EMOTIONAL & SPIRITUAL CARE OVERVIEW

The **purpose** of Disaster Emotional & Spiritual Care is to provide ethical and culturally sensitive support to address the stress, loss, and/or trauma experienced by individuals, families, and communities impacted by disaster. The **outcome** is access to mental health resources and spiritual care to assist with the holistic recovery of individuals, families, and communities.

Throughout the entire Disaster Management Continuum (Response, Recovery, and Resilience) there are numerous forms of Emotional and Spiritual Care (ESC) that assist communities in coping with tragedy, upheaval and loss. There are different interventions needed, in group settings or individual sessions, for a variety of potential recipients of care: the affected homeowners, the children in the affected homes, caregivers for those injured or displaced, emergency response personnel and disaster volunteers, religious leaders of the affected community, and even community members who experience secondary disaster impacts. ESC in disaster therefore, includes many kinds of caring gestures; listening to the stories of disaster impacted individuals/families, arranging familiar spiritual or religious resources, leading large community-wide events, and referring for more advanced mental health services.

As an integral part of the pre-disaster community, local spiritual and emotional care providers are primary resources for post-disaster emotional and spiritual care, being uniquely equipped to facilitate holistic healing. However, the level of need for ESC is potentially much more concentrated following a disaster than what is encountered on a regular basis in the community, varying among individuals by the degree of disaster exposure, personal resilience, and the strength of the recovery environment. Local providers are therefore often supported by external providers and training.

Spiritual Care and Emotional Care share some common elements and each serve an important role by collaborating to provide care. Both emotional and spiritual care can improve the hope and coping skills of persons impacted by disaster, but could also do harm if performed in an inappropriate way. Adherence to common standards and principles in ESC ensures that these services are delivered safely.

In this Toolkit, resources and tips will be shared in order to inform your community’s immediate response to disaster-related ESC needs, organizing an expanded local ESC provider network, implementing long-term ESC, monitoring services for success and providers for burnout, and ending services within appropriate parameters.
Minimum Standards for Emotional & Spiritual Care Providers

- Offer presence and hospitality (be an “active listener” while providing comfort)
- Meet, accept and respect persons exactly as they are (diverse faith traditions and social diversity)
- Provide appropriate and respectful disaster emotional and spiritual care
- Maintain confidentiality and professional boundaries that ensure safety of clients
- Ensure that service providers function at levels appropriate to their training and educational backgrounds
- Nurture and encourage every spiritual perspective to be a source of strength in difficult times.
- Embrace a holistic view of people to recognize opportunities to connect clients with needed recovery resources
- Understand the role of Disaster Mental Health and be attentive to signs for when referrals to Mental Health professionals are needed
- Commitment to collaboration with all disaster responding ESC providers (local and national) in the best interest of the clients
- Those providing emotional and spiritual care should have cultural and religious competency training

Appropriate and Respectful Disaster Emotional & Spiritual Care

The National VOAD Disaster Spiritual Care Points of Consensus states disaster can cause significant emotional and spiritual distress and that ESC can help rekindle hope and resilience. The privilege of using healing resources in disaster ESC involves certain responsibilities, among them are:

- Recognizing the right of each individual and group to hold to their existing values and traditions.
- Refraining from manipulation, disrespect or exploitation of those impacted by disaster and trauma.
- Respecting the freedom from unwanted gifts of religious literature or symbols, evangelistic and sermonizing speech, and/or forced acceptance of specific moral values and traditions.
- Avoiding the exploitation of the imbalance of power between ESC providers and those being served in any way, including:
  - Not using position, influence, knowledge or professional affiliation for unfair advantage or for personal, organizational or agency gain.
  - Not using disaster response to further a particular political or religious perspective or cause.
  - Carrying out all activities according to the need of individuals, families and communities, in a spirit of unconditional caring which does not condition any form of assistance to the embracing or acceptance of a particular political or religious creed.
ESC Resource History and Tips

In 2006, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD) Emotional and Spiritual Care Committee published *Light Our Way* to inform, encourage and affirm those who respond to disasters and to encourage standards ensuring those affected by disaster receive appropriate and respectful spiritual care services. That same year, the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (NC-PTSD), developed Psychological First Aid training, an evidence-informed modular approach for assisting people to cope with the emotional effects in the immediate aftermath of disaster and terrorism to reduce initial distress and to foster short and long-term adaptive functioning. This training has since been promoted by the American Red Cross, Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), the American Psychological Association (APA) and many others.

Since then, progress continues toward formalize disaster ESC, including an updated 2017 edition of *Light Our Way* with added content and ratification of NVOAD’s Points of Consensus for emotional care and spiritual care in 2015 and 2016 respectively. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Nation Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN), and others have developed, refined, and made readily available many resources (intervention tips, assessment tools, self-care guides, etc.). A small sampling of such resources are listed below. There may be others that are more suitable for your needs, however, it’s important to use only evidence-based, trauma-informed, non-proselytizing resources for disaster ESC.

Definitions

**Spiritual Care** includes anything that assists an individual, family or community in drawing upon their own spiritual perspective as a source of strength, hope and healing. Disaster Spiritual Care Providers may have a different religious or faith tradition than the individuals, families and communities for which they care. Disaster Spiritual Care provides sensitive, appropriate care for all persons and to celebrate and respect every spiritual perspective.

**Emotional care** offers an opportunity where one can express their emotions without judgment. Disaster emotional care includes a range of supportive actions grounded in concepts of resilience and behavioral health, which are informed by relevant research and established best practices. Providers engage in assessment and triage activities, psychosocial support, coping skill training, and early psychological intervention. In situations where the individual/family mental health needs exceed the capacity of the emotional care provider, referral to local mental health providers may be necessary.

**Spirituality** - Many people choose to adhere to a religion or faith tradition which provides a source of belonging, meaning, and identity. Spirituality is broader concept, because every person has a sense of spirituality, whether or not they are ‘religious’; it involves the struggle for meaning and the relationship of the Human Spirit to transcendence.

FEMA Crisis Counseling Program

In the event of a Federally-Declared Disaster, the State has the opportunity to apply for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Crisis Counseling Program Grants to provide outreach oriented support workers to augment the local emotional/mental health providers. More information at [https://www.fema.gov/recovery-directorate/crisis-counseling-assistance-training-program](https://www.fema.gov/recovery-directorate/crisis-counseling-assistance-training-program)
ESC Mental Health Providers:

- Identify common crisis reactions (psychological, emotional, physical, spiritual, etc.)
- Accurately assess emotional and spiritual/religious needs
- Develop a care plan with clients, select and provide appropriate intervention(s)
- Make referrals to health care, spiritual care, and other mental health professionals when needed

Settings for ESC Care

Community Settings: Settings in which the provider(s) are working with groups. These settings include community meetings and events. Activities in the congregate setting may include speeches, trainings, facilitated group conversations, literature and resource sharing, compassionate presence, and outreach.

Private Settings: Settings in which the rules, regulations, and ethics of the providing organization take precedence, such as a mental health provider setting or the space in which formal religious activities typically occur.

Shared Settings: Settings in which organized disaster emotional and spiritual care activities are provided by numerous different organizations to support the care needs of diverse populations of impacted persons. Examples of shared settings include shelters, points of distribution or dispensing, multi-agency resource centers (MARCs) and other settings organized for general disaster recovery services in which ESC support is a corresponding service but not the focal point.

Potential Collaboration Partners

Emotional and Spiritual Care is most effective when organized into a comprehensive disaster response and recovery effort in order to engage complementary resources for holistic recovery. ESC providers need to be prepared to help persons from a wide range of spiritual, cultural, and language backgrounds by acknowledging what is or isn’t within their expertise and facilitate connections with other specialists to meet the unique needs.

Local communities of faith and mental health providers are uniquely equipped to provide healing care. During times of disaster, existing helping capacity may be stretched by the level of need or compromised by disaster impact to the providers themselves. It is therefore crucial to be able to engage support from outside of the community when needed to ensure sufficient ESC resources for all impacted.

Partners may include:

- Local/National VOAD member organizations: Catholic Charities USA, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, Salvation Army, Red Cross, Lutheran Disaster Response, Additional NVOAD members can be found at https://www.nvoad.org/voad-members/national-members
- Child-centered Programing: Camp Noah, Childcare Aware, Children’s Disaster Services, Save the Children
- Local Partners: Faith Leadership, Ministerial Alliance, Mental Health Professionals, Social Service Agencies
- State Partners: Medical Reserve Corp, Mental Health Centers, Department of Mental Health
- Denomination or Regional Faith Leadership and Chaplaincy Organizations
Training

Local providers often aren’t familiar with the concentrated and lasting needs and the particular effects disasters have on individuals and communities. Training for local emotional and spiritual care providers can equip them to provide sustainable services that uplift the resilience and healing of the community while protecting the providers themselves from experiencing burnout or secondary trauma.

Components ESC Provider Training:

- Disaster 101 Toolkit
- Long Term Recovery Overview
- Disaster Spiritual and Emotional Impact
- Standards of Basic ESC Care
- Referral Process and Contacts
- Cultural and Spiritual Diversity Competency
- Reporting requirements
- Mitigating Compassion Fatigue and burnout/Self-Care Techniques

See Guidance: Additional ESC Resources for potential training sources

Secondary Trauma Stress, Compassion Fatigue & Burnout

Providing disaster emotional and spiritual care can be an overwhelming experience. Many caregivers will naturally absorb the strength of the feelings that their clients are experiencing, often resulting in secondary traumatic stress. The burdens of caring for others in this context can lead to compassion fatigue. Repeated and extended episodes of caregiving can aggravate the issue to burnout, at which point providers may be unable to continue their work.

- Secondary traumatic stress – is the emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand experiences of another. (National Child Traumatic Stress Network)
- Compassion Fatigue – physical and mental exhaustion and emotional withdrawal experienced by those that care for traumatized people over an extended period of time
- Burnout – feelings of extreme exhaustion and being overwhelmed, leading to stagnation, frustration, and apathy.

ESC Committee within the LTRG

When a disaster hits, an entire community is immediately impacted. Community members, schools, businesses, churches, roads, etc. are all affected. Disasters create many challenges but also create opportunities to bring communities together for progress and healing. This can be a long and slow process that is not always easy. The Long Term Recovery process is unique to each community. An effective way for the individual needs to be met is for a group to form with the purpose of collaborating together with recovery as the main goal. Typically, there are eight standard committees that are active during disaster recovery and response. One of these committees is the ESC Committee.

ESC Committee Goals:

- Retention and sustained wellbeing of the ESC provider network
- Stabilization and reduction of symptoms after the initial impact of trauma
- Signs of increased resilience and coping among community members
- Return to adaptive functioning for those impacted by disaster

Tasks for ESC Committee:

- MARC Participation
- On-site assistance and response to call requesting spiritual or emotional assistance
- Community Days and Camps
- Record keeping of activities
ESC Forms & Tools

- Disaster 101 Toolkit
- Long Term Recovery Overview
- Guidance: Disaster Spiritual and Emotional Impact
- Guidance: Standards of Basic ESC Care
- Guidance: Process for referral, confidentiality, and reporting
- Guidance: Cultural and Spiritual Diversity Competency
- Guidance: Mitigating Compassion Fatigue and burnout/Self-Care Techniques
- Guidance: Additional ESC Resources

Acknowledgements

- NVOAD and ESC Committee Member Organizations
- Lutheran Disaster Response
- The American Institute of Stress (AIS)
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA)
- Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress (CSTS)
- National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (NCPTSD)
- New York Disaster Interfaith Services (NYDIS)
- The Phoenix Project USA
- The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)
- OKMRC Stress Response Team

Additional Resources

- Disaster Spiritual Care Guidelines & Points of Consensus (NVOAD) - https://www.nvoad.org/resource-center/member-resources/?mdocs-cat=mdocs-cat-60&mdocs-att=null
- Disaster Emotional Care Points of Consensus (NVOAD) – https://www.nvoad.org/resource-center/member-resources/?mdocs-cat=mdocs-cat-62&mdocs-att=null
- Disaster Technical Assistance Center (SAMSHA) - https://www.samhsa.gov/dtac/disaster-behavioral-health-resources
- Trauma-Informed Care (NCTSN) - https://www.nctsn.org/trauma-informed-care
- Working with Trauma Survivors (NCPTSD) - https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/provider-type/responders/working-with-trauma-survivors.asp
- Psychological First Aid, online class (NCTSN) - https://learn.nctsn.org/course/index.php?categoryid=11

**There are so many resources among faith community, state public health, national organizations, etc., we can only highlight some here. See Guidance: Additional ESC Resources**