

# Therapy With Victims Of Hurricane Katrina

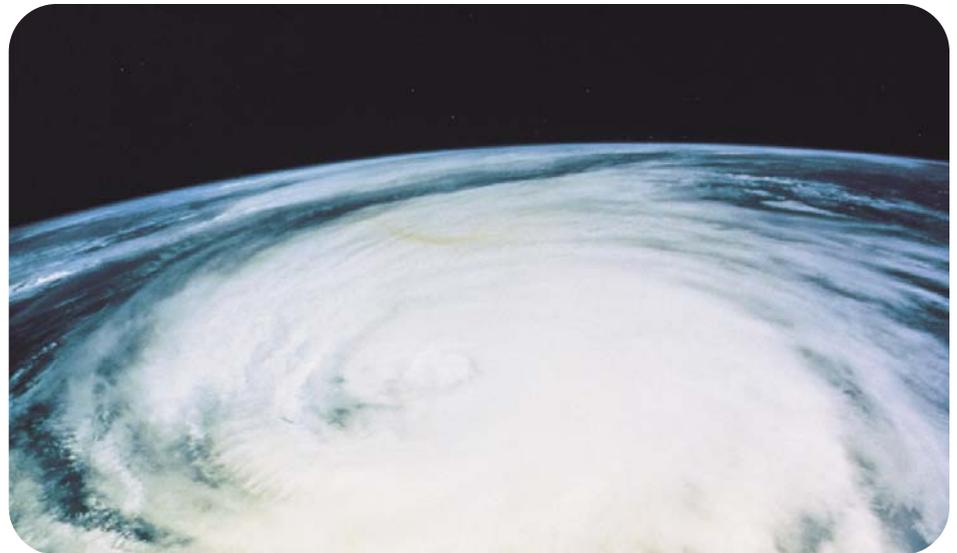
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## Background:

In August of 2005 Hurricane Katrina devastated the homes, property and lives of families living along the coast. Many families moved to Houston, Texas and the children of these families entered school. During the fall of 2005 over 200 children from New Orleans attended classes at the school in Texas. Most of these children only stayed 1-3 months. The children that remained began to tell us the horrible events that they had experienced. The senior author developed a Katrina Interview and Stress Ruler (Appendix A, page 10) to assess a number of stressors and degree of trauma. Questions included factors such as being in the Superdome, being harmed, being in an attic or on a roof, death of a family member, loss of a pet, seeing dead bodies, and other negative events. These questions were asked to determine the number of stressful events and the degree of trauma experienced by each child.

Children indicated that stress included several emotions including anxiety, sadness, and/or anger. The Stress Ruler contained four faces indicating greater degrees of emotion/stress. The Katrina Interview also began a dialog with the child about events and issues related to these events. This dialog continued in group discussions that followed the relaxation sessions.

Children were assessed using the Katrina Interview, Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale, Digit Span (WISC-IV), The Modified Emotionality Scale. A Behavioral Rating was also received from the parents of the children attending



relaxation sessions. The children that had emotional problems and remained at the school entered relaxation therapy. The authors read these children a short book named Feeling Katrina. This is a book by two psychologists (Lynette S. Causey, Ph.D. and Sandra Rouce, Ph.D.) designed to help children understand their emotions. The book acknowledges that it is hard to leave your friends and your school. The children in the story miss the smell of gumbo, the sound of jazz and other things associated with their culture and their neighborhood. Our children told us the things they missed about New Orleans.

Over 20 years research with the "Old Me, New Me" program has demonstrated significant improvement in concentration ability, anxiety, hyperactivity, aggressive ability, frustration, and other behaviors. We hypothesized that Relaxation Therapy, including Visual Imagery, could be helpful.

## Intervention:

The participants ranged in age from 7-12 years. All children were African American. The children had expressed a sincere desire to participate in the relaxation program. Many of these youngsters had severe behavioral problems and/or learning disabilities and were pleased to know that relaxation has been used to treat behavior problems and improve concentration ability.

Relaxation sessions began after the Christmas Holiday. The children attended 12-15 relaxation sessions utilizing "The Old Me New Me Program." This program was designed to be used in schools and includes a progressive relaxation tape, a breathing tape and 11 stories. The story tapes are Guided Imagery trips (Beach, Star. Woods, Magic Mountain and other stories) designed to address a variety of emotional and behavioral problems such as anxiety, anger, frustration, oppositional behavior, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. Positive Self-Talk statements are embedded in these stories to address negative

behaviors and enhance internal locus of control. Immediately following the 15 minute relaxation or story tape a discussion ensued. The discussion section allowed the child to talk about feelings and help the children implement the relaxation skills in their daily lives. The participants also drew pictures that symbolized the negative feelings that they wished to release. The children visualized the picture and released negative feelings while they were in a deep state of relaxation.

### Results:

The original population of 22 children was tested. Prior to intervention, there were significant differences between the anxiety levels of children that had experienced more stressful events as compared with those experiencing fewer stressors. ( $p < .03$ ). The total population demonstrated a deficit in auditory memory as measured by the Digit Span subtest ( $M=8.00$ ). These children made significant progress on auditory memory (Digit Span,  $p < .05$ ). Significant decreases were found in anxiety, physiological anxiety, and worry/oversensitivity ( $p < .02$ ) as well as social concerns/concentration ( $p < .02$ ). Additional improvements were found in a reduction of concentration problems, thought disorder symptoms ( $p < .02$ ) and depression ( $p < .03$ ). Parent ratings demonstrated significant decreases in physical aggression, verbal aggression, impulsivity, and concentration problems ( $p < .03$ ) as well as frustration and hyperactivity ( $p < .02$ ).

### Additional Notes:

Interviews done four months post intervention indicated that this therapy gave them self-power and reduced feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. The interventions by the authors indicate therapy stimulates resiliency to at-risk children.




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#### **Lendell Williams Braud, Ph.D. - Licensed Psychologist**

*Dr. Braud is a Professor of Psychology and Director of the Graduate School Psychology program at Texas Southern University (TSU) in Houston, Texas.*

*She developed the "Create-An-Image Relaxation" (CAIR) therapy technique. This technique was first used with abused males living at Good Shepherd Residential Treatment Facility (GSRTC) in Tomball, Texas.*

*Dr. Braud continues to do research on the CAIR technique at GSRTC. She and her colleagues are beginning a new study there that will run through the summer. She has been the primary Psychologist at Good Shepherd since May 2000.*



#### **Mimi Lupin, M.A., L.P.C., L.S.S.P.**

*Mimi Lupin is a Licensed Professional Counselor, a Licensed Specialist School Psychologist and is listed in Manchester's Who's Who of American Women. She has worked as a counselor for more than thirty years with children with emotional problems and has tested children for learning disabilities in a school setting.*

*She is currently the national trainer for the Center for Divorce Education in Ohio and trains counselors and psychologists to present the program Children in the Middle to divorcing parents in their communities. Ms. Lupin is also the author of a therapeutic CD using Imagery for children of divorce, Swimming with the Dolphins. This therapeutic CD engages children in a powerful healing conversation with a group of loving dolphins who understand what children of divorce need and how they feel and gives children hope that they will one day recover from this trauma.*

*She is also the author of the Old Me New Me, the CD program that was utilized in this study of Hurricane Katrina survivors.*

*Ms. Lupin lives in Hot Springs, Arkansas.*



The picture of the wave was done by a 5 year old brother of one of our participants. He was not a participant but sat in on some relaxation sessions and art sessions. He was only 4 1/2 years old when Katrina hit. He said that this is the wave that hit. He said the purple, green and pink areas did not mean anything he just liked those colors. Then he pointed to the black area and said that these were the people that died in the water. This just goes to show us that very young children can be impacted by events.



