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Disaster News



Mississippi Emergency Management Agency – Federal Emergency Management Agency

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MEDIA CONTACTS: MEMA—601-960-9039 or 601-953-3622
FEMA—662-329-7570

Stress is a Normal Sequence of a Disaster

COLUMBUS, MS— As the rebuilding effort goes on and on, the strain begins to show on those who were affected by the November tornadoes. Families find their old neighborhood is no longer the same, physically or emotionally. Couples find themselves arguing, or worrying about finances. Businesses struggle to stay afloat.

Stress caused by loss or a devastating experience can take on several forms. Many disaster victims are likely to experience at least one of several emotional responses: anger, fatigue, loss of appetite, sleeplessness, nightmares, depression, inability to concentrate, hyperactivity and increased alcohol or drug use.

“People are tired and the frustration level may be high,” said Federal Coordinating Officer Michael Bolch. “People are more likely to have physical stress-related symptoms when they get tired.”

“Keeping stress levels down as the recovery process continues is no easy task,” said Mississippi State Coordinating Officer Leon Shaifer. “Your neighborhoods may not be the way they were, but you can be stronger – every closed door opens up to a new one. We just need to stay connected with each other.”

State and federal health experts suggest a number of ways to relieve the symptoms of emotional distress caused by a traumatic event:

Talk about your feelings with family, friends and neighbors. Friends and family are good medicine and sharing common experiences helps people deal with and overcome anxiety and feelings of helplessness.

Get back to regular routines as soon as possible, including a healthy diet and plenty of sleep. Make bedtime a special moment of calm and comfort for young children.

Do some physical exercise every day.

Children are particularly vulnerable to emotional stress after a disaster, including excessive fear of the dark, crying, fear of being alone and constant worry.

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Reassure children that they are safe; encourage them to talk about their fears. Emphasize they are not responsible for what happened, and hold and hug them frequently.

Talk over your disaster experiences. Give everyone a chance to let off steam. Show your kids it is OK to grieve.

Talk with your kids about what each of you might do to handle future disasters.

Inform children. Every effort should be made to keep children informed about what is happening. Explanations should be in simple language. With children five or older, rehearse safety measures for use in case of future disasters.

Take a break. No matter how much work there is to do, make some time for you and your family to play.

Relax your expectations of both yourself and others for a while.

Do not rely on alcohol or drugs to help you cope. This is a vulnerable time, when bad habits can sink deep roots into your life.

Hug and laugh.

Take note of, and take pride in, the things you get done each day.

If depression, anxiety or other problems continue for either adults or children, or you have questions about your own or your children's reactions, contact the community counseling services' Project Recovery Center at 662-769-3441, 24 hours a day until further notice. They can help you overcome the stress and anxiety left by the disaster.