

Do's and Don'ts

Advice for Helpers going to Areas affected by Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita

Do:

- Listen. Do not interrupt by telling them similar things that happened to you.
- Listen. Let them talk about what they experienced. Trauma healing requires time and opportunity to talk about it. The people affected by the hurricanes may not have had a chance to process past traumas and **so do not be surprised if the conversation includes past events that were traumatic.**
- Listening is important because it validates what is said. This does not mean you agree it was right or wrong, only that you understand this is what the person experienced. As such, listening helps in healing and moving forward.
- Debrief with your team. Stay in touch about what you see needs to be done.
- Be flexible – you cannot be sure what you plan to do will in fact work out.
- Learn about trauma (physiology, warning signs)
- Laugh – appreciate the person's humor as a sign of resilience, not avoiding or denying
- Learn about trauma – what it does to the body and mind, how it changes behavior. See the list of topics below that link to more detail.

Don't:

- Don't think you have to "fix it" or try to fix things: you can't.
- Don't think you have to have the answers.
- Don't use clichés or sugarcoat.
- Don't tread on emotions: let the persons you go to help have their emotions.
- Don't be the lone ranger: you need to stay in touch with your team and debrief. Knowing when YOU are getting overwhelmed is essential to your continuing effectiveness.