

Escambia County
Emergency Operations Center
Emergency Support Function 8: Health & Medical



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Health officials provide advice for coping with stress of the oil spill

PENSACOLA – In cooperation with the mental health professionals of Lakeview Center, an affiliate of Baptist Health Care, local health officials are providing the public with the following guidance for coping with the stress, anxiety and depression that may be brought on by the oil spill. Dr. David Josephs, psychologist and clinical director with Lakeview Center, provides the following advice:

Reacting to a Traumatic Event

After surviving a disaster, individuals may feel dazed or even numb. They may also feel sad, helpless, or anxious. In spite of the tragedy, some people just feel happy to be alive. These are all normal reactions to the stress of a crisis.

Anger

Anger is a normal, healthy emotion that moves us to action when we have been wronged or victimized. The gulf animals and community are being victimized by the oil spill. Significant anger regarding the events is normal. Properly directed this anger can provide energy for recovery. Improperly directed it is destructive, divisive and damaging.

- Direct anger into community involvement and help. Individuals can focus their energies on helping friends, family, community and those whose livelihoods have been affected by the oil spill.
- Be mindful of displacing/directing anger at those close to us such as our children, spouses, family, etc.
- Be mindful that even those who disagree with us about the crisis are likely hurting too.
- Be part of the solution, not the problem.

Protect Yourself

Just as individuals would protect themselves from the flu with a flu vaccination, these are steps that can be taken to lessen the impact of stress from the oil spill.

- Limit exposure to unsettling information (turn off the T.V.)
- Spend time with family.
- Go to church, synagogue or mosque.
- Develop a routine of exercise and healthy living.

Ask for Help

Untreated anxiety and depression, substance abuse, and isolation or lack of a support system may put

individuals at greater risk of mental health impacts from the oil spill. It is important for individuals to ask for help if they:

- Find that they are unable to take care of themselves or their children.
- Are not able to do their job.
- Use alcohol or drugs to get away from their problems.
- Feel sad or depressed for more than two weeks.
- Think about suicide.

In this case, individuals should talk to a counselor, their physician, a community mental health organization such as Lakeview Center, or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-TALK).

Children (and Adults also)

It is important that parents help their children cope by using these measures (which can also be helpful tips for adults):

- Validate what children are seeing and hearing -- oil is a real problem.
- Provide hope. Explain to children that lots of people are involved in cleaning the beaches and fixing the problem. Explain that your children will be able to go to the beach again.
- Remember that children absorb what's around them. Be a positive, healthy stimulus by increasing your own resiliency to the situation.
- Give children an active role so they feel they can contribute to the beach getting better. For example, children might donate allowance money to a clean-up effort, keep their own rooms clean or spend time with friends who are also missing the beach.
- Do not take children to the beach to actually clean oil.

Need Mental Health Services?

In Escambia County:

Lakeview Center (850) 432-1222

Lakeview's 24-hour Crisis Line (850) 438-1617

Lakeview's Walk-In Clinic (Adult Outpatient Services)

- Building H, which is located on the corner of "H" Street and West Lakeview Avenue on the Pensacola campus of Lakeview Center
- Open Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Tuesday and Thursday from noon to 2 p.m.

In Santa Rosa County:

Avalon Center of Lakeview (850) 437-8900

- 6024 Spikes Way, Milton, Fla.
- Open Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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