



## The Gulf Oil Spill Crisis: Staying Hopeful in the Face of Tragedy

The oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is having a devastating impact on the wildlife and people whose life and livelihood depend upon its waters, marshes and shores. Eleven lives were lost and it may take many years before the region recovers. Whether we're directly or indirectly affected by the spill, we may all be experiencing strong feelings of anger, sadness, fear and anxiety. *Why can't they plug the hole? When will the oil stop spilling into the Gulf?*

While we find ourselves with more questions than answers, experts inform us that ecosystems have previously survived and recovered from very large oil spills. Over time, beaches get scrubbed by waves and storms. Vegetation in surviving marshlands can recover within a few years.

As we all struggle to cope with this crisis, it is helpful to remember that humans are naturally resilient and have the capacity to "bounce back" after difficult times. For centuries, we have survived natural and manmade disasters and, in many cases, have emerged stronger and wiser. In addition, there are steps we can take right now to build our resilience and successfully cope with this crisis:

**Maintain a Hopeful Outlook.** Know that many scientists and experts are working hard to stop and clean up the oil spill. It may take time, but some day the oil will stop spilling into the Gulf. We have strong allies—the air, water and sun help to evaporate, dissolve and breakdown the oil. Progress and recovery will take time and patience will be a key to maintaining a hopeful outlook.

**Make Connections.** Keep in touch with family members, friends and neighbors. We are not alone during this difficult time and we can find comfort and strength when we receive and provide support to those around us. Helping others will also increase our sense of purpose and accomplishment and reduce feelings of helplessness.

**Stay Informed, But Don't Overdo It.** Stay informed about the oil spill. This can reduce anxiety resulting from rumors or projections that are not grounded in fact. Those living in the Gulf Coast region can use information provided by government officials and community leaders to learn about newly available resources or to respond to health and safety alerts. At the same time, we can increase our stress by watching or reading too much news coverage of these events. ***It is especially important to limit children's exposure to the media.***

The Gulf of Mexico oil spill crisis is very distressing. However, we all have experience coping with stressful life events and we can draw upon those experiences to help us cope with today's new challenges. There are reasons to be hopeful for the future and there are steps we can take to increase our resilience and successfully cope with this crisis. Additional information and resources are available in the [Preparedness and Fast Facts](#) section of the American Red Cross Web site [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) and the American Psychological Association has useful resources which can be found at [www.apa.org/helpcenter/index.aspx](http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/index.aspx).

In the aftermath of a crisis, most stress symptoms are temporary and will resolve on their own in a fairly short amount of time. However, for some people, these symptoms may not go away as quickly as they would like and it may influence their relationships with family and friends. If you find yourself or a loved one experiencing some of the feelings and reactions listed below for 2 weeks or longer, this may be a sign that you need to reach out to a licensed mental health professional for additional assistance:

- Crying spells or bursts of anger
- Difficulty eating
- Difficulty sleeping
- Losing interest in things
- Increased physical symptoms, such as headaches or stomachaches
- Fatigue
- Feeling guilty, helpless or hopeless
- Avoiding family and friends

For additional information, contact your local Red Cross Disaster Mental Health or community mental health professional.