



HURRICANE RELIEF PRE-TRIP ACTIVITIES

Houston

We are so grateful that you have decided to serve in Houston this summer. We believe it is important for every group to prepare for their mission trip – that need is even stronger for your trip to the Houston area. To help with your preparation, we've created some processing questions and activities for your group as well – many of which interact with these resources:

- [Relief & Rehabilitation Blog Post](#)
- [Disaster Response Phases – Rescue, Relief, Recovery](#) (This document was created by Episcopal Relief & Development)
- [Emotional Phases of a Disaster](#)

We're asking every group that's serving with us in Houston to carve out some time to go over some of these questions and activities.

RESCUE, RELIEF, RESPONSE ACTIVITY

Goal: Get your group familiar with the disaster response process

Step 1: Have half the group build a tower together, using a lot of items. Make sure some parts are somewhat stable. Include some messy items if you have something to cover the floor – a cup full of water, a bowl of dry cereal, etc..

Step 2: Keep a few group members by the table. They symbolize the people in the community. It's their tower! Now bump into that tower (or push the table). This symbolizes the disaster.

Step 3: The group has a goal: rebuild the tower to bring it back to normal.

First, start with the 'community members' (those handful of students that stayed with the tower). Before they start, ask them:

- If the tower was really your home - How do you feel about the fact its destroyed?
- How do you feel about rebuilding the tower all by yourself?
- What's your first step – your gut reaction?
 - Clean up things, not make it worse by stepping on cereal, wipe up water etc.
 - Note: If they ask for help, tell them that they're on their way, but can't get to the tower safely yet

After some initial clean-up, bring in the reinforcements!

- First bring in people who are 'close-by' – those who helped build the tower.
- Have them bring some back-up supplies to help build – tape, extra cereal, etc...
- Ask: How does it feel to have some help? (Be prepared for a mix of reactions – they may feel anywhere from grateful to frustrated.)

Take a few minutes to keep building. Then, bring in the back-up helpers – the rest of the group. They symbolize people from across the country (maybe even world) who are coming to help. Build for a while.

- Things to point out –
 - Do any of the community members need a break?

- Is the initial ‘crisis’ still there? (Is it about to fall? Is it stable? Do we have to worry about stepping in water or cereal still?)
- Do you think it will ever look the same? How do you feel about that?

Step 4: Rescue, Relief & Recovery Processing

You’ll need “The Road to Recovery” Handout.

- **Rescue:** Look at the “Rescue Phase” on your sheet.
 - What were we doing during this phase?
Making sure it was safe, picking up pieces, making sure the tower didn’t fall again.
 - Who was involved & why was it just them?
Local people – other people were unable to get there safely
 - What were your thoughts during this stage?
- **Relief:** Look at the “Relief Phase” on your sheet.
 - What were you doing during this phase?
Starting to rebuild, coming up with a plan, getting help from some outside community members, getting supplies delivered
 - What were your thoughts during this stage?
- **Recovery (short & long-term):** Look at the “Recovery Phase” on your sheet.
 - What did you do during this phase?
Actually rebuilding! Taking breaks, telling stories of what happened, processing it
 - What were your thoughts during this stage?

You’ll come back to these in future sections and you’ll talk about what phase the community is in. This would be a good stopping point if you’re planning on breaking up these learning components.

LEARNING & PROCESSING QUESTIONS

Overall Goal: Work with your group to adjust their expectations and prepare them to expect the unexpected.

STARTING QUESTION

In one sentence, describe your purpose in coming to Houston.

You can have people share these or you can use it as a reflection. Either way, hold onto these – we’ll come back to them later.

WHAT DO YOU EXPECT TO SEE?

Goal: Explore what your group thinks the community will look like.

- Has anyone seen any pictures of the Houston area after the hurricane or saw anything on the news about it?
- Think about the community of Houston a few months after the hurricane. What do you think it might look like now?
 - *If your group needs some direction, think through these specific areas – You could divide the group and assign some of these areas to people:*
 - Roads
 - Trees & plants
 - Buildings in the cities
 - Homes close to the ocean
 - Cars, trucks, school busses
 - Grocery stores & other shops
 - Churches & schools
- What are some examples of things we could do to help in these situations?
 - *Rebuilding houses, cleaning homes, gardening or replanting...*

PLOT TWIST

Goal: Don't expect to always see the physical evidence of devastation. The hurricane had a profound impact on everyone.

- Plot Twist: What happens if... you don't see any of these things? What happens if roads look fine? What if the stores area all open?
 - Possible answers – make sure these are covered:
 - *They've already addressed some of the things in the "relief" phase (roads have been fixed, debris has been picked up. There may still be lots to work on that you just can't see, like fixing up the inside of a home.*
 - *Sometimes needs are unseen!*
 - *People you meet might be exhausted – they've spent months rebuilding and stabilizing their community. You might be able to spend time encouraging them and taking some of their work for a while.*
 - *Some people may have their physical needs met, but they still have gone through something very difficult. They may need someone to just listen to their story and let them know they are valued.*
- Take some time looking at "The Road to Recovery" page.
 - What phase do you think the community is in?
As of the late winter, our YouthWorks team has identified that they are somewhere in the recovery phase, but this may change as your trip gets closer.
 - What do you think that phase might look like in real life?
- Key teaching point: While hurricane relief may be _____ (the things you talked about above; cleaning debris, rebuilding homes, etc.), it's also sitting with people and letting them know they're not forgotten, helping organizations organize supplies or running kids programming so their full-time staff can take a well-needed break.
 - Is that what you initially expected hurricane relief to look like?
- Key teaching point: We know that everyone who comes on a trip has ideas and assumptions of what they think might happen. However, we're asking you to put these ideas aside and come with an open heart about the needs in Houston.

THE INVISIBLE IMPACTS

Goal: Prepare to understand the underlying emotional impacts of natural disaster.

- Spend some time look at the infographic called "Emotional Phases of a Disaster"
Before this session, it may be helpful as a leader to look through the whole document, learning about each phases so you can answer questions and guide your group through the first page.
 - A few things to point out & ask:
 - What does it feel like at each main point on this picture?
 - Volunteers mostly come in the 'disillusionment stage' – this is true of your trip as well.
 - How can we help best in this stage?
Ideas: Listening well, supporting people by helping in whatever way is needed, understanding that people are tired, being joyful, being mindful of what we say, working hard, etc.
- Key teaching point: It's easy to see and understand the physical devastation. Even if you don't see it, people have been affected emotionally through the hurricane. It's just as important to help with emotional support as it is to help with physical restoration.

FINAL QUESTION

Look back at your purpose, is there anything you might add? Anything you might cross off of that statement?