



After the Flood: Coping with Crisis **Six Steps for Caring for Yourself in Times of Crisis**

The floods that ravaged Middle Tennessee have left damages in the reported billions. One cost left often unmentioned is the emotional toll a tragedy of this magnitude can take on our mental health. Whether you were directly impacted, had a loved one who experienced damage or simply saw the ever present images on our television screens, this disaster left no one untouched. We may even be experiencing something called, “secondary trauma.” Secondary trauma is the negative and sometimes debilitating emotional response we experience when affected by the losses of others. Exposure to this trauma can cause emotional, physical and spiritual exhaustion and impairment.

No one can ever be fully prepared for every disaster or exposure to crisis. We can, however, make choices that lead to growth and healing. There are decisions and actions we can take to minimize the impact and maximize the recovery from secondary trauma.

Below are some six important suggestions that can help in times of Crisis:

Understand normal reactions

It would be difficult to not have horrific headlines and images played in our minds again and again after experiencing such devastating floods. It is common to experience a wide range of emotions that are too complex to organize. It is not simple to wrap our minds around reasons for sudden death or perpetrated violence. Therefore feelings of shock and disbelief, as well as fear and sadness, can affect all areas of our lives and drown our spirits. These are normal reactions to abnormal situations.

Realize effects of other losses

There are two major issues that can affect how you cope with crisis: your past and your present. Any past experiences you may have had with crisis or trauma can affect how you approach crisis today. If you’ve been affected by painful past events - a family death, or divorce or a national tragedy - you may find yourself consumed with flashbacks and memories of these times. Your present condition will also affect how well you deal with stress. Life’s stressors, such as such as caring for an aging parent or enduring financial problems, may seem magnified when experiencing another trauma.

Consider past healing

Most likely, you have survived one or many previous losses or traumas. Consider what helped you most and seek similar solutions or supports. What activities, actions, or involvements led you through healing in past stressful times? Also consider what did not help, and try to not repeat those coping attempts - such as indulging in unhealthy behaviors, or not addressing your feelings at all.

Be intentional in self-care

Take care of yourself! Be patient, but also be deliberate in daily choices that bring health and healing. Spend time with friends and family. Go for a walk. Take a bubble bath or read a good book. These, and other activities of self-care, can go a long way to balance the trauma of events outside of our control. They bring emotional, as well as physical, relief and are necessary in preventing further strife and turmoil.

Recognize need for help

If your stress is so strong that it gets in the way of your daily life, talk with someone. Don't try to go it alone. You can start with a trusted friend, relative or minister. If there are ongoing debilitating consequences resulting from any crisis or critical incident, this posttraumatic stress can be dealt with, and you can regain your life again. You may want to talk with a mental health professional to discuss how well you are coping with recent events. Seek help early, before the devastation of secondary trauma causes emotional or physical burnout.

For confidential and professional help in recovering from any current or previous crisis, contact Centerstone at (615) 460- HELP (4357) or visit www.Centerstone.org.

If you are in crisis, call Centerstone's Crisis Line at (800)-681-7444.

About Centerstone

Centerstone, a not-for-profit organization, has provided a wide range of mental health and addiction services to people of all ages for more than 50 years. Through more than 60 facilities and 170 partnership locations across Middle Tennessee, Centerstone serves more than 50,000 children, adolescents, adults and seniors each year. Centerstone is accredited by The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF). For more information about Centerstone, please call 888-291-4357 or visit www.centerstone.org.

About Susan Gillpatrick, MEd, LPC, CTS

Susan Gillpatrick, Centerstone Crisis Management Specialist, primarily works in the field with clients in critical incident response situations, and in Centerstone's wellness trainings and presentations. She is also responsible for planning and implementing marketing and growth strategies for Centerstone's Crisis Management Strategies.

In recent years, Ms. Gillpatrick worked for the Shelby County Government Victims Assistance Center in Memphis. There, she co-developed a model program for the state of Tennessee entitled, "Homicide Response." Her work in this area received the 2000 Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties.

Ms. Gillpatrick is a Licensed Professional Counselor, Certified Trauma Specialist, Certified Workplace Conflict Mediator, and Mental Health Service Provider in the state of Tennessee and a National Certified Counselor. She is also a member the American Counseling Association, the Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists, the Tennessee Mental Health Counseling Association, and the Middle Tennessee Employee Assistance Professionals Association. She is a frequent presenter at local and national conferences, and has had numerous articles published. She received her Master of Education degree in Human Development Counseling from Peabody College at Vanderbilt University.

To request Susan Gillpatrick to speak with your group or organization about complete wellness in living, contact her at (615) 460-4445 or susan.gillpatrick@centerstone.org.