



State Emergency Operations Center

Joint Information Center

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DEALING WITH STRESS AFTER NATURAL DISASTERS

JACKSON – Power outages, lack of drinking water and ice, and loss of telecommunications are not the only problems Mississippians affected by the recent tornadoes and upcoming flood waters will face.

Natural disasters like tornadoes and floods can cause serious stress and depression. People feel and express their reactions to a crisis differently. Some emotional reactions include:

- Feeling very nervous, helpless, fearful or angry.
- Feeling hopeless about the future.
- Feeling detached or unconcerned about others.
- Feeling numb and unable to experience love or joy.
- Becoming easily upset or agitated.
- Having frequent distressing dreams or memories.
- Avoiding people, places and things related to the disaster.
- Having difficulty concentrating.

How people physically react to a disaster also varies. Some physical reactions include:

- Having an upset stomach, eating too much or too little, or having gastrointestinal problems.
- Experiencing a pounding heart, rapid breathing, sweating or severe headache when thinking about the disaster.
- Having trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or sleeping too much.

“Although everyone deals with stress at some time in his or her life, when the anxiety and depression begin to affect one's occupational and social functioning, it may be an indication of a more serious problem requiring professional help,” said Dr. Lydia Weisser, Mississippi Department of Mental Health medical director.

Victims of the tornadoes are encouraged to talk about their feelings, even though it may be difficult and to rely on support groups like family, friends, local churches and local community mental health centers.

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“We want everyone who needs help dealing with the stress and devastation of the tornadoes which swept across our state to know that we are here for them,” said Ed LeGrand, executive director of the DMH. “Remember that it is normal to feel anxious about yourself and your family. You are not alone; no one who experiences a disaster such as this is left untouched.”

LeGrand said the impact of the tornadoes will last far beyond the immediate devastation. It will take time to not only repair buildings, but to rebuild lives as well.

According to DMH, to help recover mentally from the disaster it is important to remember the following steps: accept the reality of the loss, allow yourself and other family members to feel sadness and grief, try to adjust to a new environment, acknowledge that personal possessions lost are gone forever, and have faith in better times to come.

For more information about behavioral health resources in your area, contact the Mississippi Department of Mental Health Helpline at 1-877-210-8513.

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DMH is supporting a better tomorrow by making a difference in the lives of Mississippians with mental illness, substance abuse problems and intellectual or developmental disabilities one person at a time.