

Challenges After a Disaster

After a disaster like Hurricane Dorian, there are a myriad of challenges that show up. Some of these challenges are unavoidable and others are avoidable. Some of these are logistical and others are emotional. Truthfully, many did not expect such a disaster. The many who survived the hurricane disasters in 1926, 1929, and 1932 or similar disasters of those decades, when communities were whipped out, are dead, leaving their descendants ignorant of the past. Without Wikipedia, historical records, and books, we would have no idea what took place. But have we learned from the past?

One major difference the hurricanes in 1926, 1929, and 1932 has compared to Hurricane Dorian, is the scale and scope of the damage. The population today is larger and the infrastructure greater and more advanced. In 1929 there were no telephone lines in each home, hundreds of light poles, cellular and radio towers, radio antennae, satellite dishes, surveillance cameras, air-condition houses and hotels, air-condition automobiles, sophisticated airports with conveyer belts and lighted runways. I can go on and on. In fact, there were no significant medical facilities. Not having these amenities may have made recovery simpler and faster.

Today, the infrastructure is more complicated and sophisticated, although much needed. I lived in Crooked Island with my wife and two children in the early 1980s. During that time there was no government electricity. Most had generators and some had windmills. In those days, Bahamasair, like today, only flew to those islands twice a week and the mail boat about twice a month. There were no telephones in our homes, no televisions or satellite dishes. There were no Internet or cell phones.

One summer while living on Crooked island, a cluster of events took place. The mail boat was on dry dock for three months, the nurse was sick in Nassau. The doctor, who resided on another nearby island, was on vacation abroad. Hence, when Bahamasair's last flight left for the week, we prayed that there will be no disaster. It was emotionally challenging for many, especially those of us who did not grow up on the island. If one would sit and think about what to do if there is serious illness or disaster, one would panic. One could easily experience fear or helplessness. Hence, imagine what the thousands of residents who were actually

impacted by the hurricane, are experiencing today. Many of them are experiencing helplessness, hopelessness, fear, frustration, anxiety, stress, doubt, etc.

There are myriad of stories we are hearing over social media and even reading the news papers, about the frustration of many people who were impacted by Hurricane Dorian. It is imperative to understand that one person's frustration is that person's reality. Another person's perspective might be different creating a different frustration. After a disaster like the one just past, our duty is to respect the rights of people to be frustrated and not to argue if one's frustration is right or wrong. That's frustrating. Yes, those who are frustrated are to seek to be patient and learn that restoration often takes a long while.

Even when there is the best of care and good logistical planning, someone usually gets left out. That's painfully frustrating. Our nation today is being tested by the multiple expressions of fear, disbelief, suspicion, anger, anxiety, short temper, moodiness and irritability. Please remember that these are natural responses after a disaster. I say we are being tested because these responses can either make us or break us as a nation. Let us see this time as an opportunity to unify us and bring out a compassionate spirit that intertwines us into a beautiful woven carpet of peace and prosperity.

Sadly, we do know that another response to a national disaster is that of domestic violence. Research tells us that after such a disaster, intimate partner abuse and child abuse escalates. This is due to the frustration and sometimes the unusual living arrangements of families. Interestingly, research also tells us, that pregnancy increases after a disaster. Nine or ten months after a disaster, the population will go up more than usual. People have nowhere to go, so they spend more time at home. Some of these pregnancies can be wanted and other unwanted, creating more frustration.

Another challenge after a disaster is that of creating harmony in households where there are unexpected residents. Many kind families have taken into their homes, other family member or friends, whose residents have been severely damaged or lost. Some are trying how to balance between being kind and generous with maintaining the traditions and practices of the home.

Unfortunately, some family members can be disrespectful, selfish and uncaring. They have little respect and lack of understanding that the gift of caring is not a license to do what they want to do.

As soon as possible the homeowners should have a friendly chat with the temporary residents. Talk with them about your household standards and practices. If you do not want smoking in your residents, inform them. Guidelines about household duties expectations, sleep times, and curfews, can all be discussed. Make sure you are firm, respectful and kind. You might also need to make a little adjustment in your home for a short while

Barrington Brennen is a counseling psychologist and marriage and family therapist. Send your questions to question@soencouragment.org or call 242-327-1980 or visit www.soencouragement.org