

13 Steps to Restoring Yourself After Hurricane Ike

- 1.) Within the first 24-48 hours, resume or begin relatively strenuous physical exercise (e.g., brisk walking, running, cycling, etc.), and then resume or begin practicing relaxation strategies you have already found helpful or new strategies you can learn at Counseling Services (e.g., deep breathing meditation, mindfulness, progressive relaxation, grounding techniques, affect management skills training, etc.).
- 2.) Since your mind is likely swimming in and intoxicated with excessive amounts of Norepinephrine and Epinephrine (aka: Adrenaline) and Cortisol, just to mention a few, Resist or Refuse to whole-heartedly believe thoughts or feelings that try to convince you that you are bad, crazy, not responding “normally”, shouldn’t be feeling or thinking “this way”, have to, must be or should be feeling or thinking “x”. During these times we need to learn to develop a healthy-sense-of-skepticism, not about the-fact-of having whatever thoughts and feelings you’re experiencing but about the-accuracy-or-truthfulness-of the thoughts and upsetting feelings you are having. You probably have felt you just couldn’t handle it before and here you are even today...you can learn to survive and thrive again.
- 3.) It is important to notice and give attention to what you’re feeling and thinking, yet during this time you will likely need to learn to invest *less* time in “listening to” your thoughts and more time “talking to” yourself. We all talk to ourselves and listen to our internal dialogue, however, when our minds are likely intoxicated by the after-effects of a very stressful experience, consider investing more effort and energy in talking to yourself in an affirming and encouraging manner while not ignoring what thoughts are naturally emerging. If overwhelming and negative thoughts/images continue to persist, come see us in Counseling Services and we’ll walk with you through this time and teach you effective means of addressing those flashbacks and negative thoughts.
- 4.) Attempt to be more choiceful and structure your time so that you get or stay reasonably busy; be sure to intentionally schedule time for both daily physical exercise as well as daily times for practicing relaxation.
- 5.) Attempt to create and maintain some degree of a reasonable schedule, and as you are able and circumstances permit try to get back to a “pre-incident” schedule. Don’t insist upon resuming a normal-to-you schedule, yet as you are able you can begin taking steps as soon as possible to move closer and closer to “normalcy”.
- 6.) Try to reach out and make your needs and feelings known to those outside the scope of the incident as well as other fellow travelers also affected by the incident; most people “outside” and those walking through this time will and can be supportive, caring and helpful.
- 7.) Try to reach out and listen to the needs and feelings of your co-workers, fellow students and neighbors to. Check in with them and see how you can be helpful; its amazing how even during a very challenging time you can be accepting of and

comforting to others simply by authentically being yourself and wanting to *be there with* them. It's also amazing how in giving, comforting and encouraging, we too can be blessed in our attempts to comfort and encourage others. Genuine acceptance of and presence with is a great gift we can all offer...even in periods of significant distress.

- 8.) Resume or begin to journal about how your thoughts and feelings were before, during and after the storm/incident. Write about how you would've liked to think, be feeling and responding. As you write actually begin to develop and enjoy a mental movie of yourself thinking, feeling and acting the way you would like or have before (i.e., begin to vividly remember, allowing yourself to re-experience the feelings, thoughts and scene when you had thought, felt and/or responded the way you would like and then spend some time writing this experience out in detail. Consider this statement from Henry Ford, "*If you think you can or think you can't...you're right!*" Milton Erickson said, "*you can imagine and master anything*", as applied to this step consider the following...once you vividly imagine something, you will have experienced it and can begin thinking, feeling and responding like you have imagined yet in your current circumstances. Imagine that !
- 9.) Practice lavishing upon yourself extra grace and permission to simply not feel and be at "your best." Either as you are able or just simply begin letting yourself enjoy bits and "things" again that you used to enjoy experiencing whether that is with or apart from people. Take it one moment and one day at a time. If your attempts to begin enjoying things again "just isn't working", come and see us in Counseling Services and we'll meet you where you are and learn grace together.
- 10.) Considering all the stirred up emotions, disorientation, and challenging adjustments you are having to make, and whenever possible, consider postponing any "big" life decisions. The shock-and-awe state of mind you are likely experiencing may make it really easy for you to want to make a quick decision to change the way you feel that may be briefly and partly successful; however, this likely will not create a more satisfying and longer-term outcome that you would've otherwise chosen if you had a more "at-peace" state of mind.
- 11.) Attempt to get plenty of rest and resume eating or begin eating more well-balanced meals...try to eat these meals 3-5 times a day even if you "just don't feel hungry".
- 12.) Avoid using an activity, a food and/or a substance like drugs or alcohol to attempt to escape or numb the discomfort and pain you are experiencing. Everyone copes or compensates with the experience of their feelings, thoughts and sensations they are having after a devastating storm. However, some people desperately, impulsively or unwisely not just compensate but OVERcompensate, which inevitably begins to compound the initial trouble and pain they were already experiencing. Just think about how a drug, alcohol, sex, or food addiction can quickly and terribly exacerbate and destroy a person's life and relationships. You can find, learn and choose differently by practicing the steps above...or even better ones you can think of or remember practicing before.

- 13.) If you are beginning to experience mild-to-moderate symptoms (e.g., often feeling sad, takes a longer to fall asleep, some unwanted thoughts, difficulty staying asleep once asleep, *less* of an appetite, etc.), intense and overwhelming symptoms (e.g., feelings of hopelessness, largely or total *loss* of appetite, frequent awakenings throughout the night after falling asleep, extreme difficulty even falling asleep, while awake you experience frequent intrusive and disturbing thoughts and images/scenes, isolating oneself, feeling emotionally numb, etc.), or if you simply feel you just cannot “make it” anymore, let someone know how you are feeling. Just as you wouldn’t want to wait until your house is on fire before you purchased fire insurance, you wouldn’t want to wait until the pain is too great before you sought out and secured the help you need.

If you are an HBU student and believe meeting with one of our professional counselors would be helpful or may be necessary, simply call 281-649-3359 between 8-5 or come by our office in Hinton 101 and set up a confidential appointment to meet with one of our licensed professional counselors (LPC) either at that time, later that day or as soon as we can possibly meet. If “that” isn’t soon enough, please do not hesitate to call 911, go to the nearest emergency room (e.g., Southwest Memorial-Herman, Methodist, etc.), or call a supportive friend, family member, or a crisis hotline such as: 713-228-1505, 1-800-273-TALK or 1-800-633-5686.