

Like sneaker waves, stress can overwhelm after a disaster

The storms of Dec. 2007 are long past and cleanup is well underway, but this life-altering event can have significant short- and long-term emotional effects.

"A disaster like the December storms can affect a person's mental health, especially when major stress occurs," Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski said. "Our recovery efforts must recognize this fact. Loss of a home or a job, coupled with major damage in the community, can cause emotional injury that we must try to heal as we continue our efforts to help communities recover."

"The initial trauma may be over, but the hard work of rebuilding your sense of normalcy and security may be just beginning," said Bob Nikkel, assistant director for Addictions and Mental Health, Oregon Department of Human Services.

"No one who sees disaster is untouched by it," he said. "Grief, sadness, shock and anger are normal reactions to an abnormal event like the recent storms and flooding. It's important for individuals and families to take steps to promote their physical and emotional healing. Talk about what you are feeling with family and friends."

Stress caused by a disaster

can sneak up on you, often appearing weeks or months following the initial trauma. Stress is often displayed in subtle but distressing behavior and emotions. The elderly and children are particularly vulnerable to stress after a disaster and may require special considerations.

The Oregon Department of Human Services Addictions and Mental Health Division and the Federal Emergency Management Agency have developed a list of what to look for and tips for helping each other get through this difficult time.

Some emotional signs of stress include:

- Trouble concentrating or remembering things;
- Difficulty making decisions;
- Replaying the events and circumstances of the storm and flooding over and over in your mind;
- Feeling depressed, sad or down much of the time;
- Experiencing anxiety, anger or fear, especially when things remind you of the disaster;
- Nightmares;
- Having trouble sleeping;
- Increasing use of substances; and
- Feeling overwhelmed.

Some physical signs of stress are fatigue, chest pain and rapid heart beat.

Some behavioral signs of stress are withdrawal and isolation, even from your family and friends; restlessness; emotional outbursts and being easily startled.

Mental health experts suggest a number of ways to relieve symptoms of stress following a disaster:

- Friends and family are good medicine. Talk with them

about your feelings. Sharing common experiences helps overcome anxiety and feelings of helplessness.

- Get back into your daily routines as soon as you can.
- Maintain a healthy diet and get plenty of sleep.
- Get some physical exercise every day. Walking is a great stress reliever and you can do it with a friend or rela-

tive.

If signs of stress are serious or if they persist, you should consider seeing a counselor or other mental health professional.

For more information or referral, contact: Columbia County Mental Health: 503-397-5211 day; 866-866-1426 after hours; or toll-free 1-800-294-5211 "press 0".

Long-term relationships are hard to build

While Valentine's Day may have you thinking about warm, cuddly, romantic relationships, it's also a good time to think about long-term relationships, the important relationships that go far beyond candy, flowers and greeting cards.

Long-term relationships aren't just romantic ones. While marriage certainly should be a long-term romantic relationship, we also can have close, long-term friend and business relationships, but whatever the form, all relationships grow from common foundations and make similar demands upon us.

Any close, long-term relationship is difficult to build, simply because we're all different people with different backgrounds. Relationships often start easily, based on common interests or likes, but over time we'll discover the many differ-

ences that separate us, even from those with whom we're closest.

Long-term relationships succeed when we learn to accept our differences and to work through the disagreements they may bring. The bottom line for relationship success is learning to value the relationship more highly than matters of disagreement.

A key, therefore, to successful relationships work is learning to handle disagreements, because they are bound to happen. Being able to disagree with honesty, openness and trust is what helps turn a relationship into a long-term one, and what sustains that relationship through its rough patches.

For a relationship to last, both parties need to truly value relationship. Both need to agree that whatever the area of disagreement, it's never impor-

tant enough to sabotage the relationship itself. That means there will be times when you both simply agree to disagree rather than damage the relationship you share.

Having a standard of behavior for disagreements is also vital. When someone in a relationship sets ultimatums or tries to force the other person to change, the relationship is in trouble. It's important to accept that the idea is not to "win" when disagreements occur, but rather to maintain a healthy relationship.

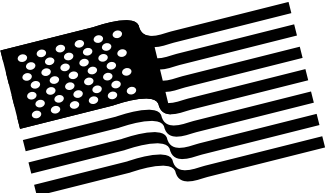
Another key in handling disagreements is clarifying issues. Most of us, especially in moments of anger, try to "interpret" the words or actions of the other person. In a solid relationship, it's important to be open and let the other person explain exactly what he or she meant and intended.

Long-term relationships do take work and compromise, but putting effort into them is what makes them last and grow. The key to a successful relationship is making sure that there is room in it for areas of disagreement.

Source: American Counseling Association



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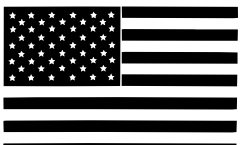


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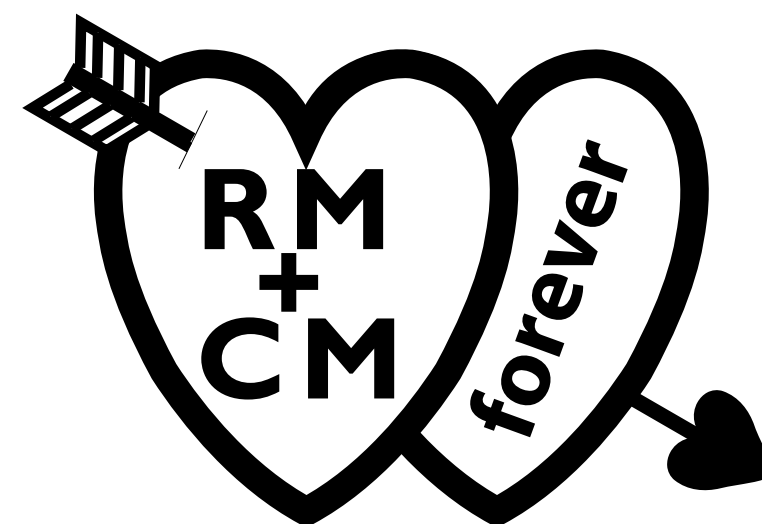
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