

TIPS TO HELP OLDER ADULTS COPE AFTER A HURRICANE

The after effects of a hurricane can take a toll on the mental health of anyone. It can create stress and anxiety and cause feelings of grief, loss, or uncertainty of things to come. Studies show that it often takes older adults longer to recover from a catastrophic event. Health problems, fixed incomes and lack of awareness about disaster aid are all contributing factors. Older adults also are a preferred target of fraudulent contractors. During the aftermath of a disaster, it's important to be supportive of older family members and become aware of some of their special needs and vulnerabilities.

Common reactions that older adults may experience include:

- Confusion and disorientation
- Concealing or not wanting to know the full extent of damage
- Fear of losing independence or being sent to a nursing home
- Withdrawal and isolation
- Apathy or believing that they are too old to start over again
- Irritability, anger or suspicion
- Grief over losses from the past

While these feelings are normal after experiencing a natural disaster, it is important that older adults take care of their mental health and wellness as they recover from the storm. Pay attention to changes that may indicate an older family member is in need of some extra help, such as:

- Increased memory loss
- Making poor decisions
- Being easily distracted
- Declining health

- Neglecting medical needs
- New physical symptoms that may be related to stress
- Decreased mobility
- Driving poorly
- Sleep disturbances or nightmares
- Increased vulnerability

During the hectic period of recovery, older family members are sometimes unintentionally overlooked. Be mindful of their special needs and make time to offer emotional support and practical help:

- Visit and phone them regularly
- Listen to their concerns
- Help them maintain daily routines as much as possible
- Offer to provide transportation
- Help them deal with insurance companies
- Find out about disaster recovery aid for which they may be qualified
- Help them fill out paperwork and keep appointments
- Connect them to social services
- Help them stay involved with their social and faith communities
- Encourage them to report fraud or abuse to authorities

For Help Contact:

**Mental Health America of Greater Houston
Information & Referral**

713-522-5161

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

24/7 Crisis Hotline

713-HOTLINE (468-5463)

Spanish Hotline: 713-47-AYUDA (29832)

Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255