

Lakeview Center



BAPTIST HEALTH CARE

Coping with the Gulf Coast Oil Spill: Our Emotional Health

Marvin Chaffin, LMHC

The Deepwater Horizon Gulf Oil Spill of 2010 is likely to have far-reaching consequences for many people living on or near the Gulf Coast of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. Some people have found their livelihoods disrupted. Business owners wonder if they will be able to meet their mortgage payments and payroll obligations. Parents will wonder if they can safely take their children to the local beach. Given the enormity of the Deepwater tragedy and the uncertain future we all face, many people may feel a real sense of anger, anxiety, frustration and sorrow that make begin to take a toll on their emotional health.

Like a natural disaster, people who have been the victims of a man-made disaster are often traumatized by the experience. Many trauma survivors describe feeling of stress, fear and anger. They also often find they are unable to stop thinking about what has happened. Having stress reactions is what happens to most people and has nothing to do with personal weakness. Many victims of tragedies such as these will often exhibit high levels of arousal. For most, if the following symptoms occur, they will slowly decrease over time.

Remember that many people who have these stress reactions (including disaster and relief workers) will often experience common stress reactions. Understanding what is happening when you or someone you know reacts to this traumatic event will help you be less fearful and better able to handle things. These reactions may last for several days or even a few weeks and may include:

- Feeling hopeless about the future & detached or unconcerned about others
- Having trouble concentrating, indecisiveness
- Jumpy & startle easily at sudden noise
- On guard and constantly alert
- Having disturbing dreams/memories or flashbacks
- Work or school problems

You may also experience more physical reactions such as:

- Stomach upset, trouble eating
- Trouble sleeping & exhaustion
- Pounding heart, rapid breathing, edginess
- Severe headache if thinking of the event, sweating
- Failure to engage in exercise, diet, safe sex, regular health care
- Excess smoking, alcohol, drugs, food
- Worsening of chronic medical problems

Other emotional troubles can include:

- Feeling nervous, helpless, fearful, sad
- Feeling shock, numb, unable to experience love or joy
- Avoiding people, places, and things related to the event
- Being irritable or outbursts of anger
- Becoming easily upset or agitated
- Self-blame or negative views of oneself or the world
- Distrust of others, conflict, being over controlling
- Withdrawal, feeling rejected or abandoned
- Loss of intimacy or feeling detached

Use your personal support systems, family and friends, when you are ready to talk. Recovery is an ongoing gradual process. It doesn't happen through suddenly being "cured" and it doesn't mean that you will forget what happened. For most, fear, anxiety, remembering, efforts to avoid reminders, and arousal symptoms, if present, will gradually decrease over time. Most people will recover from trauma naturally. If your emotional reactions are getting in the way of your relationships, work, or other important activities you may want to talk to a counselor or your doctor. Good treatments are available.

At Lakeview Center, we have behavioral health professionals available if you feel that you need further assistance in dealing with this life-changing event.

For more information or to access services, contact:

Lakeview Center

Phone: (850) 432-1222

24-hr. Crisis Line: (850) 438-1617

www.elakeviewcenter.org

Lakeview Center



BAPTIST HEALTH CARE

... helping people overcome life's challenges