

Making Life Better

After The Storm: Coping With The Trauma Caused By Natural Disasters

(NAPSA)—The sense of shattered safety and loss after a natural disaster, such as a hurricane, can wage a long-term emotional toll on everyone involved, according to AmeriHealth Caritas, a national leader in health care solutions.

“After hurricanes, we typically see people assessing the physical aftermath of the storm, yet we rarely explore the emotional after effects,” said Dr. Michael Golinkoff. “People need to monitor their mental well-being during what can be a challenging and traumatic experience.”

Dr. Golinkoff, who has more than 30 years of experience in clinical and developmental psychology, said people, especially children and those most in need, can have greater difficulty readjusting after a hurricane because they have fewer resources—emotionally and financially—to help them bounce back.

“Children are more impressionable whereas adults can put the sense of loss in a different perspective,” he said, adding that parents and guardians should regularly check in with teachers and caregivers to see if children whose lives have been affected by hurricanes have any changes in behavior or develop mood swings.

“Trillium Health Resources, based in eastern North Carolina, has firsthand experience with the accuracy of Dr. Golinkoff’s advice,” said Cindy Ehlers, vice president of clinical operations for Trillium Health Resources, a leading specialty care manager for individuals with substance misuse, mental illness, and intellectual or developmental disabilities. “Following Hurricane Matthew in 2016, we documented a 45 percent increase in the number of children ages 13 and younger accessing mental health services.

“Hurricane Florence has caused even greater dislocation and destruction in our area than Matthew did two years ago and we expect the traumatic impact on children to be more severe and widespread,” added Ehlers. “We are here 24/7 to help families in southeastern North Carolina address these challenges.”

Dr. Golinkoff encourages hurricane survivors to understand that they are not alone and to be open to discussing their fears and frustrations with others. The sense of community that comes from reaching out and connecting with others during traumatic times can be a tremendous help for those in need.



Going through a hurricane can cause an emotional toll in many people. Your doctor can help.

Acknowledge Your Feelings

Simple things, such as the stability of your family and community, can no longer be taken as a given. People have lost personal belongings that can't be replaced, such as photographs and family keepsakes, and, in some cases, people have lost loved ones and friends.

“Everything changes—schools, neighborhoods, friends—which cannot be ignored. It’s a shared trauma because your family and others in your community are likely experiencing the same things,” Dr. Golinkoff said. “It’s best to talk about what you’re feeling and say that you’re sad. We need to let people know that it’s okay to grieve a loss. It’s okay not to be okay.”

Seek Support

People often avoid the topic of mental health out of fear or shame. “It’s important that people not retreat into a shell or self-protection mode where they do not want to engage with other people,” Dr. Golinkoff said. “Recognize any sizable change within yourself and don’t be afraid to talk about it.”

Keep Motivated

Self-care is essential at all times but even more so when dealing with a traumatic experience. Dr. Golinkoff suggests engaging in volunteer opportunities to help neighbors or rebuild parts of your community.

“Engaging the community in restoration efforts is a great way to create pride and self-efficacy,” Golinkoff said. “This allows for individuals to show resiliency by taking adversity and showing the best parts of human nature.”

Learn More

For more information and advice, go to www.amerihealthcaritas.com and www.trilliumhealthresources.org or call (877) 685-2415.