

TIPS TO HELP PEOPLE LIVING WITH MENTAL ILLNESS COPE AFTER A HURRICANE

Everyone reacts differently to stress and trauma and each person has his or her own tolerance level for difficult feelings. A person with a mental illness may experience existing or new symptoms of his or her disorder. It is important that people with mental illnesses and those who care for them address their mental health and wellness as they recover from the storm.

Mental Health America of Greater Houston offers the following tips to help people living with mental illness take an active role in managing their illness in the aftermath of a hurricane:

- Continue to follow your treatment plan
- Take your medications as prescribed
- Keep your therapy appointments
- Avoid alcohol use
- Do not use illicit drugs or any that are not prescribed specifically for you
- Keep a journal or diary of any new symptoms or changes
- Have prescribed laboratory and psychological tests
- Stay connected with or get involved in a support group
- Report any change in symptoms to family, friends or doctor

Different people can have different warning signs and symptoms of their illness, so if you have a mental illness or if you are caring for a person with mental illness, **it is important that you address anything that seems out of the ordinary, especially any talk or thoughts of suicide or self-harm.** If you have a mental illness and people around you notice changes, listen to what they say.

Common reactions or changes in behavior:

- Stopping your usual routines, such as attending school or joining family activities
- Changing your sleeping pattern or eating habits, not caring about your appearance, difficulties with your coordination, lapses in short-term memory

- Experiencing mood swings, feeling out of control or very agitated, thinking about suicide or violence
- Doing things that make others think you're out of touch with reality
- Hearing or seeing things that others do not
- Being unable to let go of an idea, thought or phrase
- Having trouble thinking or speaking clearly
- Deciding not to take your medications or to follow through with your treatment plan (missing appointments, etc.)
- Feeling unable to enjoy things that are usually pleasurable
- Being unable to make even routine decisions

To get through the current crisis, take advantage of the people and tools that are available to you:

- Don't be afraid to ask for help
- Access peer support and other programs, ranging from drop-in centers to housing, employment and recreational opportunities that can help you better manage your illness
- Learn all you can about your illness and what you can do as you continue on your path to recovery
- Stay in touch with your spirituality, if you find that comforting
- Be optimistic about the challenges that lie ahead

For Help Contact:

MHMRA Psychiatric Emergency Services
(713) 970-7000

**Mental Health America of Greater Houston
Information & Referral**
(713) 522-5161

8:30am-5:00pm, Monday-Friday

Crisis Hotline (24 hours)
713-HOTLINE (468-5463)
Spanish: 713-47-AYUDA (29832)

Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255