

# My Emotions After the Hurricane

*Tips to help you cope with post-hurricane trauma*

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Hurricanes are very stressful events. All unplanned events that bring uncertain change in our lives, called crises, are always stressful. Hurricanes affect all of us in some way or another. Every member of the family will experience some form of negative response to Hurricane Frances over the next few days and months. The signs of post-hurricane trauma are not always immediate; the emotional effects may not appear for months. Recovery time varies as well. Stress takes its toll not only on those hit directly by the hurricane, but also on those who made it through physically untouched by the hurricane. Mental health experts say that those who escaped the hurricane untouched often suffer "survivor's guilt." People suffering survivor's guilt often push themselves to the limit trying to help. Children, in particular, resent the shattering of their routine. That resentment may manifest itself in enormous guilt, nightmares, temper tantrums and problems at school.

Thousands of Bahamians and Bahamian residents have sustained major losses--homes, farms, automobiles, business, boats, etc. Two Bahamian families have lost loved ones. Although the loss of a life is different from the loss of property, yet the responses are similar. When someone's life savings has been blown away in a hurricane, that is very painful.

What's important in dealing with trauma after the storm is to understand that there is a natural grieving process -- denial, questioning, acceptance and recovery -- after the loss of normalcy, loved ones, and property.

## **What Are Some of the Responses After a Hurricane?**

1. Fear, disbelief, suspicion, anger, anxiety, or apathy.
2. Short temper, moodiness and irritability.
3. Reluctance to abandon property.
4. Guilt over having been unable to prevent the disaster.
5. Confusion, numbness, and flashbacks.
6. Difficulty in making decisions.
7. Excessive helpfulness to other disaster victims.
8. Loss of appetite.
9. Crying for no apparent reason.
10. Increased effects from allergies, colds, and flu.
11. Rejecting outside help or feeling disappointed with outside help.
12. Isolation from family, friends, and social activities.
13. Domestic violence.

## **How Can Adults Cope? What Should You Do?**

We cannot avoid stress, but we can learn to manage it or how to respond to the stressors. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Recognize and accept your feelings -- and realize you're not alone.
2. Talk to others, including family, friends or clergy, about your feelings.
3. Be patient--accept that restoring your life to normalcy will take time.
4. Keep family meals as nourishing and on as much of a routine as possible.
5. Get as much sleep as possible.
6. Relax--a deep breath and vigorous stretch help reduce tension and stress.
7. Whenever possible, do something enjoyable--read a book, watch a video, play games.
8. Walk or jog.
9. Hug your family and friends--affection and touching can be soothing.
10. If your stress symptoms persist, seek professional help

## **How Do Children Deal With Stress, Especially After a Hurricane?**

**Here are some of the signs of stress in children:**

1. Head and stomach aches
2. Reluctance to go to bed
3. Insomnia and recurring nightmares sparked by fear that the hurricane will return
4. Regressive behavior such as bed-wetting, thumb-sucking and clinging to parents
5. Fantasies that the hurricane never happened
6. Withdrawal
7. Temper tantrums, crying, and screaming.
8. Shortened attention span, plummeting school performance, or refusal to attend school
9. Loss of appetite
10. Loss of interest in playing
11. Drug and alcohol use by older children

## **What Can Parents or Adults Do to Help Their Children Cope?**

1. Like you, children are scared. Understand their fears--real or imagined--and reassure them they are safe. Extra attention and hugs are important.
2. Allow children to express their feelings in conversations, drawings, or activities. Children sometimes think scary things will go away if they block them out.
3. Share your feelings with your children; let them know their feelings are normal.
4. Answer questions thoughtfully. Take extra time to make sure the explanation is simple and open for discussion.
5. Be patient.

6. Let children know they are not responsible for the disaster. Tell them how being a prepared member of the family helped everyone feel safe.
7. Allow children to help in the cleanup. Children who feel they belong are likely to feel more self-assured.
8. Give extra doses of praise for good behavior.
9. Resume your normal routine as quickly as possible. Provide the same snacks you used to. Make time for family activities such as playing games.
10. Encourage children to help those less fortunate than themselves. Allow them to prepare food, clothing and other items for donations.
11. If your children continue to show stress signs, seek professional help. Your children's stress may be more than you can handle.

**Here are scripture passages that may motivate you during this time:** Psalms 46, Psalms 23, Lamentation 3:32, Psalms 103:3-18, Psalms 139:9-10, Romans 8:18, Romans 8:31-39, Psalms 55:22, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, Matthew 6:25-34, Philippians 4:6-7, I Peter 5:6-7, Proverbs 12:25.

Dear friends, you need not go through the pain of loss all alone. Contact someone you can talk to. A pastor, friend, or relative. If your stress signs linger long or are currently unbearable, then seek professional help.

**Call Adventist Counseling Services at 242-361 6355 if you need help, or visit the web site [www.bahamasconference.org/counseling](http://www.bahamasconference.org/counseling). Or email [info@bahamasconference.org](mailto:info@bahamasconference.org) Or Write to Adventist Counseling Services, P.O. Box N=356, Nassau, Bahamas**