



News Release

For more information contact:
Dr. Gary L. Wood or Dr. Patricia N. Alexander
(813) 870-0392 (Hillsborough County, Florida)
(727) 576-5164 (Pinellas County, Florida)
(800) 870-0392 (Out-of-area)

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL READINESS FOR HURRICANE SEASON

Tampa, Fla. (June 1, 2006) Many people have experienced feeling anxious and concerned when another hurricane season approaches. In some areas of the country, individuals are still in the process of recovering from the last hurricane season and now have to face the arrival of another season. Government officials, including national, state and local, are reminding citizens to stock up on supplies, make evacuation plans and arrange for pet care. What do we need to be aware of in terms of social and emotional readiness?

According to Charles R. Figley, Ph.D. of the FSU Traumatology Institute, there are four phases individuals face whenever there is the possibility of a potential disaster and each phase has it's own set of demands:

- **Anticipation and Preparation**
- **Disaster Impact**
- **Immediate Post-Disaster Impact**
- **Long-term Post-Disaster Impact**

This article will deal with the first phase.

Individuals react differently to anticipating a potential disaster. Some make plans as advised long in advance of the possibility of a hurricane. They heed the warnings and stock up on supplies, plan an evacuation route and notify out-of-area family

and friends of their pre-determined, and if necessary alternate, route. They buy products to secure their home, make sure they have all important documents and pictures/records of their possessions in a safe place, and even make arrangements for a place to stay in the event of evacuation. They keep an eye on the information being released and start their travel well before the roads become parking lots. This can help an individual and family to restore a sense of control over the uncontrollable.

Others enter into a state of denial thinking that the “bullet has been dodged” multiple times and will be again. No worry. No planning. Just a wait and see attitude.

Other individuals engage in a panic response. They are the ones that get to the store when the shelves are empty of water, when the home supply stores are out of plywood or batteries, and spend their time running from place to place to get what they can.

Social support is a major factor in anticipating any situation that is out of one’s control. Talk with family, friends and neighbors to both offer and receive support. Maintain a rational approach - this will go a long way in minimizing anxiety and panic. Remember that each individual, even within the same family, will react differently. Even small children will pick up either a calm or frenzied response based on how others around them might be acting. As Dr. Figley says, “Be aware kids know when you are scared.” Different age groups respond differently to the same event. It is important to realize that small children may not be able to verbalize their fears and concerns. Listen and reassure them. Involve everyone in the planning - even a small child can let you know what toy they want to have with them. Don’t leave children alone. Encourage children to talk.

Remember that the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a benefit available to all employees and dependents of companies contracted with Wood & Associates for providing confidential free professional assistance 24-hours a day, 7 days a week. Remember that you or a dependent may contact the EAP regarding any concern that you might have – you don’t have to

wait until a problem becomes big to seek help. Above all, keep in mind that when you live in an area prone to weather disturbances, mental preparedness is just as important as the practical steps that you might take.

About Wood & Associates

Wood & Associates is an Employee Assistance Program and behavioral health consulting firm that helps employers maintain productivity, safety and behavioral health in the workplace. Wood & Associates is a pioneer in the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) industry and has served employers and employees in the greater Tampa Bay area and nationwide since 1982. The firm's diverse group of clients includes a number of major employers who also contract for its mental health and substance abuse services.

Gary L. Wood, Psy.D., founder of the Wood & Associates consulting practice, is a pioneer in the field of Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services. Since 1979, his practice has centered on providing solutions to employee and organizational problems. Wood is a licensed clinical psychologist, a member of the National Register of Health Service Providers in Psychology, and a graduate of Rutgers University, West Georgia College and Mercer University.

Patricia N. Alexander earned a Ph.D. in mental health counseling at the University of Florida. Trained in critical incident stress management through the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, she is a Florida Licensed Mental Health Counselor and nationally certified counselor. Through her work experience she has addressed all types of critical incident situations, including explosions, multiple homicides, suicides, line-of-duty deaths, serious accidents and robberies. Alexander conducts training on stress management for law enforcement and businesses, and has developed peer support programs for law enforcement and industry. Alexander is an educator and consultant on a wide variety of behavioral health concerns.