



Helping Those Who Volunteer

As time passes following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, many generous professional and volunteer helpers will still be on the front lines of disaster. During crisis, the emotional and physical needs of those who help others are often forgotten. In some cases these giving individuals may not consider their own needs. They may seem to be untouched by frustration, fatigue, stress and depression. Because the circumstances are so drastic, they think they should “muster” through. But helpers need assistance, too.

Recovery from the devastating effects of the hurricane has begun and the question becomes “When will this intense commitment end?” Anxiety for both volunteer and professional helpers is produced by this uncertainty about the future. Catastrophes produce a wide variety of stress symptoms among those who are helping. They may appear immediately, in a few hours, or within days of the event. Disaster helpers may experience:

- Loss of emotional control
- Fear
- Guilt
- Anger
- Grief
- Withdrawal
- Depression
- Poor concentration and attention span
- Memory problems
- Disrupted work-sleep-eating patterns

Important for Helpers to Help Themselves

Hurricane helpers need to take care of themselves. But that can be difficult to do for some. For helpers to help themselves they can:

- Realize when a situation or problem should be referred to another helper.
- Be aware of your energy limits; stop when these limits have been reached.
- Prioritize your time.
- Know your strengths and weaknesses. • Learn to say no without feeling guilty.
- Take time for pleasure.
- Change your environment; take short breaks.
- Seek normality.
- Communicate with people who understand your endeavor.
- Practice “optimism” and “humor.”



Others Can Help the Helpers

If you have a family member or friend who is helping in relief efforts you can help them. Keeping connected to others and expressed appreciation is important. Specific ways to help relief helpers include:

- Encourage sensible health habits.
- Repeatedly show appreciation for the helper's work.:
- Help with everyday tasks.
- Invite the helper to talk about their experiences.
- Help the helper accept help; offer something specific instead of "call me if you need anything".
- Do not rush helpers; their sense of time may be distorted.
- Reassure them that their stress is normal; most people recover well from stress.
- When requested, provide information about the "world outside the disaster."
- Respect their privacy.

In order for our communities to recover after this catastrophic disaster, the load must be shared. Helping others makes a big difference.

For additional hurricane information visit: <http://www.lsuagcenter.com>

Adapted by: Rebecca E. White, Extension Specialist, Family Development, LSU AgCenter, LSU.
Developed by: Elaine M. Johannes, Kansas State University Extension Service.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. The Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.

UT | **Extension**

Furnished by The University of Tennessee Extension.