

For the Women of Katrina

Protection from Violence Against Women and Children

Following natural disasters there is often a sharp rise in violence against women and children, especially for those who have lost their homes and who are living in crowded shelters. Teenage girls, young women, and separated children are at special risk.

Also, after natural disasters, men tend to take charge. Women's participation in decision making is often put down more than usual. Yet it's essential for everyone's healthy disaster recovery that women's voices in decision making and women's concerns are heard at every step of the way. (All the above information comes from studies of natural disasters both in the US and around the world.)

What You and Others Can Do

1. **Form a Small, Strong, Support Group with the Women Around You.** Three or four women together make a strong, efficient team. Tell each other your stories, your needs, and your hopes. Take turns watching each other's children and doing other tasks so you can give each other breaks. Go together, and give each other support, when one or all of you need to make a complaint, report abuse, request rule changes, obtain medical help, join committees, or meet other emergency needs. Even if you have not formed a group, always try to find another women to go with you at these important times.
2. **Talk Calmly and Often with Your Children about the Risks of Abuse.** Inform your children calmly so you don't increase their fears. Tell them it's important that they tell you right away if anyone tries to touch them inappropriately, tries to get them alone, make deals with them, befriend them too much, or bother them. Ask your children about unexplained gifts, prolonged absences, and new relationships. Check into any job offers your teens may get. Also, while in the shelter, children and teens should always be accompanied to bathrooms, since abusive men tend to hang there.
3. **Report All Violence and Abuse Against Yourself and Your Children.** It's crucial for your recovery, for your children, and for the entire community that women are safe, strong, unafraid, and un-harassed. You are a vital part of the recovery effort. Remember, too, that if someone abused you, that person will keep on abusing other women and children unless he (or she) is stopped. So report the abuse! If one aide worker doesn't take you seriously, go to the next until you get the help you deserve. Put your complaint in writing. Take at least one other woman with you to make the complaint.

The kinds of violence that can occur are domestic violence, child abuse, prostitution, sex trafficking, and most of all, an increase of sexual violence and

harassment. Be especially careful to verify all job offers before going to an unknown place. Sex traffickers often prey on homeless and displaced persons.

4. **When You Are Not Being Heard - Put It in Writing! Go to the Person in Charge! Go to the Press!** Don't let your needs and ideas get pushed into the background. Here are just three ways you and other women can put the pressure on when you need to. Get paper from an aide. Write your needs or ideas on one page. If you can, get other women to sign it with you. Find out who's in charge. Don't hesitate to go to the top. And remember, there are press people all around. Go to the press. Your voice needs to be heard.

5. **Organize and Help Other Women.** You may feel too overwhelmed right now to reach out to others. That's ok. But at some point you may find that it can help you feel more in control, or help get your mind off things, if you reach out to help others. Survey other women about their needs. Boost their spirits. Help them form a group, get their voices heard, their needs met, and their losses consoled.

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