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LOUISIANA BUSINESS EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER

Private Sector Advisory

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Crisis Counseling Can Help Louisianans Cope with Disaster-Related Distress

Recovery efforts in Louisiana continue following the historic August floods, and many survivors are still coping with the immediate effects of the disaster. While obvious problems such as home repair preoccupy some Louisianans, there is a quieter, more ominous issue that may threaten flood survivors.

Disaster-related distress is a silent, serious threat to any individual affected by a major disaster. It can manifest in the form of depression, anxiety or even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). According to the National Center for PTSD, more than 50 percent of those affected by major disasters develop some kind of clinically significant stress disorder.

Disaster-related distress is particularly treacherous because it is virtually unpredictable. While individuals with preexisting stress disorders or addictions are more likely to suffer from disaster-related distress, it can attack anyone at any time. Even individuals who show no signs of stress-related disorders immediately after a disaster may develop a condition years later.

Disaster-related distress, like any other illness, is most easily recognized by its symptoms. While symptoms vary by case and may be mistaken for symptoms of other illnesses, disaster-related stress disorders usually produce a combination of the following warning signs:

- Headaches
- Chest or muscle tightening
- Fatigue
- Inability to sleep
- Overall restlessness
- Uncontrollable anger, sadness or fear
- Lack of appetite
- Substance abuse
- Social withdrawal
- Suicidal thoughts

Individuals exhibiting many or all of these symptoms should seek treatment from a licensed therapist immediately. If left untreated, disaster-related distress can contribute to high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, diabetes and/or suicidal tendencies.

While the diagnosis and treatment of disaster-related distress may seem like a daunting process, it is not one that flood survivors and their loved ones need to go through alone. All survivors of the August flooding can take advantage of free disaster crisis counseling available through FEMA and the state of Louisiana.

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The Crisis Counseling Program is funded by FEMA and implemented by the state. The purpose of the program is to provide survivors with free, local counseling services that promote resilience, empowerment and recovery.

The crisis counselors available through the Crisis Counseling Program are local people, many of whom have also been affected by flooding. These counselors are not therapists; they come from all careers and walks of life. However, they have all been trained to educate, support and inform survivors. If necessary, the crisis counselors can refer survivors to therapists for diagnosis and treatment.

Crisis counselors are available at all FEMA disaster recovery centers. To find a center near you, call the FEMA helpline at 800-621-3362 or text DRC and your ZIP code to 43362. You can also find a center near you by downloading the FEMA mobile app or going online to [fema.gov/drc](https://www.fema.gov/drc).

For more information regarding the Crisis Counseling Program or to set up an appointment for counseling, call the Louisiana Office of Behavioral Health at 866-310-7977 or the Disaster Distress Hotline at 800-985-5990.

FEMA Brings Federal Partners in for Long-Term Recovery

The floods that forced so many Louisianans from their homes this year have receded, along with the immediate threats to health and safety. The focus is now beginning to turn toward the long-term recovery.

Louisianans are rebuilding and repairing their homes, businesses, roads, bridges and schools. And they are supported by specialists from several federal agencies, all working to help build stronger and safer communities better prepared to face disasters.

The agencies involved, led by FEMA, are working to:

- Get farms and businesses back up and running;
- Build stronger levees, roads and bridges;
- Make sure water is safe to drink;
- Help rebuild flood-damaged dwellings;
- Reopen schools and healthcare centers; and
- Help plan for safer and more resilient communities.

The designated federal coordinating agencies are the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Army Corps of Engineers, Department of Commerce, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Interior, and FEMA.

Additional information on Louisiana's disaster recovery is available at: [fema.gov/disaster/4277](https://www.fema.gov/disaster/4277), twitter.com/femaregion6, twitter.com/FEMA, facebook.com/FEMA, [fema.gov/blog](https://www.fema.gov/blog) and [fema.gov/louisiana-disaster-mitigation](https://www.fema.gov/louisiana-disaster-mitigation).

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