

Free, confidential resources support Harvey survivors' mental health

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The holiday season triggers stress for many who have lived through a natural disaster

AUSTIN, Texas — The water has receded, homes have been rebuilt and Texans have resumed their daily activities, but scars remain for many Hurricane Harvey survivors, just below the surface.

The trauma of living through a disaster can disrupt survivors' lives for years, especially if they don't recognize the symptoms and ask for help. The stress of adjusting to new circumstances — like a new home, job or school — often doesn't set in until a year after a disaster, and then may last another three years.

“Every person who witnesses a disaster is affected by it, and stress and trauma should be expected. But we all experience an event and its aftermath differently,” said Chance Freeman, director of Hurricane Harvey crisis counseling for the Texas Health and Human Services (HHS) Commission. “Recovery takes time, and it commonly requires a strong support system and knowledge of stress-management techniques.”

Free, confidential mental health support is always available through multiple providers. More than 100,000 Harvey survivors, for instance, have already received face-to-face counseling, referrals or information through Texas HHS mental health programs. With that help, they've acquired coping skills, built



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resiliency and learned strategies for any stress-related situation.

Stress-management will be especially important for survivors during the upcoming holidays as well as around events like the August anniversary of the storm, news coverage of similar weather events and the start of the school year.

“Although more than a year has passed since Hurricane Harvey, thousands of Texans continue to experience the effects of that historic disaster,” said Paul Morris, director of the FEMA Texas Recovery Office. “We all need to continue to look out for each other, be willing to offer a friendly ear and emotional support, and encourage survivors to seek help if they need it.”

Harvey survivors dealing with sadness, anger, fear or frustration can seek confidential advice anytime, any day of the year in more than 100 languages through the federal Disaster Distress Helpline by dialing 211 or 800-985-5990, or by visiting www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline. Counselors will also work with survivors via text: Just text “TalkWithUs” to 66746, or reach the helpline by TTY at 800-846-8517.

The nonprofit Crisis Text Line is also available for round-the-clock support, which can be reached by texting 741741.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline provides confidential services anytime at 800-273-TALK (8255), 888-628-9454 for Spanish speakers or 800-799-4889 for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. You can also chat with a counselor online at www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org.



Local mental health resources are available throughout Texas. Find resources in your area by visiting the Texas HHS website at <https://hhs.texas.gov/services/mental-health-substance-use/mental-health-crisis-services>.

Crisis support is available to military veterans through the Department of Veterans Affairs' Crisis Line at 800-273-8255 or www.veteranscrisisline.net. More information about Texas Mental Health Programs for Veterans can be found at <https://hhs.texas.gov/services/mental-health-substance-use/adult-mental-health/mental-health-program-veterans>.

Survivors who need assistance paying for anxiety or depression treatment can find help on the Anxiety and Depression Association of America's website at <https://adaa.org/finding-help/treatment/low-cost-treatment>.

To learn more about mental health resources and support in Texas, visit <https://mentalhealthtx.org>.

For additional information on Hurricane Harvey and Texas recovery, visit the Hurricane Harvey disaster web page at www.fema.gov/disaster/4332, Facebook at www.facebook.com/FEMAHarvey, the FEMA Region 6 Twitter account at www.twitter.com/FEMARegion6 or the Texas Division of Emergency Management website at www.dps.texas.gov/dem/.



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