



# FEMA

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Disaster information provided for local and state officials

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### **DISASTER CRISIS COUNSELING— ANSWERING THE CALL WITH SUPPORT**

**TALLAHASSEE, Fla.** – Rebuilding your life, your home and your family is emotionally taxing after a disaster, but help is available. A grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is making crisis counseling available to storm-survivors.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency has awarded a grant for \$163,808 to the Florida Department of Children and Families. The department, through its program called Project Hope, will provide crisis counseling until at least July 26, 2009. At that time, if there is still a need and the state requests it, additional funds may be approved to continue the crisis counseling program.

Project Hope crisis counselors have already provided face-to-face counseling to 1,000 Volusia County residents at Disaster Recovery Centers and are continuing to offer services to any person living in Volusia County, regardless of whether or not they are registered for FEMA assistance.

To find and serve those who need support, the counselors go door-to-door visiting citizens in their homes, as well as at community centers, churches and other organizations. The length and frequency of a crisis counselor's visits to an individual's home, or elsewhere to counsel them, is determined by their needs. Multilingual and special needs services are also being provided as needed.

Residents may request a crisis counselor meet them in their home or at another location. Local para-professional crisis counselors can be reached at **321-832-0740**, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. After-hours voice mail messages are returned, usually within 24 hours, even on weekends.

After a disaster, stress can manifest itself in many ways and may last for days, weeks, or even months. The recovery process can be unsettling and quite often stress symptoms get worse as exhaustion sets in, but there are signs to watch for.

Common reactions to a disaster may include: nightmares, difficulty sleeping, feelings of being overwhelmed, fear of the weather, anxiety about the future, difficulty making decisions, hopelessness, disappointment with outside help, headaches, increased anger or aggression,

domestic violence, frustration, and feelings of powerlessness. These feelings can be exhibited by people of all ages, including children.

Mental health experts suggest a number of ways to relieve the symptoms of emotional distress. These include:

- Discuss and share common feelings and experiences with family, friends or neighbors. This helps relieve feelings of anxiety and helplessness;
- Go back to a daily routine as soon as possible;
- Try to maintain a healthy diet and get plenty of sleep;
- Get some type of physical exercise every day, even if it is just walking;
- Hug and comfort children often. They are especially vulnerable to emotional stress after a disaster;
- Regularly reassure children that they are safe and not responsible for what happened;
- Encourage children to talk about their fears; and
- Spend extra time with the elderly who may feel vulnerable and become confused or withdrawn.

Crisis counseling helps disaster survivors recognize normal stress reactions and emotions caused or aggravated by a trauma and regain control over themselves and their environment. They work to strengthen individual, group and community coping skills and resiliency by providing support, psycho-educational tools, stress management techniques, and referrals to traditional behavioral health services as needed. Counselors also refer storm survivors to other agencies and non-profits that are helping people recover.

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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.*

*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.*

*FEMA's temporary housing assistance and grants for public transportation expenses, medical and dental expenses, and funeral and burial expenses do not require individuals to apply for an SBA loan. However, applicants who receive SBA loan applications must submit them to SBA loan officers to be eligible for assistance that covers personal property, vehicle repair or replacement, and moving and storage expenses.*

The Florida Division of Emergency Management and State Emergency Response Team (SERT) coordinates disaster preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation programs with all 67 counties and the federal government. For more information and to GET A PLAN! please visit [www.FloridaDisaster.org](http://www.FloridaDisaster.org).

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