

Coping With Holiday Stress After a Disaster

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If you lost your home, business or personal property due to Hurricane Irma, you or your family may be struggling to cope with the emotional impact of the disaster. For individuals and families looking to rebuild, the approaching holidays may be especially difficult.

FEMA's online information, Coping with Disaster provides suggestions that may ease the stress that can follow a traumatic event such as a hurricane, which can be even more challenging around the holiday season. There are special sections on how to recognize signs of disaster-related stress, and on how to help children deal with their emotional needs.

Among the suggestions:

- Limit your exposure to traumatic news coverage and social media about the disaster until you can handle it.
- Stay connected with family and friends.
- Accept the fact that your recovery may take time.

Disasters can leave children feeling frightened, confused, and insecure. Whether a child has personally experienced trauma, has seen the event on television, or has heard it discussed by adults, it is important for parents and teachers to be informed and ready to help if reactions to stress begin to occur.

The staff at the Mayo Clinic say the holiday season causes stress and depression in some people. This may be heightened by the emotional impact of other situations, such as the recent hurricane. They offer some tips on how to cope with stress, depression and the holidays.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, symptoms of depression may include:



- Difficulty concentrating, remembering details, and making decisions
- Fatigue and decreased energy
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, and/or helplessness
- Feelings of hopelessness and/or pessimism
- Insomnia, early-morning wakefulness, or excessive sleeping
- Irritability, restlessness
- Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration provides crisis counseling and support to people experiencing emotional distress related to natural or human-caused disasters. SAMHSA provides toll-free, multilingual and confidential support on its Disaster Distress Helpline. Stress, anxiety, and other depression-like symptoms are common reactions after a disaster. Call 800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746 to connect with a trained crisis counselor.

Other resources for helping you and your children cope after the disaster can be found at these websites or by calling the number provided:

- FEMA: ready.gov/kids.
- National Center for Child Traumatic Stress: Floods. Phone 310-235-2633 or 919-682-1552.
- Save the Children: Ten Tips to Help Kids Cope with Disasters, Hurricane Tips for Parents: How to Help Kids.
- American Academy of Pediatrics: Helping Your Child Cope, Talking to Children about Disasters, How Children of Different Ages Respond to Disasters, How Families can Cope with Relocation Stress After a Disaster.

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