

The Anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, August 29 – Tips for Survivors and Their Loved Ones

MENLO PARK, CA – Aug. 14 (SEND2PRESS NEWSWIRE) – While Hurricane Katrina may have long since blown over, the need for emotional healing continues for those who survived this country's largest natural disaster. With thousands of people forced to relocate into new environments within unfamiliar communities, and others returning to their homes only to find their friends and social structures long gone, many survivors continue to feel isolated, depressed, and alone in their struggle to rebuild their lives. August 29 marks the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. Transitions Expert, Dr. Carol McClelland, cautions anyone who was directly involved in Hurricane Katrina – from the survivors, to their friends and relatives, to the rescue workers and the media – to be on the lookout for what psychologists call, "The Anniversary Reaction."



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The Anniversary Reaction refers to a process whereby a specific date, time, or environment triggers an individual to revisit any emotions that were put on "pause" while he or she was in survival mode. Although the crisis may have passed, the body retains the emotional memories that were never expressed and

that still need to be released. Any big storm or hurricane can trigger the Anniversary Reaction in an individual – especially a major event like Katrina.

Emotionally, individuals may experience a feeling of dread or uneasiness, to feeling “out of it,” to feeling anger, frustration, fear, terror or overwhelm. An individual also might feel jumpy, find it hard to take action, be overly worried about personal safety, or obsess about his or her mortality.

Physical feelings might include: low energy, illness, panic attacks, addictions, trouble breathing, and stomach aches and headaches, as well as sensory memories related to sights and sounds. Mentally, one’s memory might be foggy or nightmares might occur.

Psychologically, one might feel hopeless, depressed, or experience tension within a family or relationship. Spiritually, questions may emerge around one’s faith or world view. The ability to perform at work can also be affected.

Hurricane Katrina handed its survivors multiple losses – from loved ones, to family pets, to homes and a lifetime of belongings, to the disbanding of social networks, communities, and life as it was known to be. Below are 8 tips for those who found themselves at the mercy of Hurricane Katrina:

Tips for Handling the 1-Year Anniversary of Hurricane Katrina

1. Decide ahead of time how you want to spend this anniversary day and choose a point of focus: Do you want to be alone? With family or friends? In a church or community setting? Do you want to focus on what you’ve lost? Something positive you’ve gained? The relationships that are now in your life?
2. Create a simple ritual: Light a candle, hold a moment of silence, or sing in a circle. Expect tears to fall. Recognize that a tearful celebration is healing.
3. Tell your story: Find someone who is willing to listen and tell the part of your story that you are now ready to tell. Each time you tell your story, you will obtain greater clarity and new insights might emerge.
4. Practice self-care and nurture yourself on a daily basis: Relax with a cup of tea or watch a sunset. Be compassionate with yourself for not being able to get everything on your to-do list done. Eat, sleep and rest, and do some kind of movement. If you are not up to a full workout, stretch a little while you watch television.
5. Create your own “Archie Bunker” chair where you feel safe and secure: If you don’t have a special chair, use a corner of your couch or bed. Uplifting music, photographs or posters, or a journal are comforting touches. When emotions prevail, go to your safe space. If you can’t create a safe space in your physical environment, create an imaginary safe space in your mind, like

a forest or beach that you can always return to when life feels overwhelming.

6. Release the tears: When waves of emotions surface, don't be afraid you are backsliding or relapsing. Even if you fear your tears will never stop, let them come. Emotions are a completely normal part of the healing process and will help you move through and release the pain as time passes.

7. Find healthy ways to express your anger: Hit a pillow, throw rocks in the ocean, go to a driving range and hit golf balls, or scream in your car. Do not take anger out on your child, dog, friend or spouse. Your anger is not about the people in your life; it's about the circumstances associated with your losses.

8. After the anniversary date, don't expect to jump right back into your life: Take your life in smaller bites. Instead of tackling a four-page to-do list, choose one tiny step to take that will contribute to your well-being. For example, take one week to focus on finding a new social group that you can join to break through your feelings of isolation. One brief year is not enough time to pull your life together; healing is a journey and this journey takes time.

Carol McClelland, PhD helps individuals in transition who are weathering their own personal storms. The author of "The Seasons of Change," (Conari Press) and "Your Dream Career for Dummies (Wiley), she has created a free booklet to help all who were affected by Hurricane Katrina.

To receive your free copy of "One Year Later – Surviving the Katrina Anniversary," please visit: www.seasonsofchange.com/katrina.

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