

Building Resiliency Through the Tough Times- Directions EAP, LLC; Julie Gibson, LMHP

Our hearts go out to all persons, families and communities affected by the recent flooding in the Midwest. A flash flood is one thing- heavy rains overpower systems and floods happen. But typically within days or weeks the water starts receding and people can begin cleaning up their lives. What we've had lately is a whole different ballgame. Most of the people displaced by June's heavy flooding won't see the water leave for perhaps months yet. People are crowded into temporary shelters, homes of relatives, government housing – all just wondering if there is anything left of the life they once knew. I recently heard that some lowans who work in Nebraska City and Auburn have to drive a detour route taking 4 extra hours to get to work. But they're feeling fortunate yet to still have jobs and the cars to get to them.

Do you know anyone personally affected by this year's storms? Do any of your employees or their family members have to cope with this lingering crisis? It has been a couple months now since the levies broke and the river stormed the banks, we're not back to normal yet. This is the hard part of a crises- when it lingers and we still don't have all the answers we need – will we salvage any of our personal belongings, do we have all the papers we'll need to file for FEMA? Can we still plant these fields? Does our insurance cover any part of this? Where do we go for help? Should we stay in the area—will our company rebuild the business here—will I still have a job? Can we go home yet? It's easy to become a news junkie and to constantly watch for signs of hope only sometimes to be sickened by more bad news.

You can help the people around you by becoming sensitive to those who might be struggling with the lingering effects of recent flooding. I recently ran across some tips for shoring up your resiliency in times like these. The American Psychological Association has written an article called *Manage Flood-Related Distress by Building Resilience*, retrieved from their website 2/23/2011. A paraphrase of some of their suggestions included:

- **Make connections:** Initially there can be great comfort in sharing the ordeal with others facing the same losses and challenges. We gather in shelters and churches and schools for safety and comfort. But it's easy to become isolated after the initial crises and people scatter from the shelters to private homes with friends and family. Be sensitive that many folks who might need it, don't know how or are reluctant to ask for help.
- **Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems:** You can only do so much against flooding waters, but you can change how you interpret and respond to the disaster. Focus on trying to stay positive, being grateful for lives spared. Decide to be a survivor not a continuing victim of the flood of 2011. Remember- "Life is 10% what happens and 90% what we chose to think about what happens." (Anonymous)
- **Take a news break:** No pun intended – it's easy to get over-saturated with pictures of destruction. Limit time in front of the pictures of flooded towns and roads and houses.

- **Accept that change is a part of living:** Help people focus on elements in their circumstances that they can change and to come to terms with the parts that are permanently changed beyond their control. Everything is changing in life, resiliency means coming to terms with that fact.
- **Move toward new goals:** Try to direct the feelings of loss and uncertainty into realistic goals – don't start with –“I have to clear the acreage and rebuild my house”. Think about “What is 1 thing I could do today that takes me in the direction of my goal?”
- **Take decisive actions:** Take decisive actions rather than detaching completely from problems and stresses and wishing they would just go away. There is a lot of waiting around with flood recovery. Look for ways to get back to some more normal routines.
- **Look for opportunities for self-discovery:** Many people who have experienced tragedies and hardship have reported better relationships, greater sense of strength, increased sense of self-worth, a more developed spirituality, and heightened appreciation for life. Frequently, struggling through the tough times is where our real growth occurs. Allow yourself to think – things may never be the same...but maybe that means they'll be better.
- **Nurture a positive view of yourself:** Don't compare yourself to everyone else. While some feelings might apply to many in the same situation- everyone responds to loss and grief differently. Try not to judge yourself or others. You are all persevering through difficult circumstances. That's an accomplishment. Developing confidence in your ability to solve problems and trusting your instincts helps build resilience.
- **Keep things in perspective:** Remind yourself of past hardships that may have felt overwhelming at the time. Tap into those successful skills to get you through the current challenges.
- **Take care of yourself:** Engage in healthy behaviors that will enhance your ability to cope with excessive stress. Be patient in the midst of the chaos. Try to eat well-balanced meals and get plenty of rest. Avoid alcohol and drugs since these can increase feelings of sadness or distress and hinder your ability to cope with current stresses.

As an HR Professional or a concerned employer or co-worker of someone close to our recent flood disaster be prepared to listen and consider creative ways for helping through the crises. All of us have different levels of resiliency depending on our own trials in life. This is a time for compassion and empathy and building on those resiliency skills. People can be worried and stressed, have a hard time sleeping or concentrating- stay connected to them. Watch for symptoms of grief and loss, anxiety and depression. Encourage good self care. Remember your EAP if an employee is particularly having a hard time coping, perhaps someone to talk with who can listen and coach them to the next steps in their journey is just what is needed. Employee Assistance professionals are trained to help folks through critical times like these, take advantage of their expertise.