

**A Region Suffers-A Nation Grieves**  
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In the wake of the recent New Orleans/Gulfport disaster, many Americans miles away are finding it difficult to get back to school or work. While Labor Day normally marks an end to the carefree days of summer, this year the transition was magnified a hundred-fold. We were all abruptly thrust into a rude awakening of how quickly tragedy can strike, how vulnerable we all really are, and how human suffering affects us all.

We may want to help, but feel helpless. We may want to disengage, but are mesmerized by the magnitude of destruction. We may want to move on, but feel stuck. Mostly we just feel as though we've been punched in the gut.

So, how do we find the emotional energy to move on with our lives while our southern family begins putting together the pieces of theirs? The way to bounce back from this shock is to start where we are and do what we can...one step at a time, each at our own pace. Healing is definitely an inside job. There is no one-size-fits-all answer; no quick fixes. Our response does not spring from a vacuum. Rather we each respond to such devastating loss from a complicated personal center of emotions and experience. That said, here are a few things to consider if you are feeling stressed, drained, or stuck in neutral.

First, if you are experiencing severe upset, consider talking to a trained professional, clergy, or even a close friend. Although you were not physically affected by the hurricane, it may have stirred up emotions of past loss and trauma, and acknowledging those feelings is key to moving on.

If you feel all worked up, frustrated, or angry, consider taking some positive action. It is highly unlikely that arguing about who's to blame or railing about what should have been done is going to lower your blood pressure. Vent? Sure. But then redirect your energy to making a difference. It will be empowering. You may not have answers to why this happened, but you can contribute to what happens next. Make a donation, organize a relief drive, volunteer for a phone bank, or even start a local dialogue about emergency preparedness in your neighborhood. The best cure for finger-pointing anger is to step up to the plate yourself. There'll be plenty of time later to assess what went wrong and what needs to be fixed.

If you feel emotionally drained by all of the heart-wrenching stories, consider yourself a compassionate human being. Who among us has not been moved to tears many times as this tragedy has unfolded? But if you watch, discuss, and even help nonstop, the sadness will take a toll. Consider engaging for briefer periods of time and then briefly stepping back to allow your spirit to be lifted. Notice the generous outpouring of individual support, witness a child's innocent smile, play with your pet, or take a gratitude walk, mentally listing what you're thankful for. Connect with those who care about you and express your feelings for them. Then, filled with more hope and faith, you can return to this important national issue. But, you will return more resilient, able to relate with empathy and perhaps even create an inspired way of helping.

If you feel a bit stuck, not able to focus forward at work or in your own life, consider that you - like the rest of the country - has been shocked. You may still be reeling from this emotional blow and need to allow yourself time to regroup. So what if you're not 100% focused on your obligations? Accept that you'll bounce back when you're ready; haven't you always done so before? Or, maybe this disaster has been a wake-up call to slow down, appreciate each day, and focus on what's really important. If you haven't wept for Katrina's victims, take time alone. If you haven't helped in some way, consider how you can. If you haven't reflected on your own life and how you might use it more purposefully, now might be the time. Sometimes feeling stuck is actually a call to complete something. Be patient, meet important obligations, and do what feels right to you.

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