

Typical Stress Reactions and How to Help

Reactions

Needs

Anxiety

Security

Guilt

Reassurance

Terror/Fearfulness

Acknowledgement, patience,
simplification of tasks & expectations

Helplessness

Physical nurturing, simplification of tasks
and expectations

Chaotic or out of control

Calm, peaceful environment

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

Developed by TLC and Baptist Child & Family Services