

Dealing with the psychological aftermath of Hurricane Harvey

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Flood water eventually will recede from Houston and its surrounding areas, but the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey will remain fresh for those impacted by the storm. While moving forward after a disaster like Harvey is difficult, one Baylor College of Medicine expert has offered his advice on how to cope with these challenges.

"The [psychological effects](#) of a disaster like Harvey can be numerous, and usually there are two populations that you will see," said Dr. Asim Shah, professor and executive vice chair for community psychiatry in the Menninger Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Baylor. "The first is the population of people who have a pre-existing [mental health problem](#). After a disaster like this, their issues will likely worsen. However, the second population will be people who did not have any pre-existing mental health issue, but they will develop problems."

It is common for those who have gone through a traumatic experience like Harvey to suffer from anxiety, depression, stress, fear and insecurity, Shah said. These feelings can last for months and develop into [post-traumatic stress disorder](#).

Shah warned that it is especially important to pay attention to how children may be dealing with the trauma of their experience.

"The way kids react in these situations is very different from adults," Shah said. "Families need to watch out for the [warning signs](#) that kids may not be coping well with the events they've experienced."

Warning signs may include:

- Isolating themselves in rooms
- Hiding in closets and rooms
- Not eating or eating less
- Not interacting with people

If you see these warning signs, Shah recommended addressing them sooner rather than later and to seek professional help.

He added that children can grow attached to material items like blankets and toys so it's important to remember to slowly and systematically desensitize them to the fact that their items may not be usable if their home was damaged or destroyed.

For adults who need help coping, Shah said the first step they can take toward healing is to talk about their experience and not ignore how they are feeling. The second way they can cope is by seeking professional help and, lastly, adults can use stress management and relaxation techniques.

"There are numerous ways to cope with a disaster like this, but the best thing you can do is try to cope as best as possible," Shah said.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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