

Hurricane Preparedness & Resource Guide

For Individuals and Families



Employee Assistance Program
We Care, Just Call

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www.FOH4YOU.com

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Overview

History teaches us that a lack of awareness and preparation are common threads among all major hurricane disaster situations. However, by knowing what actions you should take, you can be less vulnerable. FOH recognizes and understands the heightened anxiety levels that many people are feeling with the approaching hurricane season. In order to be prepared, both physically and emotionally, we have developed this guide to help you learn about hurricanes and how you can get ready. It will also help you understand the anxious feelings you and your family may experience as well as the importance of resiliency.

DID YOU KNOW:

- In areas that have been significantly impacted by the hurricanes—25 percent to 30 percent of the population may experience clinically significant mental health needs and an additional 10 percent to 20 percent may show sub-clinical, but not trivial, needs.
- Up to 500,000 people may be in need of professional assistance.

DEFINING A HURRICANE

A hurricane is a type of tropical cyclone, the generic term for a low pressure system that generally forms in the tropics. A typical cyclone is accompanied by thunderstorms, and in the Northern Hemisphere, a counterclockwise circulation of winds near the earth's surface.

All Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico coastal areas are subject to hurricanes or tropical storms. Parts of the Southwest United States and the Pacific Coast experience heavy rains and floods each year from hurricanes spawned off Mexico. The Atlantic hurricane season lasts from June through November, with the peak season from mid-August to late October.

Hurricanes can cause catastrophic damage to coastlines and several hundred miles inland. Winds can exceed 155 miles per hour. Hurricanes and tropical storms can also spawn tornadoes and microbursts, create storm surges along the coast, and cause extensive damage from heavy rainfall.

Hurricanes are classified into five categories based on their wind speed, central pressure and damage potential (see chart). Category Three and higher hurricanes are considered major hurricanes, though Categories One and Two are still extremely dangerous and warrant your full attention.

SAFFIR-SIMPSON HURRICANE SCALE

Scale Number (Category)	Sustained Winds (MPH)	Damage	Storm Surge
1	74-95	Minimal: Unanchored mobile homes, vegetation and signs.	4-5 feet
2	96-110	Moderate: All mobile homes, roofs, small crafts, flooding.	6-8 feet
3	111-130	Extensive: Small buildings, low-lying roads cut off.	9-12 feet
4	131-155	Extreme: Roofs destroyed, trees down, roads cut off, mobile homes destroyed. Beach homes flooded.	13-18 feet
5	More than 155	Catastrophic: Most buildings destroyed. Vegetation destroyed. Major roads cut off. Homes flooded.	Greater than 18 feet

Hurricanes can produce widespread torrential rains. Floods are the deadly and destructive result. Slow-moving storms and tropical storms moving into mountainous regions tend to produce especially heavy rain. Excessive rain can trigger landslides or mud slides, especially in mountainous regions. Flash flooding can occur due to intense rainfall. Flooding on rivers and streams may persist for several days or more after the storm.

Between 1970 and 1999, more people lost their lives from freshwater inland flooding associated with land-falling tropical cyclones than from any other weather hazard related to tropical cyclones.

ADDITIONAL WEATHER TERMS AND HAZARDS RELATED TO HURRICANES

Hurricane—An intense tropical weather system with a well-defined circulation and maximum sustained winds of 74 mph or higher.

Tropical Storm—An organized system of strong thunderstorms with a well-defined circulation and maximum sustained winds of 39 to 73 mph.

Tropical Depression—An organized system of clouds and thunderstorms with a defined circulation and maximum sustained winds of 38 mph or less.

Storm Surge—A large dome of water, often 50 to 100 miles wide, that sweeps ashore near where a hurricane strikes land and typically accounts for nine of ten hurricane fatalities. A buildup of the water level up to 15 feet or more can cause severe flooding and damage along the coast, particularly when the storm surge coincides with normal high tides.

Tornadoes—Even though a hurricane or tropical storm weakens as it moves inland, it can produce deadly and damaging tornadoes.

Flooding—Typically, hurricanes bring heavy rains that can compound drainage problems in areas experiencing storm surge flooding. Rainfall totals of 10 inches are not uncommon when a tropical storm or hurricane moves across a coastal location. Over land, torrential rain may continue even after the wind has diminished. Rainfall totals of this magnitude could easily result in destructive flash flooding and river flooding. In the past few hurricane seasons, more people have died from fresh-water flooding than from storm surge. Flooding also causes extensive property and agricultural losses.

Getting Prepared

BEFORE A HURRICANE

Ordinarily, hurricanes are tracked for weeks before reaching land. A hurricane watch implies a storm within 24-36 hours of landfall and a hurricane warning occurs within 24 hours of landfall. Fortunately, hurricanes are predictable and are trackable with early warnings, so that families often have a chance to prepare and evacuate if necessary. The family should have designated supplies ready including provisions for rapid evacuation. Practicing evacuations as a family will help make sure that you all are prepared in the event of a hurricane.

- Give children factual information about hurricanes in simple terms.
- Develop a family preparedness plan so that all family members will know what to do in case of a hurricane or other disaster. This should include a plan for pets. (See Taking Care of Your Pets on page 8)
- Assemble an Disaster Supply Kit in a large backpack or duffel bag or an easy-to-carry covered trash container. (See Disaster Supply Kit below)
- Create and practice a Family Disaster Plan, so that if you are instructed to do so, you can evacuate quickly and safely. (See Family Disaster Plan below)
- Get information and follow through on reinforcing your home.

DISASTER SUPPLY KIT

- Water**—at least one gallon daily per person for three to seven days
- Food**—at least enough for three to seven days
 - non-perishable packaged or canned food/juices
 - foods for infants or the elderly
 - snack foods
 - non-electric can opener
 - cooking tools/fuel
 - paper plates/plastic utensils
- Blankets/Pillows, etc.**
- Clothing**—seasonal/rain gear/ sturdy shoes
- First Aid Kit/Medicines/Prescription Drugs**
- Special Items**—for babies and the elderly
- Toiletries/Hygiene items/Moisture wipes**
- Flashlight/Batteries**
- Radio**—Battery-operated and NOAA weather radio
- Cash** (with some small bills)—Banks and ATMs may not be open or available for extended periods.
- Keys**
- Toys, Books and Games**
- Important documents**—in a waterproof container or watertight resealable plastic bag—insurance, medical records, bank account numbers, Social Security card, etc.
- Tools**—keep a set with you during the storm
- Full tank of gas in your vehicle**

FAMILY DISASTER PLAN

- Discuss the type of hazards that could affect your family. Know your home's vulnerability to storm surge, flooding and wind.
- Locate a safe room or the safest areas in your home for each hurricane hazard. In certain circumstances the safest area may not in be your home but within your community.
- Determine escape routes from your home and places to meet loved ones. These should be measured in tens of miles rather than hundreds of miles.
- Have an out-of-state friend as a family contact, so all your family members have a single point of contact.
- Make a plan now for what to do with your pets if you need to evacuate.
- Post emergency telephone numbers by your phones and make sure your children know how and when to call 9-1-1.
- Check your insurance coverage—flood damage is not usually covered by homeowners insurance.

- Stock non-perishable emergency supplies and a Disaster Supply Kit.
- Use a NOAA weather radio. Remember to replace its battery every 6 months, as you do with your smoke detectors.
- Take first aid, CPR and disaster preparedness classes.

PREPARING YOUR HOME

- Have backflow valves installed in your plumbing's sewer traps to prevent flood waters from backing up into the drains of your home.
- Make a list of items to bring inside in case of hurricane-force winds and/or flooding (patio furniture, lawn decorations, tools, trash cans, planters, etc.).
- Clear loose and clogged rain gutters and downspouts so that water is able to drain properly.
- If you live near the water, consider elevating your home to make it more resistant to flood-driven waters. (Check with your town's planning and zoning official for approval.)
- Raise your furnace, water heater and electric panel if they are in areas of your home that may be flooded.
- Seal walls and openings in basements with water-proofing compounds to avoid seepage through cracks.
- Take photographs of your home for insurance purposes.
- If you have a boat, determine where you can store it in the event of a flood.
- Write down instructions for how to turn off electricity, gas and water if authorities advise you to do so.

DURING A HURRICANE

If a hurricane is likely in your area, you should:

- Listen to the radio or TV for information.
- Secure your home, close storm shutters, and secure outdoor objects or bring them indoors.
- Turn off utilities if instructed to do so. Otherwise, turn the refrigerator thermostat to its coldest setting and keep its doors closed.
- Turn off propane tanks. Avoid using the phone, except for serious emergencies.
- Moor your boat if time permits.
- Ensure a supply of water for sanitary purposes such as cleaning and flushing toilets. Fill the bathtub and other large containers with water.

You should evacuate under the following conditions:

- If you are directed by local authorities to do so. Be sure to follow their instructions.
- If you live in a mobile home or temporary structure—such shelters are particularly hazardous during hurricanes, no matter how well-fastened to the ground.
- If you live in a high-rise building—hurricane winds are stronger at higher elevations.
- If you live on the coast, on a floodplain, near a river, or on an inland waterway.
- If you feel you are in danger.

If you are unable to evacuate, go to your safe room. If you do not have one, follow these guidelines:

- Stay indoors during the hurricane and away from windows and glass doors.
- Close all interior doors—secure and brace external doors.
- Keep curtains and blinds closed. Do not be fooled if there is a lull; it could be the eye of the storm—winds will pick up again.
- Take refuge in a small interior room, closet, or hallway on the lowest level.
- Lie on the floor under a table or another sturdy object.

RECOVERING FROM DISASTER

Recovering from a disaster is usually a gradual process. Safety is a primary issue, as are mental and physical well-being. If assistance is available, knowing how to access it makes the process faster and less stressful. This section offers some general advice on steps to take after disaster strikes in order to begin getting your home, your community and your life back to normal.

AFTER THE HURRICANE

- Keep monitoring radio, TV (local or cable), NOAA Weather Radio and/or the Internet.
- Roads may be closed for your protection.
- If you come upon a barricade or a flooded road, turn around and go another way!
- Avoid weakened bridges and washed out roads. Do not drive into flooded areas.
- Stay on firm ground. Moving water only six inches deep can sweep you off your feet.
- Standing water may be electrically charged from underground or downed power lines.
- Check gas, water, electrical lines and appliances for damage.
- Do not drink or prepare food with tap water until you are certain it is not contaminated.
- Avoid using candles and other open flames indoors. Use a flashlight to inspect for damage.
- Be especially cautious if using a chainsaw to cut fallen trees.
- Use the telephone to report life-threatening emergencies only.
- Wait until an area is declared safe before entering.
- If you are using an emergency generator, make sure the exhaust is vented to the outside.
- Most important, be a GOOD neighbor.

Taking Care of Your Pets

BEFORE THE HURRICANE

- Make sure that your pets are current on their vaccinations. Pet shelters may require proof of vaccines.
- Have a current photograph.
- Keep a collar with identification on your pet. Consider microchipping your pet for permanent security.
- Have a leash on hand to control your pet.
- Have a properly-sized pet carrier for each animal—carriers should be large enough for the animal to stand and turn around.
- Plan your evacuation strategy and don't forget your pet! Specialized pet shelters, animal control shelters, veterinary clinics and friends and relatives out of harm's way are ALL potential refuges for your pet during a disaster.
- If you plan to shelter your pet—work it into your evacuation route planning.

PET DISASTER SUPPLY KIT

- Proper identification including immunization records
- Ample supply of food and water
- A carrier or cage
- Medications
- Collar, leash. Consider a muzzle, if you think your pet may be fearful.

DURING THE HURRICANE

- Bring pets indoors well in advance of a storm—reassure them and remain calm.
- Animals brought to a pet shelter are required to have: Proper identification collar and rabies tag, proper identification on all belongings, a carrier or cage, a leash, an ample supply of food, water and food bowls, any necessary medications, specific care instructions and newspapers or trash bags for clean-up.
- Pet shelters may be filled on first-come, first-served basis. Call ahead and determine availability.

AFTER THE HURRICANE

- Walk pets on a leash until they become re-oriented to their home—often, familiar scents and landmarks may be altered and pets could easily be confused and become lost. Also, downed power lines, reptiles brought in with high water and debris can all pose a threat for animals after a disaster.
- If pets cannot be found after a disaster, contact the local animal control office to find out where lost animals can be recovered. Bring along a picture of your pet if possible.
- After a disaster, animals can become aggressive or defensive—monitor their behavior.

ADDITIONAL PET RESOURCES

- The Humane Society of the United States: www.hsus.org/hsus_field/hsus_disaster_center/resources/
- FEMA Information for Pet Owners: www.fema.gov/plan/prepare/animals.shtml
- Bring Your Pet: www.bringyourpet.com

Financial FAQs—a Hurricane Reality

MORTGAGE PAYMENTS:

What do I do about the home I own and cannot access; do I still need to pay the mortgage? You still own the property and there is debt, so you need to research your situation with your lender. Consider contacting FEMA, as they may have general input as to your rights under a declared disaster, as there may be some relief under federal law that is part of the declaration of the disaster. Contact your lender and review your options and requirements. Your lender may have a loss mitigation department where you can also direct your questions. If your home is funded via FHA, VA, or HUD, contact the HUD Housing Counseling Center, 888-297-8685 with questions.

RENTAL HOUSING:

Do I need to pay my rent? Contact FEMA to clarify your rights under a declared disaster. If you are not able to return or use the rental, and it is declared a disaster and uninhabitable, you may not need to pay from the period of the declaration on, but you are still responsible for rent up to the declaration. Contact your landlord, once you know the status/use of the rental and advise of your intent, (document the conversation date, etc.) when the rental is uninhabitable.

UTILITIES:

Do I need to pay? Assuming that the area was declared a national disaster, then most likely all utilities were shut off. You must contact the utility companies for advice, including; telephone, water, electric, gas, garbage. It is assumed that if the utilities are shut off, that your billing will cease, but this must be verified by contacting the utility companies. You are certainly responsible for all prior billings. Again, FEMA may have information on your rights and responsibilities as it relates to this situation.

PERSONAL LOANS/CAR LOANS/LEASES/STUDENT LOANS:

Do I have to pay? All debt-related expenses/loans still exist, and you are responsible. Contact each credit card company, financial institution, leasing company and the lender on student loans for direction as to your responsibility. Most will have programs in place, for either a delay or hardship, but you must contact the program. For car loans/leases, you should also contact your car insurance company because if your car is damaged it may be covered by your policy. If your car/truck is still in use, you will need to pay loans/fees, but they may have programs to allow some grace period.

INSURANCE—HOMEOWNERS, RENTER, CAR/TRUCK, HEALTH, LIFE, AND OTHER COVERAGE:

Do I need to pay my insurance expenses? If my employer provides my health insurance, is it still valid? Contact FEMA, as they may be able to outline your rights under a declared disaster. With a declared disaster there will be specific instructions/programs for your situation. If you lose your home, car, etc. your carrier will advise you what you need to do. Again, you are responsible for paying all past-due premiums, and for paying health, disability, life and special personal coverage's. Contact the carrier for status of payment. For group health coverage, you need to contact your employer to find out the actions they are taking. Also, contact the carrier of your group coverage to confirm coverage or other options, just in case your coverage is terminated for non-payment.

Preparing Yourself At Work

In the event you are unable to leave work during a disaster situation, it is important to have supplies to sustain you until you are able to leave or until help arrives.

PERSONAL WORKPLACE DISASTER SUPPLY KIT

Flashlight with extra batteries—Use the flashlight to find your way if the power is out. Do not use candles or any other open flame for emergency lighting.

Battery-powered radio—News about the emergency may change rapidly as events unfold. You also will be concerned about family and friends in the area. Radio reports will give information about the areas most affected.

Food—Enough non-perishable food to sustain you for at least one day (three meals) is suggested. Select foods that require no refrigeration, preparation or cooking, and little or no water. The following items are suggested:

- Ready-to-eat canned meals, meats, fruits and vegetables.
- Canned juices.
- High-energy foods (granola bars, energy bars, etc.).

Water—Keep at least one gallon of water available, or more if you are on medications that require water or that increase thirst. Store water in plastic containers such as soft drink bottles. Avoid using containers that will decompose or break, such as milk cartons or glass bottles.

Medications—Include usual non-prescription medications that you take, including pain relievers, stomach remedies, etc. If you use prescription medications keep at least a three-day supply of these medications at your workplace. Consult with your physician or pharmacist about how these medications should be stored, and your employer about storage concerns.

Tools and Supplies

- Emergency “space” blanket (mylar)
- Paper plates and cups, plastic utensils
- Non-electric can opener
- Personal hygiene items, including a toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, brush, soap, contact lens supplies, and feminine supplies
- Plastic garbage bags, ties
- Include at least one complete change of clothing and footwear, including a long sleeved shirt and long pants, as well as closed-toed shoes or boots
- If you wear glasses, keep an extra pair with your workplace disaster supplies

GENERAL INFORMATION

- Your kit should be adjusted based on your own personal needs.
- Do not include candles, weapons, toxic chemicals, or controlled drugs unless prescribed by a physician.

The Emotional Toll of Hurricanes

LESSONS LEARNED FROM HURRICANE DISASTERS

America has been described as a nation transformed by events. Some events move us forward. Others test our courage. Hurricanes certainly qualify as an event of the courage-testing variety. Withstanding something as powerful as a hurricane has taught us the meaning of resiliency. We have learned that when we help others, we are also helping ourselves and, together, we can turn hopelessness into hope. The following are some of the lessons learned from past hurricanes—lessons that will serve us well when dealing with future challenges:

- We learned that the inconceivable is possible (and that we have a responsibility to plan for it). In that same brief moment, we learned of our vulnerabilities.
- We learned about courage and witnessed uncommon acts of courage among common people.
- In the moments, days and months that followed past disasters, we learned of our resilience. We learned that with the empathy and support we give each other, our resilience becomes stronger.
- We learned about volunteerism. We learned about how helping others and contributing to our communities strengthens us and offers a framework for healing. We learned about our mutual responsibility to each other.
- We learned about the value of having disaster plans. We also realized how quickly we need to respond in disasters and, as a result, have begun to approach disaster training with greater attentiveness.
- We've learned that having fears is normal, that talking about fears is helpful and represents strength, and that empathetically listening and responding to each other's fears creates healing and strengthens our relationships.

OVERCOMING YOUR FEARS AND ANXIETY IN HURRICANE SITUATIONS

Although increased anxiety levels are normal if you are in an actual hurricane situation, there are ways to reduce the stress beforehand or in the aftermath. Anxiety can be a feeling of apprehension, dread or fear over a real or imagined threat to your well-being. Some amount of anxiety at times is normal. Feelings of anxiety can alert you when danger is present. Anxiety brought on by a traumatic event can become overwhelming and may get in the way of your daily life. Below are some helpful tips to assist you in overcoming anxious feelings:

- **Be prepared.** Anticipating and getting ready for the hurricane season will help offset anxiety about the situation.
- **Eat healthy foods.** Try to eat at your regular times and don't skip meals.
- **Limit caffeine.** Too much caffeine can make you edgy and anxious. Drink decaffeinated coffee, tea, colas or other sodas. Avoid chocolate.
- **Avoid nicotine and alcohol.** They both contain chemicals that can cause anxiety.
- **Practice relaxation exercises daily.** Sit quietly and breathe slowly and deeply when you're feeling anxious, meditate, or try visualizing that you're in your favorite place, calm and happy.
- **Don't over-commit.** Lots of people may need help after a hurricane, but trying to do too much all at once can bring on anxiety.
- **Maintain as much of your daily routine as possible.** The comfort of doing routine things in the wake of a hurricane can help relieve anxiety.

- **Limit your television news viewing.** Major events like hurricanes feed news coverage, but you don't have to subject yourself or your family to repeated doses of it. Tune in for occasional updates, but limit your exposure if it adds to your anxiety or that of your family members.
- **Keep family members close by, if it makes you feel better.** Being protective about your family's safety is good. But try not to overreact.
- **Do something for someone else.** Taking attention off your own worries and doing something nice for someone else can help lower anxiety.
- **Volunteer.** Contact area schools, hospitals or volunteer groups to ask how you can help. Taking action to be part of the solution is a very constructive way to reduce your anxiety.
- **Talk to someone.** If you start to feel overwhelmed by your emotions, talk with a friend, family member, doctor, religious advisor or mental health professional.

Impact on Children and Families

Hurricane warnings result in heightened anxiety and emotional distress, as people try to figure out when and where the hurricane will hit. Often the fear and anxiety is contagious, as families and the community prepare for the storm. There may be frenetic shopping for food, water, and emergency supplies, such as flashlights, candles, generators, and planking for boarding up of windows. People may line up at gas stations to fill up their tanks in preparation for evacuation. Families must figure out how to meet together in a safe place or to finalize evacuation plans.

A hurricane threatens the usual assumptions of safety. The torrential rains, flooding, and winds often disrupt telephone lines and other utilities, breaking down communication and compromising food and water supplies. A powerful storm can blow off the roofs of houses, break windows, blow open doors and destroy entire homes. Leaving shelter is dangerous, as wind-blown items such as shards of glass, parts of houses and trees can result in sudden injury or death.

Children may witness anxiety and fear in parents and caretakers who are usually confident. They may lose not only their home, but also cherished memorabilia and toys. They may be exposed to collapsed or damaged buildings, destruction of their school or familiar community landmarks.

There will be a spectrum of psychological casualties. The condition of individuals with pre-existing emotional and behavioral problems may be exacerbated if their support systems fail, if they lack medications, and if their routine is destabilized. Individuals may develop chronic emotional and behavioral problems following exposure to pervasive stresses, such as the loss of community infrastructure, of home or employment, or of family or friends. In addition, emotional exhaustion may impact the ability of an individual or family to recover.

Children and adults frequently experience traumatic reminders, during which individuals will suddenly relive and re-experience all the emotions, fears, thoughts and perceptions they initially experienced at the time of the hurricane. The usual traumatic reminders are hurricane warnings, the sudden onset of dark clouds, bolts of lightning, torrential rain and a pick-up in the wind, as well as the activities associated with hurricane preparations.

Common emotional reactions of children and families exposed to a hurricane include:

- Feelings of insecurity, unfairness, anxiety, fear, anger, sadness, despair, worries about the future
- Specific fear that it will happen again
- Childhood myths and explanations as to causality
- Disruptive behaviors, irritability, temper tantrums, agitation, hyperactivity
- Clinging-dependent behaviors or avoidant and phobic symptoms
- Somatic symptoms such as stomach aches, headaches, loss of appetite, nightmares, sleep problems
- Increased concerns regarding the safety of family members, friends and loved ones
- School-based problems with decreased motivation and school performance

Adolescents may respond differently than younger children in a hurricane or other natural disaster. They may exhibit behaviors which are:

- Socially withdrawn, angry, irritable
- Risky because they are eager to live life to the fullest
- In conflict with authority

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP YOUR CHILD

Parents should spend time talking to their children, letting them know that it is okay to ask questions and to share their worries. Issues may come up more than once and parents should remain patient and open to answering questions again and needing to clarify things. Although it will be hard finding time to have these conversations, parents can use regular family mealtimes or bedtimes to talk. They can let children know what is happening in the family, with their school, and in the community. They should answer questions briefly and honestly and be sure to ask their children for their opinions and ideas. For younger children, after talking about the hurricane, parents might read a favorite story or have a relaxing family activity to help them feel more safe and calm.

To help children's recovery, parents should:

- **Be a role model.** Try to remain calm, so your child can learn from you how to handle stressful situations.
- **Monitor adult conversations.** Be aware of what adults are saying about the hurricane or the damage. Children may misinterpret what they hear and be unnecessarily frightened.
- **Limit media exposure.** Protect your child from too many images of the hurricane, including those on television, on the Internet, on radio and in the newspaper.
- **Reassure children they are safe.** You may need to repeat this frequently even after the hurricane passes. Spend extra time with them, playing games outside, reading together indoors, or just cuddling. Be sure to tell them you love them.
- **Replace lost or damaged toys** as soon as you are able.
- **Calm worries about their friends' safety.** Even though phones may not be working, reassure your children that their friends' parents are taking care of them, just the way they are being taken care of by you.
- **Tell children about community recovery.** Reassure children that things are being done to restore electricity, phones, water and gas. Tell them that the town or city will be removing debris and helping families find housing.
- **Take care of your children's health.** Help them get enough rest, exercise, and healthy food. Be sure they have a balance of quiet and physical activities.
- **Maintain regular daily life.** Even in the midst of disruption and change, children feel more secure with structure and routine. As much as possible, keep to regular mealtimes and bedtimes.
- **Maintain expectations.** Stick to your family rules about good behavior and respect for others. Continue family chores, but keep in mind that children may need more reminding than usual.
- **Encourage children to help.** Children cope better and recover sooner if they feel they are helping out. Give them small clean-up tasks or other ways to contribute. Afterward, provide activities that are not related to the hurricane, such as playing cards or reading.
- **Be extra-patient once children have returned to school.** They may be more distracted and need extra help with homework for a while.
- **Give support at bedtime.** Children may be more anxious at times of separation from parents. Spend a little more time talking, cuddling, or reading than usual. (You'll want to start the bedtime routine earlier so that children get the sleep they need). If younger children need to sleep with you, let them know it is a temporary plan, and that soon they will go back to sleeping in their own beds.
- **Help with boredom.** Daily activities, such as watching television, playing on the computer, and having friends over, may have been disrupted. Extracurricular activities, like sports and or dance classes, may have been suspended. Help children think of alternative activities to do, such as board games, card games and arts and crafts. Try to find community programs (at the library, a park program, or a local YMCA) with child-friendly activities your child can attend.

- **Keep things hopeful.** Even in the most difficult situation, it is important to remain optimistic about the future. Your positive outlook will help children to see good things in the world around them. This will help get them through even the most challenging times.
- **Seek professional help** if your child still has difficulties more than six weeks after the hurricane.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO TO HELP THEMSELVES

Parents may have a tendency to neglect their own needs during a crisis. In order to take care of their children, parents must take care of themselves. Here are some things parents should keep in mind:

- **Take care of yourself physically.** Eat healthy, get enough sleep and get proper medical care.
- **Support each other.** Parents and other caregivers should take time to talk together and provide support as needed.
- **Put off major decisions.** Avoid making any unnecessary life-altering decisions during this stressful post-hurricane period.
- **Give yourself a break.** Try not to overdo clean-up activities. Avoid lifting heavy items or working for extended periods of time to reduce injury.

HOW FAMILIES CAN HELP CHILDREN COPE WITH FEAR AND ANXIETY

Whether a hurricane touches your family personally or news of it is brought into your home via newspapers and television, you can help children cope with the anxiety that disasters can cause.

Listening and talking to children about their concerns can reassure them that they will be safe. Start by encouraging them to discuss how they have been affected by what is happening around them. Even young children may have specific questions about tragedies. Children react to stress at their own developmental level.

Here are pointers for parents and other caregivers:

- **Encourage children to ask questions.** Listen to what they say. Provide comfort and assurance that address their specific fears. It's okay to admit you can't answer all of their questions.
- **Talk on their level.** Communicate with your children in a way they can understand. Don't get too technical or complicated.
- **Find out what frightens them.** Encourage your children to talk about fears they may have. They may worry that someone will harm them at school or that someone will try to hurt you.
- **Focus on the positive.** Reinforce the fact that most people are kind and caring. Remind your child of the heroic actions taken by ordinary people to help victims of tragedy.
- **Pay attention.** Your children's play and drawings may give you a glimpse into their questions or concerns. Ask them to tell you what is going on in the game or the picture. It's an opportunity to clarify any misconceptions, answer questions and give reassurance.
- **Develop a plan.** Establish a family emergency plan for the future, such as a meeting place where everyone should gather if something unexpected happens in your family or neighborhood. It can help you and your children feel safer.

Survivors and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

The effect of a disaster or traumatic event goes far beyond its immediate devastation. Just as it takes time to reconstruct damaged buildings, it takes time to grieve and rebuild our lives. Life may not return to normal for months, or even years, following a disaster or traumatic event. There may be changes in living conditions that cause changes in day-to-day activities, leading to strains in relationships, changes in expectations and shifts in responsibilities. These disruptions in relationships, roles and routines can make life unfamiliar or unpredictable.

THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN TRYING TO UNDERSTAND DISASTER EVENTS

- No one who experiences a disaster is untouched by it.
- It is normal to feel anxious about your family's safety.
- Profound sadness, grief and anger are normal reactions to an abnormal event.
- Acknowledging our feelings helps us recover.
- Focusing on your strengths and abilities will help you to heal.
- Accepting help from community programs and resources is healthy.
- We each have different needs and different ways of coping.
- It is common to want to strike back at people who have caused great pain. However, nothing good is accomplished by hateful language or actions.

SIGNS THAT STRESS MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE IS NEEDED

- Disorientation or confusion and difficulty communicating thoughts.
- Limited attention span and difficulty concentrating.
- Becoming easily frustrated.
- Overwhelming guilt and self-doubt.
- Depression, sadness and feelings of hopelessness.
- Mood swings and crying easily.
- Difficulty maintaining balance.
- Headaches and stomach problems.
- Tunnel vision/muffled hearing.
- Colds or flu-like symptoms.
- Difficulty sleeping.
- Poor work performance.
- Reluctance to leave home.
- Fear of crowds, strangers, or being alone.
- Increased use of drugs/alcohol.

WAYS TO EASE THE STRESS

- Talk with someone about your feelings (anger, sorrow and other emotions) even though it may be difficult.
- Don't hold yourself responsible for the disastrous event or be frustrated because you feel that you cannot help directly in the rescue work.
- Take steps to promote your own physical and emotional healing by staying active in your daily life patterns or by adjusting them. A healthy approach to life (e.g., healthy eating, rest, exercise, relaxation, meditation) will help both you and your family.
- Maintain a normal household and daily routine, limiting demanding responsibilities of yourself and your family.
- Spend time with family and friends.
- Participate in memorials, rituals and the use of symbols as a way to express feelings.
- Use existing support groups of family, friends and spiritual/religious outlets.
- Establish a family emergency plan. It can be comforting to know that there is something you can do.

A disaster or traumatic event can have far-reaching effects in several major areas of our lives, making rebuilding our emotional selves extremely difficult. However, sometimes just knowing what to expect can help ease the transition back to a normal life. As you and your family begin to rebuild your lives, you may face any or all of the situations described below.

PERSONAL UNCERTAINTIES

- Feeling mentally drained and physically exhausted is normal and common.
- The loss of a home, business, or income may result in displacement and confusion about the future.
- Unresolved emotional issues or pre-existing problems and previous losses may resurface.
- Anniversaries of the disaster or traumatic event remind us of our losses. This reaction may be triggered by the event date each month and may be especially strong on the yearly anniversary of the event.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIP CHANGES

- Relationships may become stressed when everyone's emotions are heightened, and conflicts with spouses and other family members may increase.
- When homes are destroyed or damaged, families may have to live in temporary housing or with relatives and friends, leading to overcrowding and added tension.
- Family members or friends may be forced to move out of the area, disrupting relationships and usual support systems.
- Parents may be physically or emotionally unavailable to their children following a disaster or traumatic event, because they are busy cleaning up or are preoccupied, distracted, or distressed by difficulties related to the event.
- Parents may become overprotective of their children and their children's safety.
- Children may be expected to take on more adult roles, such as watching siblings or helping with cleanup efforts, leaving less time to spend with friends or participate in routine activities, such as summer camp or field trips.

WORK DISRUPTIONS

- Fatigue and increased stress from preoccupation with personal issues can lead to poor work performance.
- Conflicts with co-workers may increase because of the added stress.
- Businesses may be forced to lay off employees, or company work hours and wages may be cut.
- Reduced income may require taking a second job.
- Daily travel and commute patterns may be disrupted because of the loss of a car or road reconstruction.

FINANCIAL WORRIES

- Those who experience work disruptions may be unable to regain their previous standard of living, leading to financial concerns and unpaid bills.
- Seeking financial assistance to rebuild and repair damages adds to the already high levels of stress caused by the disaster or traumatic event, and the hassles of dealing with a bureaucracy can add to the frustration.

HOW TO BE A SURVIVOR

Regardless of individual circumstances, everyone needs to complete several steps to recovery from a disaster or traumatic event.

- 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 closure to the situation and move on. Do not continue to let the loss take its physical, emotional, or spiritual toll.
- Have faith in better times to come.

You and your family have survived a traumatic event. That doesn't mean your lives are over or that you don't deserve to be happy again. Return to doing things you enjoy with friends and as a family. Reestablish the routines of your life. Make commitments and keep them.

If you or a member of your family still has trouble coping, ask for help. Consult a counselor or mental health professional. In the workplace, you may be able to get assistance from your human resources department. For help with financial matters, contact a financial advisor.

Additional Resources

FEDERAL/NATIONAL RESOURCES

American Red Cross: www.redcross.org or call 1-866-HELP-NOW. For missing persons call 1-866-GET-INFO.

FEMA: www.fema.gov or call 1-800-621-FEMA (3362), or 1-800-462-7585 (TTY)

FirstGov: www.firstgov.gov—The U.S. Government's official portal of information and resources

Humane Society of the United States: www.hsus.org

National Hurricane Center: www.nhc.noaa.gov

National Weather Service: <http://iwin.nws.noaa.gov/iwin/graphicsversion/bigmain.html>

Salvation Army: www.salvationarmyusa.org or 1-800-SAL-ARMY

ALABAMA STATE RESOURCES

Alabama Emergency Management Agency (EMA): <http://ema.alabama.gov>. Click on "Local EMA Offices" for local phone numbers.

Alabama Homeland Security:
www.homelandsecurity.alabama.gov

FLORIDA STATE RESOURCES

Florida Emergency Information Hotline:
1-800-342-3557. (Activated during emergencies.)

Evacuation Routes and Storm Surge Zones:
<http://floridadisaster.org/PublicMapping/index.htm>

Florida Emergency Operations Center:
www.floridadisaster.org/eoc/

GEORGIA STATE RESOURCES

Georgia Emergency Management & Homeland Security:
www.gema.state.ga.us or call 1-404-635-7000 or 1-800-TRY-GEMA (toll-free statewide)

LOUISIANA STATE RESOURCES

Resources for Disaster Relief in Monroe, LA:
1-800-749-2673

Louisiana Homeland Security: www.ohsep.louisiana.gov

City of New Orleans: www.cityofno.com/portal.aspx

Louisiana Governor's Office: www.gov.state.la.us

MISSISSIPPI STATE RESOURCES

Mississippi Crisis Line Helpline: 1-601-713-4357

Mississippi Emergency Management:
www.msema.org

NORTH CAROLINA STATE RESOURCES

North Carolina Emergency Management Division:
(800) 858-0368
www.nccrimecontrol.org

SOUTH CAROLINA STATE RESOURCES

South Carolina Emergency Management Division:
www.scemd.org/index.html or call (803) 737-8500

For a list of County Emergency Management Agencies:
www.scemd.org/who/county_orgs.html

TEXAS STATE RESOURCES

Governor's Division of Emergency Management:
www.txdps.state.tx.us/dem/pages/index.htm

EMAC (Emergency Management Assistance Compact):
(512)-424-2208 (phone) (512)-424-7160 (fax)

FOH4YOU.COM

Additional information, self-help tools and other resources are available online at www.FOH4YOU.com. Or call us for more information, help and support at 888-222-0634. Counselors are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to provide confidential assistance at no cost to you.

SOURCES:

American Red Cross
The National Child Traumatic Stress Network
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services
Administration
National Mental Health Association