Adjust to a new environment. Acknowledge that the person or possessions lost are gone forever. ▲ Put it behind you and move on, when you are ready. Do not continue to let the loss take a physical, emotional, or spiritual toll. ▲ Have faith in better times to come. <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; margin-top: 20px;"> <p>For more information on hurricane recovery and health concerns, visit the Red Cross Disaster Assistance and Resources page at: http://katrina.redcross.org</p> </div>