

## DISASTER SPIRITUAL AND EMOTIONAL CARE TIP SHEETS

<p><b>Topic:</b></p>	<p><b>Connecting with Survivors</b></p>
<p><b>Aim:</b></p>	<p>This tip sheet contains tips on connecting emotionally and spiritually with disaster survivors and responders.</p>
<p><b>General Information:</b></p>	<p>There are numerous ways that caregivers can support those who have been affected by a disaster. The following is a list of the principles of crisis intervention along with how to implement that particular principle.</p>
<p><b>Goals for Connecting:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't argue.</li> <li>• Don't minimize the problem.</li> <li>• Find something to agree upon.</li> <li>• Establish rapport.</li> <li>• Use active listening techniques.</li> <li>• Emotionally connect with them and provide a safe harbor.</li> <li>• Provide strength, support, and guidance.</li> <li>• Provide a safe place where people can tell their story and experience all the thoughts, feelings and emotions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Qualities for Connecting:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being genuine.</li> <li>• Showing accurate empathic understanding.</li> <li>• Expressing unconditional positive regard.</li> <li>• Conveying warmth.</li> <li>• Being tactful and sensitive.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Factors which Prevent Connecting:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Busyness.</li> <li>• Being unengaged and inattentive to the survivor in front of you.</li> <li>• Failing to start at a non-threatening place that is non-invasive.</li> <li>• Being demanding; probing for emotional response.</li> <li>• Conveying distance or coldness.</li> <li>• Provoking guilt; blaming the person.</li> <li>• Being judgmental and dogmatic.</li> <li>• Responding to survivor anger with harshness, anger or disappointment.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Connecting in Practice:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be objective and meet the person "where they are" and with "what they are feeling."</li> <li>• Facilitate access to social support systems (family, friends, neighbors, services).</li> <li>• Help people recognize and draw on their own strengths.</li> <li>• Affirm the uniqueness of each individual's situation and reactions.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help them to understand that their stress response, while it may feel strange, is okay.</li> <li>• “Reach out” and provide for practical needs: nourishment, heat/cooling, clothes, blankets, telephone, a place to rest.</li> <li>• Provide accurate information on safety, where to get assistance.</li> <li>• Preserve an interpersonal safety zone protecting basic personal space (e.g., privacy, quiet, personal effects).</li> <li>• Minimize a person’s exposure to gruesome images, morbidity, and traumatic scenes.</li> <li>• Listen supportively to those who want to share their story.</li> <li>• Avoid probing for details or pushing for emotional responses.</li> <li>• Avoid giving advice (unless asked).</li> <li>• Ask how they (and their loved ones) are doing, and what you can do to help.</li> <li>• Meet them where they are, without judgment and your expectations.</li> </ul>
<b>Outreach:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You do not always have to talk about spiritual issues, pray, or read scripture to minister to the spiritual needs of people.</li> <li>• Meeting the practical needs is a part of spiritual ministry as well.</li> <li>• Disaster mental health workers seem less threatening when they refer to their services as “assistance,” “support” or “talking”.</li> <li>• The most effective interventions are usually done on-scene.</li> <li>• It seems that people are most open to talking about things over a cup of coffee or a meal.</li> </ul>
<b>Rejection:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caregivers must be prepared for rejection and anger responses from people affected by the disaster.</li> <li>• The emotional and spiritual caregiver should not personalize a refusal to talk or what may appear to be rejection.</li> </ul>
<b>Other Resources:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harding, S. (2007). <i>Spiritual care and mental health for disaster response and recovery</i>. New York: New York Disaster Interfaith Services.</li> <li>• National Child Traumatic Stress Network. (2006). <i>Psychological first-aid: Field operations guide for community religious professionals</i>. Los Angeles, CA: Author.</li> <li>• National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters. <i>Light our way: A guide for spiritual care in times of disasters</i>. Arlington, VA: Author.</li> <li>• Roberts, S., &amp; Ashley, W. (2008). <i>Disaster spiritual care: Practical clergy responses to community, regional, and national tragedy</i>. Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing.</li> </ul>

(Adapted from: Ellers, K.L. (2008). *Emotional and spiritual care in disasters, Participant guide (Version 6.0)*, International Critical Incident Stress Foundation.)

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