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News Release

Free Crisis Counseling for Louisiana Children and Youth Seeking Normalcy after Flood Event

BATON ROUGE, La. — Returning to school in late August brings a sense of routine to most children across the country. But in Louisiana there are many young people whose lives are far from normal. They are still living the aftermath of storms and widespread floods that drove tens of thousands from their homes and left many living with relatives, or in hotels or shelters.

Some schools that were battered by the storms are not able to open on time, so even students whose homes were not affected are unable to resume their normal lives. Family lives may also have been disrupted as parents lost jobs when places of employment were damaged.

Children can be especially vulnerable to stress following a disaster. Preschoolers, children and teenagers may have witnessed their home being damaged or destroyed, experienced an evacuation, suffered an injury, lost a pet or even just had their normal routines interrupted. These children are susceptible to bouts of anxiety, fear and behavioral problems.

A free crisis counseling program, funded by FEMA and administered by the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals (DHH), is open to any adult or child in designated parishes. To learn more, call the DHH-Office of Behavioral Health Louisiana Spirit Crisis Line at **866-310-7977**.

Trained counselors are provided by the network of state Human Services authorities and districts. Calls to the crisis lines are free of charge, as are face-to-face follow-up sessions for children (and adults) whose needs cannot be fully served through phone counseling.

The health department team encourages parents to help children through the season by listening and talking about their feelings, while reassuring them they are loved and that it’s OK to have these feelings. Children are resilient, and with reassurance, guidance and love, they will be able to take a life-changing event and develop the coping mechanisms to assist them in the future.

(more)

Younger children may suffer sleep problems or bedwetting. Older children may display anger, aggression or withdrawal. Some children who have had only indirect contact with the disaster, but witness it on television, may develop distress.

What's the best way to respond to your child during or after a disaster? Click *here* (https://www.ready.gov/kids/parents/coping) for some pointers, including a guide to common child reactions to disaster by age.

"Parents are the experts on their own children – they know when something's out of line," said Tom Davis, associate professor of psychology at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. "Three months after a disaster, if my child was still having difficulties, with symptoms like nightmares, flashbacks, not wanting to talk about it and always being in startle mode, I would consider counseling."

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FEMA's mission is to support our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards. Follow us on Twitter at https://twitter.com/femaregion6 and the FEMA Blog at http://blog.fema.gov.

Disaster recovery assistance is available without regard to race, color, religion, nationality, sex, age, disability, English proficiency or economic status. If you or someone you know has been discriminated against, call FEMA toll-free at 800-621-FEMA (3362). For TTY call 800-462-7585.

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) is the federal government's primary source of money for the long-term rebuilding of disaster-damaged private property. SBA helps businesses of all sizes, private non-profit organizations, homeowners and renters fund repairs or rebuilding efforts and cover the cost of replacing lost or disaster-damaged personal property. These disaster loans cover losses not fully compensated by insurance or other recoveries and do not duplicate benefits of other agencies or organizations.

For more information, applicants may contact SBA's Disaster Assistance Customer Service Center by calling (800) 659-2955, emailing disastercustomerservice@sba.gov, or visiting SBA's Web site at www.sba.gov/disaster. Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals may call (800)877-8339.

Download the FEMA mobile app for disaster resources, weather alerts, and safety tips. The app provides a customizable checklist of emergency supplies, maps of open shelters and weather alerts from the National Weather Service for up to five locations across the Nation. The latest feature of the app allows you to send notifications to your device to remind you to take important steps to prepare your home and family for disasters. Go to Ready.gov for more details.