



## Shore Up Your Resilience to Manage Distress Caused by the Oil Disaster in the Gulf

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The Gulf of Mexico is experiencing a man-made disaster caused by a leak from a destroyed offshore oil rig. The situation has been described by President Obama as a “massive and potentially unprecedented environmental disaster.” Reports indicated that as many as 210,000 gallons of crude oil a day are pouring in to the Gulf with no ready solution. This disaster will affect wildlife, the area’s fishing and recreation industries, and the health of oceans and shorelines. Watching the disaster unfold, whether in proximity to the disaster or on your television or computer, can be distressing. In addition, the situation can feel helpless because it is growing worse and there is little most people can do to stop it.

There are simple and effective ways to address the distress or anxiety you may be experiencing. Many are essential ingredients for a healthy lifestyle and adopting them can help improve your overall emotional and physical well being.

**Get the facts** —Stay informed about the extent of the oil spread and how it is affecting the area. What are the likely consequences if oil continues to spill for several more months? Knowing the facts can lessen anxiety that comes from uncertainty and enable you to feel more in control about an otherwise chaotic situation. The facts can also prevent you from worrying about issues you cannot control or that are not a cause for concern.

**Have a plan** —If you are directly affected by the oil spill, identify steps you can take in the event of loss of livelihood, destruction of property, or other outcomes. Consult with peers and close friends or relatives to explore ideas for persevering through possible hardship. Having a thought-out plan with specific action steps can make the situation more manageable.

**Make connections** —Reach out to connect with close family members and friends. These relationships can be a source of strength. Coming together and helping one another can be positive for your emotional health. Children will have questions and worries about the oil disaster, especially in the communities most affected. Keep in mind that children learn resilience skills from the adults in their lives. Encourage activities and open communication to enable them to better cope day by day. Psychological research shows that “social support”—caring and supportive relationships—are essential for building resilience and happiness.\*

**Maintain a hopeful outlook** —Know that scientists, environmentalists, biologists and other experts are working to develop a viable solution to this problem. Companies and government agencies are already using equipment and expertise to limit the oil’s spread and damage. Disasters are inevitable, but not insurmountable. Identify ways you’ve successfully managed past hardships and draw upon these skills and experiences to help you through the current situation.

**Volunteer** —Lighten your burden by contributing your energy and talent to a cause you feel passionate about—whether it is the environment, ocean wildlife, fishing communities, or other causes. For example, in past oil spills, animal rescue organizations helped to clean animals covered in oil and return them to their natural habitats. Supporting or helping one of these organizations may be a way to make a difference in the current crisis.

The American Psychological Association’s Psychology Help Center offers additional resources for managing stress and coping with natural disasters.

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\*What predicts psychological resilience after disaster? The role of demographics, resources, and life stress. Bonanno, G. A.; Galea, S.; Bucciarelli, A.; Vlahov, D. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. Vol. 75(5), Oct 2007, 671-682.

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