

Faith Communities & the Disaster Distress Helpline

All religious leaders should have a basic understanding of mental health assessment and referral—and, know where to refer a person in crisis. The Disaster Distress Helpline* offers 24/7 year-round crisis counseling for individuals and families in emotional distress related to all hazards, natural or human-caused disaster via phone (1-800-985-5990) and SMS (text “TalkWithUs” to 66746). The Helpline serves all 50 states and territories. Never “dormant,” it is *always available* before, during and after disasters.

TIP SHEET

12

WHO ANSWERS THE DISASTER DISTRESS HELPLINE & WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SOMEONE CALLS OR TEXTS?

All crisis call center staff and volunteers answering calls and texts for the Disaster Distress Helpline are trained in *Psychological First Aid* and “*Just In Time: Disaster Crisis Counseling for Call Centers*”.

Disaster Crisis Counseling includes:

1. Active Listening (“*I hear that you are confused and feeling overwhelmed about the evacuation orders ...*”)
2. Validation (“*It’s scary not being able to reach your loved ones after the storm ...*”)
3. Normalization (“*Feeling angry and abandoned, even months after a disaster, is a common reaction...*”)
4. Psycho-education (“*The thoughts you’re having after volunteering may be what is called ‘vicarious trauma’ ..*”)
5. Coping Skills Enhancement (“*And so in past tough times you have turned to your faith to help you get through?*”)
6. Connection to Social Supports (“*The last time you felt this stressed, to whom did you turn for support?*”)
7. Resources and Referrals (“*Have you ever heard of 2-1-1 call centers? These are local call centers that ...*”)
8. Planning (“*After we hang up, you’re going to call your local Red Cross chapter to find out about shelters ...*”)

Crisis Assessment, Intervention and Referral: Those who have struggled to recover after a disaster (survivors living and working in impacted areas; loved ones of victims; first responders, rescue and recovery workers and disaster relief staff and volunteers) may be at an increased risk for persistent anxiety, substance use/abuse, or threat or intent to harm oneself or others. Therefore, if a caller to the Disaster Distress Helpline indicates that they are or may be in crisis, call center staff, interns and volunteers are trained and equipped to assess, intervene & refer.

Guiding Principles: The Disaster Distress Helpline treats every caller and texter with respect, empathy, cultural sensitivity, and empowerment. DDH services are open and affirming of all who call or text, regardless of race, ethnicity, country of origin, immigration status, sex, gender identity, ability, age, sexual orientation, economic status, faith or creed.

WHEN SHOULD I REFER TO THE HELPLINE?

(See also, NDIN Tip Sheet 09: Faith Communities & Disaster Mental Health)

- ⇒ When no local or state crisis counseling hotline is immediately available after a disaster in your area
- ⇒ When a disaster you are responding to affects multiple communities in more than one state and it is easier to promote one toll-free, 24/7 crisis hotline number to those you serve
- ⇒ When you think that text-based crisis counseling may be more accessible to someone with whom you are working (teens, deaf or hearing impaired, those with limited English-speaking skills; when texting may be easier than talking)
- ⇒ When you are looking for a 24/7 crisis hotline available as an after-hours “safety net” for someone in distress
- ⇒ When you think someone in your congregation may benefit from receiving crisis counseling that is based outside of their community, that is anonymous and confidential (unless immediate crisis intervention is needed; see above)
- ⇒ When you or your fellow faith-based leaders in disaster relief need support for yourselves!

***The Disaster Distress Helpline (DDH) is administered by Link2Health Solutions (L2HS) via a grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. L2HS also administers the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline for SAMHSA and the Disaster Distress Helpline ‘Core Region Centers’ (CRCs) were selected from the Lifeline network of over 150 call centers to provide 24/7 staffing for its services.**

Disaster Distress Helpline

PHONE: 1-800-985-5990 TEXT: "TalkWithUs" to 66746

SUMMARY OF DISASTER DISTRESS HELPLINE SERVICES:

Phone: 1-800-985-5990

- Toll-free
- Multi-lingual
- Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, year-round

TTY for Deaf and Hearing Impaired: 1-800-846-8517

- Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, year-round

SMS: Text "TalkWithUs" to 66746

- Standard text messaging/data rates apply (according to each subscriber's mobile provider plan)
- Spanish-speakers can text "Hablanos" to 66746; Puerto Rico text "Hablanos" to 1-212-461-4635
- Palau, Marshall Islands, American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia text "TalkWithUs" to 1-206-430-1097
- US Virgin Islands text "TalkWithUs" to 1-212-461-4635
- Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, year-round

Web: <http://disasterdistress.samhsa.gov>

Social Media:

- Facebook: www.facebook.com/distresshelpline
- Twitter: @distressline

Literature

- Tri-fold brochures & wallet cards: distress warning signs, tips for healthy coping, how to get help
- Available in English and Spanish
- Call Ann Ahearn, Administrative Assistant, at 1-212-614-5766 to inquire about ordering free copies or email aahearn@mhaofnyc.org.

For more information regarding the Disaster Distress Helpline, contact:

Joe Samalin, Outreach and Training Manager: 1-212-614-6386 / jsamalin@mhaofnyc.org
- Trainings or presentations, other collaborations

Alicja Patela, Communications Coordinator: 1-212-614-5765 / apatela@mhaofnyc.org
- Social media, press and other media inquiries

Christian Burgess, Director: 1-212-614-6346 / cburgess@mhaofnyc.org
- Any of the above or all other matters

⇒ For more information on SAMHSA, visit: <http://www.samhsa.gov>

⇒ For more information on Lifeline, visit: <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>