

TYPICAL STRESS REACTIONS AND HOW TO HELP

PERSON'S REACTIONS

Anxiety

Guilt

Terror/Fearfulness

Helplessness

Chaotic or out of control

Fear of being alone

Worry about what will happen

PERSON'S NEEDS

Security

Reassurance

Acknowledgement,
patience, simplification
of tasks and expectations

Physical nurturing,
simplification of tasks
and expectations

Calm, peaceful
environment

Safety and conviction
that self and others will
be safe, reassurance that
someone is there with
them

Reassurance, sense of
safety

HOW TO HELP:

- Give information and facts
 - DO NOT make false promises, (i.e. there's no way a tornado could hit this building; there won't be a flood here, etc.
 - DO focus on offering yourself as a helper, that they're not alone, what staff Officials are doing to ensure safety
- Reflect and help people label feelings – i.e., fear, worry, sadness, anger; “it sounds like you're feeling ~”, “I can see how you would worry about ~.”
Normalize their feelings – i.e., given what you've been through, it's normal to feel ~, or fear ~; others have indicated they are feeling the same way
- DO NOT try to tell them how they should or should not feel; rather, acknowledge their feelings and offer support

- Provide reassurance about safety/security – e.g., we’re here to help; staff are on site at all times; we learned a lot from Katrina, plans are being implemented in a smoother manner.
 - if someone is concerned about flooding or the safety of the shelter, reassure them that leadership are monitoring local conditions
- Offer a healthy outlet to express feelings/fears, such as talking, drawing, playing a game or some other distraction, eating a snack, do some physical exercise
- Offer a little more structure than usual – i.e., guidance in following routines or schedules, establishing distractions such as setting up games, etc.
- If a person seems distressed or agitated, help by directing them to a calmer, quieter place, engage them in reassuring talk or a quiet activity, do some simple relaxation exercises like deep breathing, talk about favorite things
- Seek assistance from additional staff if you feel uncomfortable or if something occurs that you do not understand
- Help them feel a sense of control by engaging in simple activities or routines they can control.
- Help them talk about healthy coping – i.e., “what do you normally do when you feel afraid/worried/nervous, etc?” “what do you need right now to feel safe?”
- Talk about a positive hopeful future – i.e., what are you looking forward to when the storm is over? What would you like to do tomorrow and the day after?
- Remember: fear, anger, worry, anxiety and other distress are contagious; thus, monitor your own feelings, work to stay calm when talking to people, and take breaks to relax or calm down or rejuvenate yourself as needed

Here is a simple relaxation exercise that can be useful to staff and shelter residents alike:

- Get comfortable in your chair; close your eyes if you want to, or focus on a spot on the wall
- Take 3 slow, deep breaths; inhale and exhale slowly each time
- Think about yourself in a calm, relaxed place – imagine all the details, sights, sounds, smells, and what you are doing in that place; spend a couple of minutes enjoying this image.
- As you complete this and open your eyes, take 3 more slow deep breaths
- If you like, take a moment to draw yourself in your relaxed place; or, do another calm activity such as writing, or quiet visiting

Courtesy of:
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