



Presented at Post-Harvey Community Workshop

# TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

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## Some Normal Reactions to a Disaster

### Physical

Fatigue, exhaustion  
Sleep disturbance  
Change in appetite  
Nausea  
Dizziness / Headaches  
Sensitivity to noise  
Gastrointestinal problems  
Increased startle response  
Muscle tremors  
Profuse sweating  
Accident prone  
Tenseness/Grinding teeth

### Cognitive

Difficulty concentration  
Difficulty making decisions  
Impaired memory  
Decreased self-esteem  
Worry  
Confusion  
Nightmares  
Hyper vigilance  
Obsessing  
Blaming & thoughts of retaliation

### Emotional

Frustration/Irritability  
Guilt  
Sadness/Depression  
Mood swings  
Anger  
Lonely  
Loss of pleasure  
Anxiety or nervousness  
Emotional numbness  
Helplessness  
Loss of emotional control  
Tearfulness for no apparent reason.

### Behavioral

Withdrawal  
Agitation  
Increased conflict/arguing  
Reduced intimacy  
Impaired work/school performance  
Distrust/Suspiciousness  
Over-protectiveness  
Blaming  
Impulsiveness  
Loss of trust in self & others

## **Stress Management Tips**

Accept that these feelings are normal and will go away over time.

Take one step at a time. Set priorities. Take tasks in small steps.

Structure your time. Go back to as normal a schedule as possible.

Eat regular meals and drink plenty of water.

Stay busy but rest when needed.

Stay connected to people. Get and give support.

Talk to people. Share your feelings. Talk is a healing medicine.

Exercise. Work out those frustrations. Smile...another source of endorphins.

Enjoy small pleasures, however small or short. 2 minutes count. Reward yourself.

Be patient with yourself and others. Everyone is stressed.

Stay positive. Remind yourself how you've gotten through difficulties before.

Focus on what you CAN control. Divert your attention from what is uncontrollable.

Breathe.....Use your breath to calm yourself. Breathe in deeply. Exhale slowly.

Avoid overuse of alcohol.

Do not label yourself crazy. You are normal and having normal reactions.

## **It is time to seek professional help in the event of:**

Symptoms lasting longer than 2-4 weeks

Panic Attacks

Immobilizing Depression

Seriously impaired functioning

Thoughts of self-harm or harm to others or that life is not worth living

Chest pain or persistent irregular heart beats

Recurrent dizziness or headaches

Crying spells or bursts of anger

This does not indicate craziness or weakness. It only means that the disaster was just too difficult for the person to handle alone. When in doubt, contact a counselor or physician.

## **Helping Children Cope with Disaster**

### **Normal Reactions:**

Nervousness / anxiety	Intense / unpredictable emotions
Fear	Irritable / temper fits
Withdrawal from family	Changes in thinking patterns
Acting out in school	Nausea, headaches
Shock / overly sensitive to environment	Trouble completing routine tasks

### **Signs of Concern: When it is time to seek professional help**

Severe cognitive limitations	Hypervigilance
Intrusive thoughts / flashbacks	Extreme withdrawal/avoidance
Chronic headaches, stomachaches, dizziness	Refusal to return to school
Nightmares, screaming in sleep, bedwetting	Atypical behavior problems

### **Coping Techniques**

Restore sense of safety with predictable routines.

Listen: Let them tell their story, over and over again with facts, thoughts & feelings.

Answer questions, but tell them only what they need to know, no gory details.

Reassure with appropriate physical contact.

Provide opportunity for play; play is how they cope (especially under age 4).

Rebuild something together to reduce feelings of helplessness.

Interact with journaling, drawing, art, role playing, reading books about how other children cope, deep breathing, muscle relaxation, create a feelings box with pictures or tangible items that bring comfort, teach coping statements to soothe anxiety.

Take care of them; don't expect them to take care of you.

Predict triggers and plan how to cope (rain, holiday, Harvey anniversary date).

Limit television viewing of news of storms.

Avoid making false promises.

Identify safe person at school with whom they can talk on a hard day

## **Spiritual Effects Experienced After a Traumatic Event**

Feeling:      Isolated & disconnected from God  
                 Empty  
                 Abandoned or not loved but God  
                 Anger with God  
                 Guilt for feelings of anger, fear, sadness

Questioning God and theological beliefs

"Where was God when the water was coming into my house?"  
"Why didn't God just make the rain stop?"  
"If God is good and loving, then why.....?"

Withdrawal from faith community

                 Isolating from people who love you  
                 Angry with the church for not helping enough

Increased awareness of mortality which leads to fear and anxiety

Loss of meaning or purpose

So many of these questions and feelings are wrapped in grief. Grief is not limited to death.

Ultimately grief is about changes that come from losing what we love, find value or security in.

### **Helpful ways to deal with loss and the spiritual effect it may have on you.**

Acknowledge & talk about your loss and the pain/suffering that comes with it.

Realize that these questions and feelings are a normal part of grief.

Don't get stuck in the thoughts that you "are losing your faith or are not spiritual enough". This is not true. Questioning is OK.

Reach out to your local church and choose to communicate your feelings and questions.

Tell God how you feel. He has created all of our emotions and wants to hear from us.

What you are experiencing is a normal reaction to experiencing a disaster.

## **Counseling Resources**

Disaster Related Crisis Counseling (24 hours)	(713) 970-7070
Innovative Alternatives-Bay Area	(832) 864-6000
Pro-Act LLC	(713) 475-0072
Counseling over the Phone	
Red Cross text TALKWITHUS to 66746	
SAMSHA text TalkWithUs to 66746 or	(800) 985-5990
Family Services of Galveston County	
<a href="http://www.fsc-galveston.org/about/">www.fsc-galveston.org/about/</a>	
Galveston	(409) 762-8636
Dickinson	(281) 576-6366