

**DISASTER SPIRITUAL AND EMOTIONAL CARE TIP SHEETS**

<p><b>Topic:</b></p>	<p><b>Disaster Spiritual and Emotional Care Listening and Attending Skills</b></p>
<p><b>Aim:</b></p>	<p>Disaster settings are normally chaotic, noisy and lacking privacy. As a result of reading this tip sheet, the designated emotional and spiritual caregiver can learn effective ways to create an environment that mitigates the effect of present distractions and stressors experienced by the individual, allowing him or her to process the experience of the disaster.</p>
<p><b>General Information:</b></p>	<p>The goal is to use attentive listening skills in order to help the survivor understand his/her experience of the disaster, to feel heard and understood, and begin to feel some sense of control and relief as a result of the process.</p> <p>It is important to note that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Listening is an active process and not simply quietly taking in what someone is saying.</li> <li>2. It is not up to you to fix the situation. Instead, listen for the person’s strengths, point them out, and suggest additional supports and resources as needed.</li> <li>3. Maintain an attitude of patience, calm and concern.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Create a Ministry of Presence:</b></p>	<p>In emotional and spiritual care emphasis is placed on being present with people. This is often referred to as the “ministry of presence.”</p> <p>Here are some definitions of ministry of presence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Becoming the channel through which God’s presence is manifested in interpersonal relationships” (Christian Business Leaders, <a href="http://www.cblw.org">www.cblw.org</a>).</li> <li>• To be fully with another person, exhibiting a non-anxious, comfortable presence while demonstrating “God with us” through the interconnectedness of the human interaction. It is the art of being with another.</li> </ul> <p>Elements of ministry of presence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Showing-Up”</li> <li>• “Being” rather than “Doing”</li> <li>• “Listening” rather than “Talking”</li> <li>• Meeting the survivor where they are at emotionally/psychologically</li> <li>• Demonstrating divine silence in which love rests secure</li> <li>• Providing the Ministry of “Privilege”</li> <li>• Giving a calm, accepting presence</li> <li>• Walking through the pain with another</li> <li>• Living out the Gospel through loving companionship, doesn’t necessarily mean speaking about spiritual topics</li> </ul>

**Key  
Attending  
Skills:**

There are three parts to active listening in a crisis: the setting, hearing the story, and responding accurately and with care and respect. Consider the following:

About the setting:

- Minimize distractions in the environment; this can be accomplished by relocating or positioning the individual's back to distractions.
- Be observant about the conditions and the survivor's appearance. Is the setting safe? Is it private? Does the survivor look like they feel safe? Do they have obvious physical needs that you should discuss?

Hear the story:

- Be fully present with the survivor; it is your job to set aside other thoughts and direct your attention to the survivor and what he or she is saying.
- Maintain a comfortable gaze; do not allow the eyes to shift, look around the room or take on an out-of-focus look.
- Maintain an engaged, but unobtrusive body position. Three such body positions are: direct (face-to-face) body orientation, an angled body orientation, and a side-by-side orientation. It has been noted that, on average, women are more likely to prefer the direct body orientation, while men tend to prefer the latter two body orientations. You will need to decide which orientation to use based on your assessment of the situation.
- Remember the importance of nonverbal messages. A lack of facial responsiveness or negative responses can quickly destroy a communication of interaction.
- Allow survivors to relate their experience of the disaster as they experienced it; this is often a necessary step that allows survivors to ground themselves in reality and make their felt pain real by linking it directly to their circumstance. The act of sharing can help validate the survivor's experience, and aid the creation of a bond between survivor and caregiver.

Respond with care and respect:

- Utilize empathy in the listening process; empathy is feeling and thinking with another person. If you are new to this, consider using a simple model, such as "When (an event they shared with you) occurred, then you felt (their experience)."
- It is OK if your reply misses the mark. The speaker usually will correct you, and then you can respond more accurately. You do not have to be accurate every time.
- As you start, keep your statements short and encourage the survivor to do most of the talking. Focus on helping them to tell their story. As their story is complete then shift to asking about other aspects of the story and how they are coping.
- Remember this is not therapy; it is the job of the caregiver to recognize and redirect downward emotional spiraling, should it begin to occur.



<p><b>What Not to Do:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't problem solve too early; it is easy for caregivers to respond cognitively, thereby causing them to miss reinforcing what the survivor is saying. Instead, the caregiver must first allow the survivor to give voice to their situation and receive confirmation by the caregiver as to what they have said.</li> <li>• Do not challenge, interpret, or make statements about larger issues beyond the crisis. Your role is to reinforce strengths and add to them as needed.</li> <li>• Don't interrupt the survivor too early with guiding questions; this may distract the thought process of the survivor, and deter them from saying what needs to be said.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Other Resources:</b></p>	<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. (2009). <i>Disaster spiritual care: Points of Consensus</i>. Arlington, VA: 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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