

September 9, 2005

<b>DIRECTIVE:</b>	<b>JOB CORPS INFORMATION NOTICE NO. 05-09</b>
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**TO:** ALL JOB CORPS NATIONAL OFFICE STAFF  
ALL JOB CORPS REGIONAL DIRECTORS  
ALL JOB CORPS CENTER DIRECTORS  
ALL JOB CORPS CENTER OPERATORS  
ALL NATIONAL TRAINING AND SUPPORT CONTRACTORS  
ALL OUTREACH, ADMISSIONS AND CTS CONTRACTORS

**FROM:** GRACE A. KILBANE  
National Director  
Office of Job Corps

**SUBJECT:** Managing Traumatic Stress in the Wake of Hurricane Katrina

1. Purpose. To advise centers and health care providers on how to best respond and manage the mental health issues of students and staff that may arise from the multiple effects of Hurricane Katrina.

2. Background. On August 31, 2005, the American Psychological Association issued a fact sheet indicating that the effects of a hurricane like Katrina will be long-lasting and the resulting trauma can reverberate even with those not directly affected by the disaster. It is common for people who have experienced traumatic situations to have very strong emotional reactions. Understanding normal responses to these abnormal events can assist center students and staff in coping effectively with their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, and help towards the path to recovery. Shock and denial are typical responses to large-scale natural disasters, especially shortly after the event. Those who were in close proximity to danger or who lost family members may be particularly affected. Both shock and denial are normal protective reactions. Once the initial shock subsides, reactions to the hardships caused by Katrina will vary from one person to another. The following are common reactions students and staff may experience:

- a. More irritable than usual with mood swings.
- b. Find it difficult to concentrate or make decisions, or become more easily confused.
- c. Repeated and vivid memories of the event that may cause problems sleeping.

- d. More interpersonal conflicts or, on the other hand, become withdrawn and isolated and avoid usual activities.
  - e. Physical symptoms (e.g., headaches, nausea and chest pain) that may require medical attention; pre-existing medical conditions may worsen due to the stress.
3. Action. Many of our students and staff already possess the skills of resilience and will bounce back on their own, given time. However, there also are a number of steps center and health staff can take to help restore emotional well being as students and staff return to center or are transferred to other centers:
- a. The mental health, counseling, and Trainee Employee Assistance Program (TEAP) staff should have times available where group discussion can occur. This can help students and staff realize that other individuals in the same circumstances often have similar reactions and emotions. This can also help staff identify which students or staff may need additional mental health services.
  - b. The center mental health consultant (CMHC) should provide staff training on how to support and manage students during this time and how to identify students that may need further mental health support. This training will be very important for all staff, with a focus on counselors and residential advisors.
  - c. The TEAP specialist should be aware that this is a time when student's at risk may begin to use alcohol and drugs for the first time or go back to using them. Consider offering sessions or handouts on how to cope with stress without alcohol and/or drugs.
  - d. Encourage students and staff to maintain their daily routines as required by the Job Corps center. This will help restore a sense of security and normalcy.
  - e. The recreation department should consider having more activities planned during non-work/school hours to keep students engaged and assist with relaxation.
  - f. If students are having difficulty sleeping, refer them to the CMHC for an initial evaluation, which may include environmental/behavioral suggestions. If problem persists and gets worse, refer them to the center physician.
  - g. Encourage students to communicate their experience in whatever ways feel comfortable to them, such as by talking with family or close friends, or keeping a diary.
  - h. Make sure all students know whom to contact on center if they need mental health assistance.

- i. Students and staff with prolonged reactions that disrupt their daily functioning on center should be referred for a consultation with the CMHC or a trained and experienced mental health professional off center.

It is important to understand that there is not one “standard” pattern of reaction to the extreme stress of traumatic experiences. Some students and staff will respond immediately, while others have delayed reactions, sometimes months or even years later. Some have adverse effects for a long period of time, while others recover rather quickly. Try to keep things in perspective. Although a disaster often is horrifying, help our students and staff focus as well on the things that are good in their lives.

4. Expiration Date. Until superseded.
5. Inquiries. Inquiries should be directed to Barbara Grove at (202) 693-3116, or emailed to [grove.barbara@dol.gov](mailto:grove.barbara@dol.gov).