

Advice for displaced persons during the holiday season

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The holiday season is a time to give back, and that is especially important to remember this year due to the impacts of Hurricane Harvey. Although many people are back in their homes, others are still displaced. One Baylor College of Medicine expert discusses the challenges of being displaced and how to overcome them during the holidays.

"Being displaced due to Harvey is very tough because [people](#) can still go back and see the devastation caused to their homes and their belongings. Having to see this can cause constant trauma and bad memories to remerge, and in addition, they can't be in their homes for the holidays," said Dr. Asim Shah, professor and executive vice chair in the Menninger Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Baylor.

There are several signs and symptoms to be on the lookout for that you or someone you know might not be coping well, Shah said. These include [feelings](#) of sadness or depression, being withdrawn, tired, lethargic, anxious and/or irritable.

Shah added that feelings of guilt also can be an issue. For example, if a person did not have flood insurance, they may feel guilty and ask themselves "why did I not have [flood insurance](#)," "what if I had not moved to this neighborhood" or "what if I had moved more of my furniture upstairs." People also can feel guilty if they were not able to help their pets, elders, neighbors, family or friends, he said.

"If you notice these feelings in yourself or if you see them in somebody else, it is important for you or the person to seek professional help," he said.

Although it may be a tough [holiday season](#) for those who are displaced, Shah said one of the first ways you can get through it is by identifying how you are feeling about the situation. By acknowledging your feelings, you can start to move forward.

He also encouraged those who may be feeling stressed to find an activity that brings them happiness and to find a support system that they feel comfortable going to for help if needed.

Another coping strategy Shah suggested is to focus on the future and not the past.

"Studies have shown that people who focus on the past are more stressed and anxious than those that look forward to the future. In this case, if you can't return to your home, you should focus on finding a new home and settling in as soon as possible and not looking back," he said.

The [holiday](#) season is a very important time for the community to come together to help those who are still displaced, Shah said, and showing support for those still impacted can make a big difference.

"With Thanksgiving coming up soon, we should take the initiative to invite people who have been displaced into our home and make them feel welcome so that they have a great holiday too," Shah said. "Later in the season, if you have a spare Christmas tree or extra ornaments it would be nice to give them to a family that may have lost all of their belongings."

Financially, people may have a hard time this year as well, he said. To help out, Shah suggested that, if possible, you should do a little bit of extra holiday shopping and give those items to a family who may have lost their belongings. He added that observing the holidays in a simpler way might be beneficial as well.

"During the disaster and after, we saw so many people from the community come out to help that I am sure they will do it again during the holidays. Isn't giving back what the true spirit of the holidays is all about?" Shah said.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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