

Confidential Crisis Counseling Available to Flood Victims of Louisiana

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PRESS RELEASE

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BATON ROUGE (May 17, 2011) – Free, confidential crisis counseling is available to Louisianians who are suffering from stress, anxiety or depression as a result of the Mississippi River flooding. A toll-free 24-hour number, 866-310-7977, will connect residents in need to services in their community to help them through this difficult time.

“Property damage from the flooding in our state will be apparent,” said Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals Secretary, Bruce D. Greenstein. “But disasters leave behind less visible effects, and we want people to know we’re here to help them address those as well.”

Louisiana’s behavioral health community and DHH, through its Louisiana Spirit program, have led the nation in disaster response counseling and behavioral health interventions. The program, first developed in response to hurricanes Katrina and Rita, has been active for several different emergency incidents, including most recently the BP oil spill from last year.

The Crisis Hotline is being answered by crisis counselors who are prepared to offer:

- Crisis intervention for those who are in emotional crisis
- Educational information about identifying stress and its effects as well as how to avoid experiencing more severe stress in the future
- Coping tips to help address signs and symptoms of serious distress
- Resource information about supports available
- Referral information for those who feel they may benefit from mental health services

Stress can surface in many forms and it often appears weeks or months after a traumatic event, mental health experts say. Stress reactions to a disaster may include anger, fatigue, loss of appetite, sleeplessness, nightmares, depression, inability to concentrate, hyperactivity and/or increased alcohol or drug use.

People of all ages may exhibit these symptoms, but children and older adults are of special concern in the aftermath of disasters. Children especially can be vulnerable to disaster-related stress effects from interruption of daily routines and loss of the stability the home environment provides. Symptoms of disaster trauma in children can include excessive fear of the dark, crying, fear of being alone and constant worry. Even second-hand exposure to the disaster through extensive media coverage can take an emotional toll.