



DISASTER SPIRITUAL AND EMOTIONAL CARE TIP SHEETS

Topic:	How to Minister to Disaster Survivors
Aim:	Ministering to survivors in the wake of a disaster can be a powerful support to help them process what has happened. While there are many benefits to helping, there are also many challenges. This tip sheet describes those challenges and how to manage them.
In General:	<p>Counseling in a crisis situation is different from traditional counseling in several important ways.</p> <p>Traditional counseling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longer term in focus • Takes place in an office or agency • Driven by diagnosis • Encourages insight and personal growth <p>Crisis counseling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home or community based • Emphasizes current coping and support • Accepts the present at face value, does not seek to uncover • Validates the person's reactions to the current situation
First Contact:	<p>When you are working in a crisis or disaster setting, consider these points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate contact with people, that is, seek them out — don't expect them to come to you. • Allow time for the survivor to explain how they are doing. • Ask "What is going on inside?" rather than talking about "feelings." • Maintain a calm presence with the survivor to allow them to express any range of emotions they might be feeling. • Pay attention to nonverbal communication, including appearance and physical condition. • Use active listening to track with what the survivor is telling you. Do not analyze. • Provide practical services (e.g. handing out supplies), and be able to provide accurate information about the status of the disaster as this can decrease anxiety. • Help survivors identify people who can provide support. • Questions about "why" a disaster occurred are common and should be expected. Be careful to place the emphasis upon listening rather than giving over simplified theological answers or explanations.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When offering prayer, present prayer as an option and not a necessity (e.g. Is there anything you would like prayer for right now before I go, or are you okay?) • Ask the person if they have a plan for what they will do next. If not, help them think about practical needs and practical steps.
After the First Meeting:	<p>You may not get to see a person more than once. If you do, keep in mind the above suggestions, and also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask about the person's ability to get rest. • Ask about their plan. Were they able to do it or not? If not, explore barriers, help them revise their plan. • Assess if the person is in need of more professional assistance. Signs of this include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Feelings of despair or being overwhelmed; Talk of giving up ○ Loss of sleep for an extended period ○ Physical condition deteriorating ○ Lack of support system • If you use these signs, talk with the person about accessing additional services. If other services are not available, make a specific agreement to meet again. • Stay in contact with the person until a referral to another professional is complete, which means they have actually seen that person, not just been given a name.
Other Resources:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harding, S. (2007). <i>Spiritual care and mental health for disaster response and recovery</i>. New York: New York Disaster Interfaith Services. • National Child Traumatic Stress Network. (2006). <i>Psychological first-aid: Field operations guide for community religious professionals</i>. Los Angeles, CA: Author. • National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters. (2009). <i>Disaster spiritual care: Points of Consensus</i>. Arlington, VA: Author. • National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters. <i>Light our way: A guide for spiritual care in times of disasters</i>. Arlington, VA: Author. • Roberts, S., & Ashley, W. (2008). <i>Disaster spiritual care: Practical clergy responses to community, regional, and national tragedy</i>. Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing.

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