



For Release  
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## Disaster Victims “Can’t Handle Stress Alone”

DES MOINES, Iowa—Mental health experts at the Iowa Department of Human Services are urging flood survivors to seek crisis mental health counseling even if they think they can handle the stress alone.

“Iowans are remarkably self-reliant, a trait that usually serves us very well. But when disaster strikes, it’s important to reach out for help,” said Allen Parks, director of the Mental Health and Disability Services division of the DHS.

Parks said hundreds of Iowans have already sought help through the Project Recovery Iowa program that offers crisis mental health counseling. To find a counselor anywhere in the state, call the Iowa Concern hotline at 1-800-447-1985. The counseling is free.

But Parks said crisis counseling outreach workers are running into resistance from people who say they appreciate the offer but that they don’t need assistance.

“We’ve had cases where Mr. Smith says he is doing fine but that Mr. Jones two doors down really needs help. So we go to Mr. Jones and he says he’s OK but that we should really look in on Mr. Smith,” said Parks.

He said that many people who experienced either the tornado or flood disaster are facing stress. The relief of actually surviving the disaster is now turning to frustration because it’s taking time to put lives back together.

Parks said people who are affected by a disaster may experience more than one type of reaction and these reactions may change over time.

“You’re not showing weakness by seeking help,” he said. “Many people may experience anxiety, loss of sleep or appetite, stress, grief, irritability, hopelessness and family conflict. The purpose of crisis mental counseling outreach is to help people regain a sense of control and to understand their reactions to the disaster,” he said.

Via FEMA grants, the DHS launched Project Recovery Iowa in the wake of deadly northeast Iowa tornadoes and subsequent flooding. Crisis counseling outreach staff seek to educate victims about disaster reactions, to teach coping skills, and to steer people to resources that may be helpful.

To underscore the importance of crisis counseling, Gov. Chet Culver on Tuesday afternoon plans a visit to Pathways Behavioral Health in Waterloo. Pathways is one of the agencies contracted by the DHS to provide crisis counseling outreach.

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