

SECTION ONE

BASIC CONCEPTS OF

Spiritual Care

Summary

Spirituality is an essential part of humanity. Disaster disrupts people's spiritual lives significantly. Nurturing people's spiritual needs contributes to holistic healing. Everyone can benefit from spiritual care in times of disaster.

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Basic Concepts of Spiritual Care

THE NATIONAL VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS ACTIVE IN DISASTER (National VOAD) is an organization especially appropriate to identify and champion the principles and standards of disaster spiritual care. Many of the member organizations have religious and spiritual backgrounds. The very principles of National VOAD's foundation, the Four C's of Cooperation, Communication, Coordination, and Collaboration, speak to identifying, applying and practicing common standards in this



important endeavor. The Emotional & Spiritual Care Committee likes to include a fifth C—Compassion. We offer *Light Our Way* as a source of

ALAN SAT IN SHOCKED SILENCE. His head was spinning with images of the chaos that had crashed down on him only a few hours earlier. He and his wife awoke at midnight to what sounded like a freight train roaring through their farm. The house had shuddered as a massive tree limb slammed through the back porch and staring into the inky darkness, Alan realized the barn was gone. Just....gone.

Now he waited in the hospital emergency room, silent amid the bustle of nurses and doctors scurrying frantically among the many injured. The storm had continued northeast and had struck the town with savage fury. Alan's sister lay somewhere behind the maze of hospital curtains. The doctor said she'd broken her hip and that at her age, this was a serious matter.

Alan felt the rage building inside him. How could this be? What are we going to do? "I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING!" His shouting surprised everyone, including himself. He was immediately embarrassed, but still shaking with rage.



common language and approach to developing capacity in spiritual care along the entire disaster continuum. We hope that this resource lights the way toward planning and providing spiritual care as an integral part of disaster response.

WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY?

Before one can explore the meaning and place of spiritual care, we must consider a primary question. “What is spirituality?”

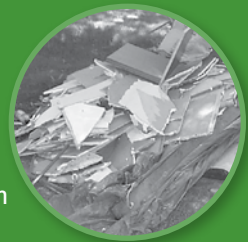
Spirituality is a broader concept than religion or faith tradition. Many people choose to adhere to a religion or faith tradition that provides a source of belonging, meaning, and identity. Spirituality is broader because every person has a sense of spirituality, whether or not she is “religious.”

There may well be as many definitions of spirituality as people on the globe. Many definitions, however, share common elements involving the struggle for meaning and the relationship of the human spirit to transcendence and hope.

Most people slid away from him, but one woman sat down right beside him. She introduced herself as the Chaplain on duty that evening. Alan could see from her name badge that she was a Rabbi. “I notice you’re in some distress,” she said gently, “I just want you to know that I’m here if you’d like to talk.”

Alan had never spoken with a counselor or clergyperson for personal matters before, but this night he poured out his heart. He cried and complained and cursed. The Chaplain sat with him listening to his lament. She encouraged him to share his feelings and held his hand when he cried. Alan was surprised at how grateful he was for her simple touch.

When Alan finally received permission to visit his sister the Chaplain offered to come with him. “Would you pray for us, Chaplain?” he asked. The Chaplain’s prayer asked for God’s presence in the midst of these difficult times. Alan returned home, but his heart was heavy and his spirit was numb.



Consider these descriptions of spirituality.

“Spirituality is a personal quest for the transcendent, how one discerns life’s meaning in relation to God and other human beings. Healthy spirituality fosters healthy relationships and affirms all of life’s experiences as part of the journey.”

—RABBI ERIC LANKIN

“Spirituality is the feeling of being alive. It is the driving force that gives you the understanding of who you are. It is the guide that leads you to the meaning of your relation with God, people, the world and yourself. Spirituality brings clarity to your thoughts, tranquility to your heart and warmth to your feelings.”

—IMAM SHAYKH KIFAH MUSTAPHA

“Spirituality is the essence of life—the beliefs and values that give meaning to existence and that which is held sacred. It is one’s understanding of self, God, others, the universe, and the resulting relationships.¹”

—REV. NAOMI KOHATSU PAGET



MARKS OF POSITIVE SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality is a complex and intricately personal experience. Each person's spiritual life is a unique and marvelous journey. Each spiritual journey follows its own course; nevertheless, lives that are spiritually whole exhibit similar trends. Such lives express:

- **A sense of awe and wonder:** Feelings of awe and wonder are the personal response to one's awareness and relationship to the Transcendent, the Mystery, to *that-which-is-greater-than-myself*.
- **A sense of community:** Feelings of belonging and connectedness nurture one's soul as well as one's physical and mental health. The "soul food" of communal identity promotes connectedness, compassion and the desire to serve others.
- **A sense of personal mission:** People who have a strong sense of purpose and direction for their lives seem better able to remain focused and grounded in spite of disruptions and changes.
- **Enthusiasm for continuous discovery and creativity:** A mark of the presence of spiritual reflection is an adventurous spirit that is willing to risk new experiences.
- **A sense of well-being and joy:** Feelings of satisfaction and happiness reflect a balanced life: care for oneself and care for others; accountability to self and others; and, the ability to celebrate life and the Source of life even in the worst of times.²

Many of these trends of healthy spirituality need to be nurtured and attended to after disaster. We will examine later in this guide how one may assess and plan for spiritual care to attend to these needs.



HOW DISASTER AFFECTS SPIRITUALITY

Faced with any loss, but especially sudden and profound loss such as in disaster, one's sense of meaning and purpose—indeed everything one may have thought about how the world works—is turned upside down. This sense of disruption can pervade an entire community.

“A disaster affects the entire fabric of community that existed prior to the event and can cause traumatic stress among the whole community. Disaster recovery is in large part the rebuilding of community, the re-tying of the thousands of strands of relationship in the fabric of our being together that have been severed by the disaster.”

—THE REV. JOHN A. ROBINSON, JR.

Symptoms of spiritual dis-ease that may be exhibited during disaster include:

- Reconsidering core tenets of religious beliefs
- Asking questions like “why did God do this?”
- Questioning justice and meaning
- Feeling far from previously held beliefs
- Feeling a need to be cleansed
- Closing oneself off from loved ones
- Feeling despair and hopelessness
- Feeling guilty
- Wondering about life and death
- Feeling shame





WHAT IS SPIRITUAL CARE?

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. In disaster, anything that nurtures the human spirit in coping with the crisis is spiritual care.

Religious leaders naturally provide care for their own congregants, members, and parishioners in a manner imbued with the symbolism, meaning and resources of their own faith traditions. In fact, for individuals who belong to particular communities of faith, their own clergy and religious leaders are usually the best persons to offer them spiritual care in times of trouble. Disaster spiritual care, however, can be quite different.

In disaster spiritual care, spiritual care providers may not share a religious or faith tradition with the individuals, families and communities for which they care. Indeed, the recipients of the care may not belong to any religious community at all. Thus, disaster spiritual care endeavors to provide sensitive, appropriate care for *all* persons and to celebrate and respect *every* spiritual perspective.



Therefore, some of the basic standards and principles of disaster spiritual care include:

1. Offer presence and hospitality
2. Meet, accept and respect persons exactly as they are
3. Do No Harm—Never exploit persons in vulnerable need

Spiritual care providers can be a quiet and patient listening presence while people share strong feelings and emotions of loss, anger and pain. Spiritual care providers nurture and encourage every spiritual perspective to be a source of strength in difficult times. Spiritual care providers patiently accept strong expressions of anger and rage, even those directed at God. Spiritual care providers never correct or contradict any expression of faith or doubt. *All expressions are authentic and true for the person receiving care.*

Spiritual care may involve arranging and appropriately providing for religious resources, rituals and experiences if the recipient of the care identifies with a specific faith tradition. If requested, such religious symbols can bestow a sense of belonging and comfort. Disaster spiritual care providers become familiar with the symbols and resources of the world religions and encourage partnerships among all faith leaders in a community.

In this resource we will explore many different avenues of spiritual care, including activities that explicitly assist spiritual healing and activities that are effective even without previous plan or intention. Throughout the entire disaster continuum, there are numerous forms of spiritual care that assist communities in coping with tragedy, upheaval and loss.



WHO RECEIVES SPIRITUAL CARE?

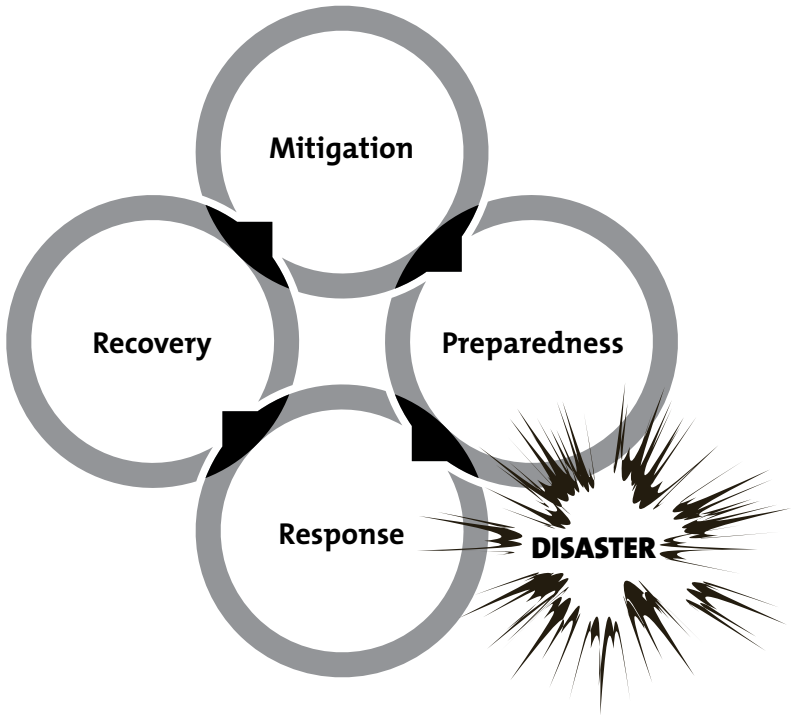
Everyone’s sense of meaning can be shaken during a disaster—from those suffering losses to response workers. Each may benefit from receiving spiritual care. The following chart suggests persons who may require spiritual care and the kind of spiritual struggles they may face.

<p>People who are impacted by disaster who may seek or need spiritual care:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • individuals/families/communities who have lost homes or have been displaced • individuals/families/communities who have lost businesses or whose businesses have been shut down • individuals/families who have become separated • families/businesses/congregations who have lost loved ones or been displaced • the seriously injured • first responders • relief workers • community leaders • Emergency Room and hospital personnel • law enforcement personnel • survivors of previous disasters and traumas 	<p>Questions and needs arising from the disaster:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • struggles of faith and meaning • desire for religious/spiritual resources and rituals • questions about getting assistance—when, where, how • need for contact & sense of belonging • need for basic survival materials—shelter, rest, water, food, basic sanitation • need for accompaniment/calm presence of others who have not been affected as severely • need for gathering places to connect with other survivors/mourners • need for safe places to vent/talk/recover
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Spiritual care is a fluid and creative process. Spiritual care providers respond to the unique needs of individuals, families and communities in many different ways. In the next section we will explore different avenues of spiritual care.

THE FOUR PHASES OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT



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