

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH MESSAGES RELATED TO DISASTERS & OTHER PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCIES

Developed by
Nebraska's Risk Communication Cadre
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Behavioral Health Messages Related to Disasters & Other Public Health Emergencies

Building trust and conveying messages of hope and recovery are critical to the emotional well being of persons affected by disasters and other public health emergencies.

This document contains several pre-developed messages that spokespeople can use for different events. Spokespeople should practice delivering the three key messages, then work their way through the supporting points when needed. These messages were developed by Nebraska's Behavioral Health Risk Communication Cadre – professionals with special expertise and knowledge of risk communication and threat assessment. The group meets monthly to discuss emergency plans and information related to behavioral health.

The behavioral health guidelines for risk communication (on page 3) serve as broad guiding principles for public officials as they communicate with the public.

This is followed by a series of messages related to psychological or emotional aspects of disasters that are commonly asked by media and by people affected by the event. **These messages are intended to be delivered as written.** Each topic is composed of **three key messages** and a set of **three supporting statements for each key message.** The message and supporting statements have been **very carefully designed and ordered** to help the spokesperson communicate this important information effectively using easy to understand language, short sentences, and other proven risk communication techniques.

A set of **fact sheets are included at the end of the document.** These can be used in conjunction with the key messages or form the basis of printed material that can be distributed as needed.

Additional material is available for download from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Disaster Technical Assistance Center (DTAC). The [Disaster Response Template Toolkit](#) contains a comprehensive collection of online resources and materials, as well as editable templates that can be easily tailored to meet the needs of any disaster response program.

To view the **Disaster Response Template Toolkit**, please visit http://www.samhsa.gov/dtac/dbhis/dbhis_templates_intro.asp.

For Nebraska specific information, please visit <http://disastermh.nebraska.edu/>

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RISK MESSAGES WITH BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CONTENT

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH GUIDELINES FOR RISK COMMUNICATION

BE FIRST. BE RIGHT. BE CREDIBLE. BE EMPATHETIC.

Building trust and conveying messages of hope and recovery is critical to the emotional well-being of persons affected by disaster or emergency events.

Your messages should:

- Begin with a statement of empathy
- Provide reassurance through fact-based information
- Counter rumors
- Encourage safe, adaptive, and cooperative behavior
- Promote self-care strategies for stress management
- Emphasize resilience

During a period of uncertainty and unconfirmed threat, communication should:

- Reassure
- Foster Confidence & Coping
- Promote Preparedness

During an event communication should:

- Reassure
- Foster Confidence & Coping
- Empower
- Encourage People to Reconnect

During recovery communication should:

- Foster Resilience
- Empower
- Encourage Community Cohesion
- Commemorate

References:

Missouri Department of Mental Health Office of Disaster Readiness. (2006) Disaster Communications Guidebook - Communicating in a crisis: Promoting trust, cooperation, & emotional well-being through risk communication. U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services. (2005). Terrorism and other public health emergencies: A reference guide for media. Office of the assistant secretary for public affairs: Washington, D.C. Retrieved April 23, 2007 from: <http://www.hhs.gov/emergency>

TOPIC: *STRESS AND LOSS OF BASIC INFRASTRUCTURE

QUESTION: WHAT CAN WE DO TO COPE WITH THIS SITUATION?

Note: This message can be customized for different situations like a disaster, loss of electricity, or any major infrastructure/utility loss. For instance, the question may be “What can we do to cope with the stress of living without electricity?”

Key Message #1:

1) Adjusting to life after an event like this can be challenging.

Supporting Statements:

- a) It is common to feel tired or worn out even with enough sleep.
- b) People may be surprised by the intensity of their emotions.
- c) Everyone reacts to stress their own way.

TWEET:

Everyone reacts to stress in their own way. Take care of yourself. Get plenty of rest & eat right.

Key Message #2:

2) Take care of yourself.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Eat healthy foods and get plenty of rest.
- b) Accept help when it’s offered.
- c) Spend time with family or friends, talk, or play games.

Key Message #3:

3) There are many ways to help those affected by this event.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Offer help like cooking, running errands, or babysitting.
- b) Help someone get away from home for a day or a few hours.
- c) Most people will be okay with support from family and friends.

References:

National Mental Health Association. (nd). Coping with Loss. Retrieved Feb. 7, 2012 from: <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/information/get-info/grief-and-bereavement/coping-with-loss/coping-with-loss>

American Association of Retired Persons. (nd). Grief and Loss. Retrieved Oct. 12, 2006 from: <http://www.aarp.org/relationships/grief-loss/>

TOPIC: *ANXIETY

QUESTION: WHAT CAN PEOPLE DO TO FEEL SAFER OR CALMER (REDUCE STRESS/ANXIETY)?

Key Message #1:

1) Take care of your emotional and spiritual needs.

Supporting Statements:

- a) It's common to feel anxious or worried.
- b) Try to reduce your work load and regular responsibilities.
- c) Stay in contact with friends, family, and spiritual support.

Key Message #2:

2) Good physical health improves your outlook.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Eat a balanced diet, get enough sleep, and exercise.
- b) Avoid using drugs, alcohol, and tobacco to cope.
- c) Keep a regular schedule to lessen worry and anxiety.

Key Message #3:

[For natural disaster or a public health emergency]

3) Prepare as you would for any emergency.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Make a list of healthy ways to take care of your mind and body.
- b) Stay informed about [insert event].
- c) Keep extra food, water, medicines, and household goods on hand.

[For terrorism/shooting; can also be used for other events]

3) Take things one day at a time.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Focus on things you can control.
- b) Helping someone else can help you feel better.
- c) Do something you enjoy.

References:

<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/mass-shooting.aspx>

TWEET:

Take care of emotional & spiritual needs. Good health improves your outlook. Prepare as you would for any emergency.

QUESTION: ARE THE RUMORS TRUE?

Key Message #1:

1) Stay current on official information.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Be calm, and follow the advice of local authorities.
- b) Check the facts.
- c) Pay attention to official sources.

Key Message #2:

2) Professionals are working to resolve the situation.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Responders are trained to handle a variety of situations.
- b) They are taking actions according to plans.
- c) Responders are prepared for an event like this.

[Note: An alternate version of c), or an answer to a question, could be:]

- d) I have confidence in the people working on this situation.

Key Message #3:

3) There are a number of things you can do.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Share the facts with people.
- b) Follow directions from local officials.
- c) Be ready to help when asked.

TWEET:

Get the facts at:
[website and/or
facebook page]

TWEET:

Follow directions:
[website and/or
facebook page]

TOPIC: MEDIA COVERAGE

QUESTION: HOW DO I DEAL WITH MEDIA COVERAGE AFTER AN EVENT?

Key Message #1:

1) Be thoughtful about what you see and hear about the [event]

Supporting Statements:

- a) It can take time to confirm facts.
- b) Avoid repeating rumors.
- c) Get the facts from official sources.

Key Message #2:

2) Information on social media could affect your reactions.

Supporting Statements:

- a) A large number of sources exist on social media.
- b) Official sources must verify information before sharing it.
- c) Avoid reacting to rumors.

Key Message #3:

3) Most people will be fine with support from family and friends.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Limiting exposure to media may reduce everyone's stress.
- b) Trained professionals can help if you are overwhelmed.
- c) Rely on and support those around you.

TOPIC: *STRONG EMOTIONS AFTER AN EVENT

QUESTION: HOW DO WE DEAL WITH SUCH STRONG EMOTIONS?

Key Message #1:

1) People may be surprised by intense and changing emotions.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Fear, anger, guilt, and sadness are common feelings after an event like this.
- b) You may also notice those emotions in others.
- c) Be patient with yourself and your loved ones.

Key Message #2:

2) Take care of yourself during this stressful time.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Get plenty of rest.
- b) Take time for yourself.
- c) Talk to someone if you're feeling overwhelmed.

Key Message #3:

3) We will get through this by supporting each other.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Focus on things you can control.
- b) Be available to help others when you can.
- c) Accept help when it is offered.

TWEET:

Fear, anger, guilt & sadness are common after an event. Take care of yourself. Talk to someone if you're overwhelmed.

TOPIC: *LOSS OR GRIEF

QUESTION: HOW ARE PEOPLE AFFECTED BY SUCH A MAJOR LOSS?

Key Message #1:

1) Everyone reacts to loss in their own way.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Grief is a common response to loss.
- b) Sometimes people are surprised at their emotions.
- c) Be patient with yourself and others.

Key Message #2:

2) Take care of yourself after a loss.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Grief can be exhausting so take care of yourself.
- b) Accept help from others.
- c) Talk to a professional if you're concerned about your reaction.

Key Message #3:

3) There are many ways to help someone who has experienced loss.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Offer help like cooking, running errands, or babysitting.
- b) Be a good listener.
- c) Most people will be okay with support from family and friends.

References:

National Mental Health Association. (nd). Coping with Loss. Retrieved Feb. 7, 2012 from:
<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/information/get-info/grief-and-bereavement/coping-with-loss/coping-with-loss>

American Association of Retired Persons. (nd). Grief and Loss. Retrieved Oct. 12, 2006 from:
<http://www.aarp.org/relationships/grief-loss/>

TWEET:

Grief is a common response to loss. Take care of yourself. Accept help when offered. See a professional if needed.

TOPIC: HOLIDAYS AFTER A DISASTER OR MAJOR EVENT

QUESTION: HOW DO WE COPE WITH THE HOLIDAYS AFTER THE DISASTER/EVENT?

Key Message #1:

1) Consider that this year may be different.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Family traditions for decorating, travelling, and gift giving may change.
- b) Reminisce and talk about past holidays.
- c) Think about creating new traditions.

Key Message #2:

2) You may have the holiday blues.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Be aware of unrealistic expectations.
- b) Stress levels may be higher this year.
- c) Focus on what's really important to you.

Key Message #3:

3) Make time for activities you enjoy.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Spend time celebrating with family and friends.
- b) If you drink alcohol, choose celebration over medication.
- c) Take time for yourself.

TOPIC: ANNIVERSARY REACTIONS

QUESTION: WHAT CAN PEOPLE EXPECT TO EXPERIENCE AS WE APPROACH THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE DISASTER/EVENT?

Key Message #1:

1) Some people will experience reactions related to the anniversary of [event].

Supporting Statements:

- a) Common anniversary reactions may include stronger thoughts, feelings, and memories about the event.
- b) It's common to feel grief and sadness again.
- c) It's also common to experience fear, anxiety, anger or guilt prompted by reminders of the event.

Key Message #2:

2) Anniversaries are natural times for individuals and communities to mourn, reflect, and heal.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Anniversaries can bring up thoughts of loss.
- b) It is a time to pause and appreciate family, friends, and others.
- c) Anniversaries can give survivors a renewed sense of hope and purpose.

Key Message #3:

3) There are things you can do to help yourself and others as this anniversary approaches.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Participate in community remembrances or commemorations.
- b) Talk about what you are feeling to someone you trust.
- c) Most people will be okay with support from family and friends.

References:

Anniversary Reactions to a Traumatic Event: The Recovery Process Continues.

<http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/NMH02-0140/default.asp>

Crisis Counseling Assistance and Training Program: Disaster Anniversary Training. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (<http://www.samhsa.gov>), and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) (<http://www.fema.gov>).

TOPIC: SUICIDE PREVENTION

QUESTION: WHAT DO I DO IF SOMEONE I KNOW IS SUICIDAL

Note: It is not uncommon for some people to feel suicidal after disaster or major loss. The topic of suicide prevention should be addressed openly to encourage people to get the help they need.

Key Message #1:

1) Many suicides can be prevented.

Supporting Statements:

- a) The number one cause of suicide is untreated depression.
- b) Depression is treatable.
- c) Help is available.

Key Message #2:

2) Know the warning signs:

Supporting Statements:

- a) Talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide.
- b) Looking for ways to hurt or kill themselves.
- c) Feeling hopeless or helpless.

Key Message #3:

3) Know what to do and take action.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Directly ask, "Are you thinking about killing yourself?"
- b) Listen, offer hope, and get help.
- c) Call the suicide prevention hotline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255).

References:

<http://www.suicideprevention.nebraska.edu/>

TOPIC: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AFTER A DISASTER

QUESTION: IS THERE A LINK BETWEEN DISASTER AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Key Message #1:

1) Domestic violence increases after a disaster.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Risk can increase in an already stressed relationship.
- b) Domestic violence is not always physical.
- c) Disaster stress can increase verbal abuse, threats, intimidation, and isolation.

Key Message #2:

2) Everyone's safety is important.

Supporting Statements:

- a) If you are hurt or need help now, call 911.
- b) Your safety and that of your children is a top priority.
- c) It's okay to get help; it's not your fault.

Key Message #3:

3) You can take action if you are aware of domestic violence.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Ask if something is wrong, and express your concern for the person's safety.
- b) Listen and offer support without judgment or criticism.
- c) Help is available through the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (1-800-799-7233).

References:

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. (nd). The Impact of Disaster. Retrieved Feb. 18, 2013 from:
<http://www.ncadv.org/learn/TheImpactofDisaster.php>

Enarson, Elaine (1998). *Surviving domestic violence and disasters*. The FREDA Centre for Research on Violence against Women and Children, Vancouver, British Columbia. Available online at:
<http://www.harbour.sfu.ca/freda/reports/dviol.htm>

TOPIC: PERPETRATED VIOLENCE

QUESTION: HOW COULD SOMEBODY DO THIS? WHY DID THIS PERSON DO THIS?

Note: This message is particularly pertinent after a human-caused incident with high public outrage. Consider being proactive in releasing this message.

Key Message #1:

1) It's always difficult to understand why people make these choices.

Supporting Statements:

- a) This is a question that everyone is asking.
- b) We may never really know why.
- c) It is common to try to make sense out of a senseless act.

Key Message #2:

2) You will hear many opinions about why this happened.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Be skeptical about what you may hear.
- b) Much of what you hear will be opinions rather than facts.
- c) Limiting exposure to these opinions may lessen your stress.

Key Message #3:

3) We are working to find out more.

Supporting Statements:

- a) We are working with other agencies involved in this situation.
- b) We are focusing on the facts.
- c) We want to use what we learn to prevent this in the future.

TOPIC: MASS VIOLENCE – RECOVERY (STAFF)

QUESTION: HOW ARE WE GOING TO GET THROUGH THIS? (WHEN ORGANIZATION RE-OPENS – WHETHER 1 WEEKS OR 1 MONTH LATER)

Key Message #1:

1) We're all in this together.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Everyone here is affected.
- b) We know it's hard to come back to this building.
- c) We need to continue supporting one another.

Key Message #2:

2) Recovery will take time.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Healing is different for everyone.
- b) We will make our best effort to return to normal operations.
- c) Taking care of yourself is critical.

[Note: Combine with a message about managing stress and how to take care of yourself]

Key Message #3:

3) There is help available.

Supporting Statements:

- a) We all need extra support.
- b) Talking to someone about your feelings can help.
- c) Support is available at [insert information].

QUESTION: HOW DO I KNOW IT'S SAFE TO RETURN TO THIS BUILDING?

Key Message #1:

1) Your safety is our primary concern.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Measures have been taken to ensure your safety.
- b) [State some specific measures being taken.]
- c) We want to serve you in a safe environment.

Key Message #2:

2) We are committed to providing services you need.

Supporting Statements:

- a) We are open and ready to serve you.
- b) Every precaution is being taken as we provide services.
- c) We want to be sure your needs are met.

Key Message #3:

3) We care about our customers.

Supporting Statements:

- a) We continue to improve our security.
- b) We appreciate your support and confidence.
- c) More information is available at: [insert information]

TOPIC: CONCERNS ABOUT VIOLENCE

QUESTION: WHAT DO I LOOK FOR IF I AM CONCERNED ABOUT SOMEONE WHO IS POTENTIALLY VIOLENT?

Note: After a violent event the public may be interested in knowing what can be done to “spot” someone who is on the path to violence. This message is meant to empower people to report their concerns.

Key Message #1:

1) Watch for concerning behavior.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Warning signs include hints or threats of violence to self, others, animals, or property.
- b) Writings, drawings, or communications of a violent nature can signal problems.
- c) Look for lack of social connections and recent losses.

Key Message #2:

2) Trust your instincts if you are concerned.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Pay attention to how you feel.
- b) Many times our gut feelings are correct.
- c) Reaching out for support is the right thing to do.

Key Message #3:

3) When in doubt, check it out.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Reach out to someone you trust.
- b) If you feel safe, ask them if they have thought about hurting someone or themselves.
- c) For help or support call [insert appropriate number here, such as The Nebraska Helpline 1-888-866-8660].

TOPIC: VIOLENCE PREVENTION

QUESTION: WHAT CAN THE PUBLIC DO TO HELP PREVENT TERRORISM?

Key Message #1:

1) Be aware of your surroundings.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Keep track of what's in your environment; people, clothing, entries/exits, objects, sounds, smells, etc.
- b) Notice whether anything is out of the ordinary.
- c) Awareness takes practice.

Key Message #2:

2) Reporting suspicious activity is important.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Everyone can make a difference in protecting their community.
- b) Your information may help authorities complete a puzzle.
- c) Reporting makes you and your community safer.

Key Message #3:

3) Tell authorities when you notice something questionable.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Be safe – stay out of harm's way.
- b) Report your concerns immediately to local law enforcement at [number].
- c) For more information about what to report, go to: <http://www.dhs.gov/see-something-say-something>

TOPIC: *TALKING WITH CHILDREN ABOUT AN EVENT

QUESTION: WHAT SHOULD WE TELL CHILDREN ABOUT THIS EVENT/DISASTER?

Key Message #1:

- 1) The age of the child should guide the type of information and how much you share about the disaster.**

Supporting Statements:

- a) Give information at a level the child can understand.
- b) Give younger children fewer details about the disaster.
- c) Children of all ages need comfort and attention from the adults in their lives after events like this.

TWEET:

Be honest & reassuring w/kids. Let them ask questions; give simple answers. It's OK to talk about their feelings.

Key Message #2:

- 2) Be honest when talking to children.**

Supporting Statements:

- a) Give children only enough information to answer their questions.
- b) Sometimes being honest means admitting you don't know the answer.
- c) Tell children there are people working to make them safe.

Key Message #3:

- 3) Listen to the child's concerns.**

Supporting Statements:

- a) Let children know it is okay to talk about how they feel.
- b) Some children may ask the same question over and over.
- c) Let children ask questions freely and give them simple answers.

References:

Psychosocial Issues for Children and Families in Disasters: A Guide for the Primary Care Physician. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Washington D.C., 1995.

Talking about Disaster: Guide for Standard Messages. National Disaster Education Coalition. July 2004.

TOPIC: *CHILDREN'S REACTIONS

QUESTION: HOW WILL CHILDREN REACT TO THIS DISASTER?

Key Message #1:

1) Adults and children have a variety of reactions after disasters.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Children may be scared, worried, upset, have sleep problems, or feel sick.
- b) Children might act younger than their age.
- c) Everyone reacts to disasters in their own way.

Key Message #2:

2) Some children may need additional support.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Talk to a professional if you're concerned about a child's reaction.
- b) Seeking help doesn't mean that you've failed.
- c) People often find it helpful to talk with a professional.

Key Message #3:

3) Most children will be fine with support from family and friends.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Children feel more secure with structure and routine.
- b) Children learn from adults how to react to the disaster.
- c) Most children will feel safe again over time.

References:

Speier, Anthony. Psychosocial Issues for Children and Adolescents in Disaster. 2nd ed. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services. Washington D.C., 2000

TWEET:

Kids have a variety of reactions after disasters. Some may need extra help - most will be fine with support from family & friends

TOPIC: EXPOSING CHILDREN TO THE DISASTER

QUESTION: WHAT AFFECT WILL MEDIA COVERAGE OF THIS EVENT HAVE ON OUR CHILDREN?

Key Message #1:

1) Talk with children about what they see and hear about the disaster.

Supporting Statements:

- a) The age and maturity of the child should guide how much and the type of information you share about the disaster.
- b) Give younger children fewer details about the disaster.
- c) Listen to the child's questions and answer them.

Key Message #2:

2) Adults and children have a variety of reactions after disasters.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Children may be scared, worried, upset, have sleep problems, or feel sick.
- b) Younger children may believe an event is happening again if they see it repeated on TV.
- c) Children learn from adults how to react to the disaster.

Key Message #3:

3) Most children will be fine with support from family and friends.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Children of all ages need comfort and attention from the adults in their lives after events like this.
- b) Limiting children's exposure to media may lessen everyone's stress.
- c) Talk to a professional if you're concerned about a child's reaction.

TOPIC: SUSPECTED ABUSE OR NEGLECT

QUESTION: WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK A CHILD IS BEING ABUSED OR NEGLECTED?

The target audience for this message is disaster response workers. It is important that volunteers and other responders understand they have a duty to report suspected abuse or neglect. This message is also appropriate for the general public.

Key Message #1:

1) Your call could save a child's life.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Everyone in Nebraska is legally responsible to report suspected child abuse or neglect.
- b) You can make the call anonymously.
- c) Everyone has the power to protect a child.

Key Message #2:

2) Make the call if you suspect child abuse or neglect.

Supporting Statements:

- a) It might be hard to make the call.
- b) Thousands of people like you call every year and make a difference.
- c) Reporting child abuse or neglect is the right thing to do.

Key Message #3:

3) Call the Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-652-1999.

Supporting Statements:

- a) It is a toll free call.
- b) Your call can be placed at any time of the day.
- c) The power to protect a child starts with just one phone call.

TOPIC: SELF-CARE FOR VULNERABLE PERSONS

QUESTION: WHAT CAN WE (VULNERABLE POPULATIONS) DO TO STAY HEALTHY DURING THIS STRESSFUL RECOVERY PERIOD?

Note: This message is geared toward vulnerable populations (anyone with functional impairments or previous trauma). It is also applicable to the general population so can be used with other messages about self-care.

Key Message #1:

1) Take care of yourself during this stressful time.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Create a routine.
- b) Sleep, exercise, eat right, and take prescribed medications.
- c) Allow yourself time to adjust.

Key Message #2:

2) Connect with friends, family, and your community.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Everyone reacts to events like this in their own way.
- b) Help others when you can.
- c) You will feel better if you keep in touch with people.

Key Message #3:

3) You may need extra support right now.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Ask for help, and accept help when it is offered.
- b) Focus on things you can control.
- c) Talk to someone if you're feeling overwhelmed.

References:

Responding to the Needs of People with Serious and Persistent Mental Illness in Times of Major Disaster. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Washington D.C., 1996

TOPIC: *HOW TO HELP OTHERS

QUESTION: HOW CAN WE BE HELPFUL TO THE MOST VULNERABLE IN OUR COMMUNITY?

Key Message #1:

1) Everyone reacts to events like this in their own way.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Common reactions include fear, sadness, anger, or feeling numb.
- b) Some may experience distress that is hard to shake.
- c) It may remind some people of past events.

Key Message #2:

2) Some people may not have access to their support services.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Special support needs remain even after a disaster.
- b) Special needs may be intensified because of the event.
- c) Ask the person what you can do to help.

Key Message #3:

3) Most people will be okay over time.

Supporting Statements:

- a) We all need to feel safe and secure.
- b) Some people take longer than others to feel better.
- c) Be available for others who need support.

TWEET:

Everyone reacts to events in their own way & wants to be safe. Ask how you can help.

TOPIC: PETS AND OTHER ANIMALS

QUESTION: WHAT ABOUT MY PET/ANIMAL?

Key Message #1:

1) It's normal to be concerned about your animal after a disaster.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Get information about what is being done for pets, such as shelter options and search efforts.
- b) If you have a disaster plan for your pet, follow it.
- c) If you don't have a plan, you can get information about what to do at [insert source(s)].

Key Message #2:

2) You need to take care of yourself and your family.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Protecting yourself and your family is your first priority.
- b) Use caution around animals because they may be frightened or injured.
- c) Keep yourself and your family safe by following emergency instructions.

Key Message #3:

3) There are ways to interact with your pet safely after a disaster

Supporting Statements:

- a) Your pet's behavior may change.
- b) Be careful; your pet may be frightened or injured.
- c) Resources to help your pet include your local shelter, veterinarian, or animal control authority.

TOPIC: EMPLOYEES HELD OVER

QUESTION: WHAT DO I TELL EMPLOYEES TO MINIMIZE THEIR ANXIETY ABOUT BEING HELD OVER?

Key Message #1:

1) Our community needs you here right now.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Your skills and compassion will make a difference.
- b) Be calmly aware of changing conditions.
- c) We're counting on you.

Key Message #2:

2) We understand you may have a lot on your mind.

Supporting Statements:

- a) It is common to experience a variety of emotions under these conditions.
- b) You may also notice these emotions in others.
- c) Focus on the things you can control right now.

Key Message #3:

3) We are all in this together.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Take care of yourself and your fellow workers during this time.
- b) Take breaks when you can and encourage others to do the same.
- c) Pay attention to information from official sources.

TOPIC: SHELTERS

QUESTION: WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT AT A SHELTER?

Key Message #1:

1) Shelters provide a temporary place to stay.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Everyone who stays must register with shelter staff.
- b) Some supervision will be in place.
- c) Other help may be available at the shelter.

Key Message #2:

2) Shelters are generally open to anyone impacted by the disaster.

Supporting Statements:

- a) People in the shelter may be strangers.
- b) People in stressful situations react in different ways.
- c) If someone makes you uncomfortable, keep your distance and/or tell shelter staff.

Key Message #3:

3) Families should stay together.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Be aware of your surroundings and people around you.
- b) Keep track of your belongings.
- c) Keep children in your sight at all times.

TOPIC: SHELTER IN PLACE, ISOLATION OR QUARANTINE

QUESTION: HOW DO WE COPE WITH CABIN FEVER?

Key Message #1:

1) Everyone copes in their own way with situations like this.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Some people may be bored or frustrated.
- b) Some may accept the situation.
- c) It's common for feelings to change in these situations.

Key Message #2:

2) Knowing the reasons for these measures may make coping easier.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Remember these precautions are in your best interest.
- b) By following directions you are protecting yourself and others.
- c) Remind yourself that this won't last forever.

Key Message #3:

3) Take things one day at a time.

Supporting Statements:

- a) A regular schedule lessens worry and anxiety.
- b) Do something to take your mind off of the situation for a while.
- c) Hobbies and other interests can help fill time.

TOPIC: COPING WITH PROLONGED LOSS OF POWER

QUESTION: HOW DO WE COPE WITHOUT POWER FOR SO LONG?

Key Message #1:

1) Adjusting to life without power can be a challenge.

Supporting Statements:

- a) It is common to feel tired or worn out even with adequate sleep.
- b) Sometimes people can be surprised by their own emotions.
- c) Everyone reacts in their own way.

Key Message #2:

2) Take care of yourself.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Eat healthy foods and get plenty of rest.
- b) Accept help when it's offered.
- c) Spend time with family or friends, talk, or play games.

Key Message #3:

3) There are many ways to help someone who is coping with loss of power.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Offer help like cooking, running errands, or babysitting.
- b) Help someone get away from home for a day or a few hours.
- c) Most people will be okay with support from family and friends.

TOPIC: EVACUATION (WILDFIRE)

QUESTION: WHAT DO I NEED TO DO IN AN EVACUATION?

Key Message #1:

1) Pay attention to your reactions.

Supporting Statements:

- a) You may be surprised by your strong emotions.
- b) It's common to feel worried or tense.
- c) Pause and take a deep breath.

Key Message #2:

2) Listen to the warnings.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Focus on what you need to do right now.
- b) Stay informed.
- c) Follow official directions.

Key Message #3:

3) Prepare to act.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Collect what you absolutely need.
- b) Think about your next steps.
- c) Calmly take action.

TOPIC: CONTAMINATED FOOD/WATER SUPPLY AND/OR CONSUMER PRODUCTS

QUESTION: HOW DO I KNOW WHAT'S SAFE?

Key Message #1:

1) Officials will tell you when it's safe.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Follow recommendations from trusted sources.
- b) People are working hard for your safety.
- c) Stay up to date on the situation.

Key Message #2:

2) We know you're concerned.

Supporting Statements:

- a) It's common to feel anxious or worried.
- b) Take care of yourself.
- c) Following recommendations reduces your risk.

Key Message #3:

3) Here's what you can do

Supporting Statements:

- a) You can protect yourself.
- b) Focus on things you can control.
- c) Share the facts with people you know.

TOPIC: INFLUENZA OUTBREAK OR PANDEMIC

QUESTION: WHAT SHOULD WE BE DOING TO STAY HEALTHY OR SAFE?

Note: An influenza outbreak or pandemic may cause strife in communities as people shun those working areas with high risk of exposure. Releasing messages early to quell alarm and stigma associated with potential exposure.

Key Message #1:

1) An outbreak of [disease] affects everyone.

Supporting Statements:

- a) An emotional response to the impact of [disease] is normal.
- b) Emotions can include anger, fear, and guilt.
- c) Examine your feelings to see if you are angry or blaming others.

Key Message #2:

2) This is a time to work together.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Be supportive of your family - maintain a routine.
- b) Be supportive of other community members.
- c) Strive to keep a sense of normalcy.

Key Message #3:

3) During this outbreak, people may worry about being avoided or rejected.

Supporting Statements:

- a) If people avoid or blame others, this can also affect those who are virus-free.
- b) Viruses are hard to control – keep yourself safe.
- c) Show your support of others – virtual communication may be best.

References:

Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress. (2006). *Mental Health and Behavioral Guidelines for Response to a Pandemic Flu Outbreak: Background on the Mental Health Impact of Natural Disasters, including Epidemics*. Bethesda, MD: Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences

Reynolds, Barbara. (2006). *Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication: Pandemic Influenza*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

TOPIC: MEDICINE SHORTAGE

QUESTION: WHAT CAN YOU DO IF MEDICINE OR VACCINE IS IN SHORT SUPPLY?

Key Message #1:

1) You can take steps to protect yourself.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Learn what you can do to be safe.
- b) Create a plan for you and your family.
- c) Taking action early reduces anxiety.

Key Message #2:

2) Your patience and cooperation are essential.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Be prepared to follow instructions.
- b) People are working to make the right medicines available.
- c) Focus on things you can control.

Key Message #3:

3) Prepare as you would for any emergency.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Take care of your mind and body.
- b) Limit your exposure by practicing good health habits.
- c) It is important to keep a positive outlook.

TOPIC: EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE – WHAT IS HEALTH DEPARTMENT DOING

QUESTION: WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT DOING TO KEEP US FROM GETTING EBOLA?

Key Message #1:

4) Our federal, state, and local partners tell us when a person may be at risk for Ebola.

Supporting Statements:

- a) We're notified when someone at risk enters the country and is coming to our area.
- b) Being at risk means a person is symptom free and coming from a country where Ebola is present.
- c) You can only spread Ebola when you have symptoms.

Key Message #2:

5) Public health helps those at risk for Ebola watch for symptoms.

Supporting Statements:

- a) We check in with at risk persons twice a day to see how they are feeling.
- b) When someone shows symptoms, medical care is quickly provided.
- c) This quick action helps to protect everyone.

Key Message #3:

3) Public health works with the whole community to ensure public safety.

Supporting Statements:

- d) We plan and train together so we are ready to respond.
- e) We share guidance from experts with local medical professionals.
- f) We educate the community about Ebola.

TOPIC: EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE – WHO IS MOST AT RISK

QUESTION: WHO IS MOST AT RISK OF GETTING EBOLA?

Key Message #1:

1) Individuals in direct contact with someone who has Ebola may be at risk.

Supporting Statements:

- d) Healthcare workers providing direct patient care are at higher risk.
- e) Household members of someone who has the Ebola virus may be at risk.
- f) Ebola is only spread when a patient is showing symptoms.

Key Message #2:

2) Travelers who recently returned from [West Africa - or insert current location] may be at risk.

Supporting Statements:

- d) Travel to [West Africa - or insert current location] within the last 21 days is recent enough for a person to be at risk.
- e) The outbreak has mainly affected [Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, and Mali – insert current countries].
- f) Public Health monitors all individuals who have returned from these countries.

Key Message #3:

3) Most Nebraskans have zero risk of getting Ebola.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Only those coming in direct contact with an Ebola patient are at risk.
- b) Travel to [West Africa - or insert current location] increases your risk of coming in contact with Ebola.
- c) Additional information about Ebola can be found at CDC.gov.

QUESTION: I HAVE AN APPOINTMENT AT THE MED CENTER, IS IT SAFE TO GO?

Key Message #1:

1) It is safe to go to appointments at the Med Center.

Supporting Statements:

- a) They are a world leader in control and treatment of diseases.
- b) Med Center staff is well-trained to care for patients with Ebola.
- c) The Ebola treatment unit is separated from the rest of the hospital.

Key Message #2:

2) The Med Center is specially equipped for these situations.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Access is strictly limited to medical staff caring for the patient.
- b) All equipment, supplies, and waste are decontaminated.
- c) Med Center staff has prepared for this kind of situation for a decade.

Key Message #3:

3) Your health and safety is top priority.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Staff is highly skilled in caring for patients with Ebola.
- b) The staff trains regularly during the year.
- c) We have confidence in the care and safety that staff provides for all patients.

TOPIC: EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE – COULD A PATIENT HERE START AN OUTBREAK

QUESTION: COULD BRINGING A PATIENT HERE START AN OUTBREAK IN NEBRASKA?

Key Message #1:

1) The risk of getting Ebola is extremely low.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Methods of transmission are well understood.
- b) Public health professionals continually assess the level of risk in Nebraska.
- c) The public will be updated regularly.

Key Message #2:

2) The U.S. has a modern public sanitation system.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Hospitals are trained in up-to-date infection control practices.
- b) Hospitals decontaminate equipment, supplies, and waste.
- c) Modern wastewater treatment systems destroy Ebola.

Key Message #3:

3) Health care standards in the U.S. are exceptional.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Additional screening takes place at all health care facilities in Nebraska.
- b) Staff are trained to identify persons at risk.
- c) Plans are in place to care for persons at high risk.

QUESTION: HOW DO WE KNOW THAT HEALTHCARE WORKERS AREN'T SPREADING EBOLA?

Key Message #1:

1) Our healthcare system is prepared for an Ebola patient.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Hospitals care for highly infectious patients every day.
- b) Hospitals have been preparing for the possibility of an Ebola patient.
- c) All preparations are done according to guidance from the CDC.

Key Message #2:

2) The two U.S. healthcare workers who became sick with Ebola have been cured without spreading the virus.

Supporting Statements:

- a) In Dallas in 2014, once the healthcare workers showed symptoms, they were isolated and treated.
- b) Lessons learned from Dallas prompted updated guidance about protective gear for healthcare workers.
- c) Following updated guidance, zero additional healthcare workers have become sick with Ebola.

Key Message #3:

3) Healthcare workers follow steps to ensure safety.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Healthcare workers train and exercise using protective gear.
- b) Healthcare workers caring for Ebola patients are monitored daily for signs and symptoms.
- c) Healthcare workers use proper protective gear to keep them safe.

TOPIC: EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE – WHY IS PERSON BEING TREATED IN U.S.

QUESTION: WHY IS THE PATIENT BEING TREATED IN THE UNITED STATES, INSTEAD OF AFRICA?

Key Message #1:

1) The U.S. healthcare system is excellent.

Supporting Statements:

- a) We have the capability to treat this disease.
- b) Omaha has one of the specialized care units in the U.S.
- c) We are trained and prepared for this event.

Key Message #2:

2) The patient is an American.

Supporting Statements:

- a) We have a duty to care for our citizens.
- b) The patient deserves the best care.
- c) Chances for a positive outcome are better here.

Key Message #3:

3) The public is safe from infection.

Supporting Statements:

- a) The facility is completely contained.
- b) A specially equipped vehicle will safely transport the patient.
- c) Advanced infection control procedures are in place for transport and treatment.

QUESTION: HOW ARE QUARANTINED PEOPLE MONITORED?

Key Message #1:

1) Safety of the public is the first concern.

Supporting Statements:

- a) The Health Department is responsible for monitoring individuals in quarantine.
- b) Individuals are monitored until they are no longer at risk.
- c) We follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines.

Key Message #2:

2) There are procedures in place to monitor individuals in quarantine

Supporting Statements:

- a) Key personnel are trained.
- b) The Health Department has experience in monitoring serious illness.
- c) Individuals are monitored daily.

Key Message #3:

3) Quarantine is for the safety of everyone.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Ebola is not easily spread.
- b) Bodily fluids from a sick individual are the only way to contract Ebola.
- c) Quarantined individuals are not sick.

TOPIC: EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE – QUARANTINE AND ISOLATION

QUESTION: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN QUARANTINE AND ISOLATION?

Key Message #1:

1) Quarantine is for individuals who have been exposed to certain contagious diseases.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Quarantined individuals are separated to monitor for possible illness.
- b) Quarantined individuals are restricted from public movement.
- c) Quarantined individuals are not sick.

Key Message #2:

2) Isolation is for individuals who are sick.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Isolation separates sick individuals with a contagious disease.
- b) People in isolation are treated for their illness.
- c) Individuals are released from isolation when they are no longer contagious.

Key Message #3:

3) The purpose of quarantine and isolation is to prevent the spread of disease.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Safety of the public is the first concern.
- b) There are plans in place to guide quarantine and isolation.
- c) Quarantine and isolation are effective.

TOPIC: EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE – WORRY ABOUT PEOPLE TRAVELING

QUESTION: SHOULD I BE WORRIED ABOUT PEOPLE TRAVELING INTO OUR AREA?

Key Message #1:

1) International travelers from affected areas are screened.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Most travelers are fine.
- b) People with signs of infection are prevented from traveling.
- c) Your public health department monitors anyone at risk.

Key Message #2:

2) It's difficult to contract Ebola.

Supporting Statements:

- a) You are safe unless you've been around someone with Ebola.
- b) Ebola is spread through contact with bodily fluids.
- c) You can't get Ebola by air, water, food, or mosquitoes.

Key Message #3:

3) The U.S. public health system is prepared to protect you and your family.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Your public health department is trained to quickly respond.
- b) The health department will tell you about potential health threats.
- c) Pay attention to information from official sources.

TOPIC: EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE – IS IT SAFE TO FLY

QUESTION: IS IT SAFE FOR ME TO FLY?

Key Message #1:

1) Airlines have protocols to protect you.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Most passengers are healthy enough to travel.
- b) People with signs of infection with Ebola are prevented from traveling.
- c) Air crews know what to do if someone gets sick on the plane.

Key Message #2:

2) Ebola does NOT spread through the air like flu.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Ebola is spread through contact with bodily fluids.
- b) You can't get Ebola by air, water, or food.
- c) It's common to feel anxious or worried about Ebola.

Key Message #3:

3) The U.S. public health system is prepared to protect you and your family.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Your public health department is trained to quickly respond.
- b) The health department will tell you about potential health threats.
- c) Pay attention to information from official sources.

TOPIC: RECRUITMENT OF HEALTH CARE VOLUNTEERS

QUESTION: WHY SHOULD I VOLUNTEER?

Note: Medical Reserve Corps recruit health care professionals who are available in a crisis. This recruitment message may be used as preparedness or during response/recovery periods when health care volunteers are needed to bolster local resources.

Key Message #1:

1) Your help will be needed.

Supporting Statements:

- a) You know how to help people in a crisis.
- b) Your skills and compassion will make a difference.
- c) You are uniquely qualified to provide medical assistance in a disaster.

Key Message #2:

2) You can help your community respond to a disaster.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Your community needs your skills on a short-term basis.
- b) You will work as part of a dedicated medical response.
- c) You will know you have made a difference.

Key Message #3:

3) Sign up now to speed the response to a disaster.

Supporting Statements:

- a) You are committing in advance to save lives.
- b) Volunteer professionals will be needed throughout the disaster and recovery.
- c) We need to know we can count on you.

TOPIC: DEPLOYMENT OF HEALTH CARE VOLUNTEERS

QUESTION: HOW WILL I BE DEPLOYED TO VOLUNTEER DURING A DISASTER?

Note: Local and state affiliated volunteers often want to know how they would be called out once a disaster has occurred. Stopping self-deployment to disaster sites is important.

Key Message #1:

1) Volunteers will be notified to stand by when an event occurs.

Supporting Statements:

- a) You determine your availability for deployment.
- b) Make preparations to be away from home and work.
- c) Wait for the notification to deploy.

Key Message #2:

2) You will be personally contacted if you are needed to volunteer.

Supporting Statements:

- a) You will only be deployed in a declared emergency.
- b) Volunteers will be selected by specialty area based on need.
- c) You may be deployed immediately or on a later call-out.

Key Message #3:

3) You will receive detailed instructions for deployment.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Write down the instructions you receive.
- b) Bring identification and a copy of your professional license with you.
- c) Be sure to tell family and employers that you are deploying.

TOPIC: VOLUNTEERS RETURNING FROM DEPLOYMENT

QUESTION: WHAT CAN I EXPECT UPON MY RETURN FROM A VOLUNTEER DEPLOYMENT?

Key Message #1:

1) Volunteers go through a process to close out their work.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Volunteers meet with someone to review their deployment.
- b) The close-out process includes forms and paperwork.
- c) Volunteers will return any issued equipment.

Key Message #2:

2) It is common to have emotional reactions following deployment.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Volunteers often report they think about the event more than expected.
- b) Talking about the experience and re-connecting with support systems is important.
- c) You may find it helpful to talk with a professional.

Key Message #3:

3) Give yourself time to return to your normal schedule.

Supporting Statements:

- a) Be aware of your physical well-being.
- b) You may need more rest than usual.
- c) Accept help from others when it is offered.

FACT SHEETS

The following pages contain brief, one page fact sheets that can be customized with your contact information and used as handouts or additional information for media in a press release.

Additional fact sheets about behavioral health issues related to disaster, terrorism and mass casualty that are specific to a current situation in Nebraska may be posted at www.disastermh.nebraska.edu.

**NEBRASKA
DISASTER
BEHAVIORAL
HEALTH**



Fact sheets related to a current disaster project will be posted on the Active Recovery Projects page or the Home Page.

FACT SHEET: AFTER THE DISASTER

There are a number of personal responses to disaster that are common and normal to experience.

Some common responses are:

- Irritability/Anger
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Inability to sleep
- Nightmares
- Shock or disbelief
- Sadness
- Headaches or nausea
- Hyperactivity
- Lack of concentration
- Increased alcohol or drug consumption
- Feeling numb

Many disaster victims, survivors, and rescue personnel will have at least one of the above responses. **Acknowledging your feelings and stresses** is the first step to feeling better. Other **helpful actions** include:

- Talk or write about your disaster experiences. Sharing your feelings rather than holding them in will help you feel better about the experience.
- Take time off from cares, worries, and home repairs. Engage in recreation, relaxation, or a favorite hobby. Getting away from home for a day or a few hours with close friends also can help.
- Pay attention to your health, a good diet, and adequate sleep. Relaxation exercises may help if you have difficulty sleeping.
- Prepare for possible future emergencies to help lessen feelings of helplessness and to achieve peace of mind.
- Rebuild personal relationships in addition to repairing other aspects of your life. Couples should make time to be alone together, to talk, and to have fun.

If stress, anxiety, depression, or physical problems continue or start interfering significantly with your daily life, you may wish to contact your doctor or mental health professional.

FACT SHEET: CHILDREN'S REACTION TO THE DISASTER

Children may display a variety of **emotional reactions after a disaster**. It is very normal to be frightened, insecure, or upset about what happened.

How a parent reacts will make a difference in the child's understanding and recovery after the disaster. Parents should keep children informed about what is happening and explain it in terms they can understand.

Consider talking with the child's physician or a mental health professional if their emotional reactions concern you.

The following list includes some of the **normal reactions** children may have to the disaster:

Crying/Depression	Inability to concentrate
Bedwetting	Temporary withdrawal from others
Thumb sucking	Not wanting to attend school
Nightmares	Headaches
Clinging/fear of being left alone	Changes in eating and sleeping habits
Regression to previous behaviors	Excessive fear of darkness
Fighting	Increase in physical complaints

These are a few things parents or caregivers **can do to help children recover** from the disaster:

- Hug your child often.
- Reassure your child frequently that you are safe and together.
- Talk with your child about his/her feelings about the disaster. Share your feelings too. Provide information the child can understand.
- Talk about what happened.
- Spend extra time with your child at bedtime.
- Allow children to grieve about their lost treasures: a toy, a blanket, or a lost home.
- Talk with your child about what you will do if another disaster strikes. Let your child help prepare and plan for future disasters.
- Try to spend extra time together to begin replacing fears with pleasant memories.

Reference:

Adapted from: <http://www.mentalhealth.org/dtac/ChildrensReactions.asp>

FACT SHEET: HOW TO TALK TO CHILDREN AFTER THE DISASTER

Note to Parents:

- Remember that you and your child are having normal or common reactions to a very abnormal situation.
- Make sure you take care of your own physical and psychological needs so that you can attend to your child's needs.

A common misconception is that children will be frightened if you talk to them about what is going on. Children are usually more frightened if you whisper about it and avoid talking to them.

How to start talking

- Give your children direct, undivided attention and let them know you want to listen and help them.
- Let your children ask questions freely and give them simple concrete answers.

How to listen and show you understand:

- Listen carefully to what they say, don't jump to conclusions, and repeat back to them what you heard them say
- Accept a child's perceptions. Avoid simply telling them to stop feeling the way they are. Talk about what makes them feel the way they do and what you can do to help.

References:

Psychosocial Issues for Children and Families in Disasters: A Guide for the Primary Care Physician. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Washington D.C., 1995.

Talking about Disaster: Guide for Standard Messages. National Disaster Education Coalition. July 2004.

FACT SHEET: TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT DEATH

Here are some simple guidelines that may help families talk to children about the death of a person or pet known or loved by the child.

- Tell the truth as gently as you can.

Example, "Grandpa died. He's not coming back, but we will always remember him."

DON'T: Confuse your child with vague phrases such as "passed away" or "no longer with us."

- Share your grief.

Example, "I'm very sad. How are you feeling about this?"

DON'T: Hide your grief and send the message to your child that they should do the same.

- Comfort your child.

Example, "Death is a part of life." Ease your child's fears of the unknown. Talk about your spiritual beliefs.

- Deal with your child's emotions.

Example, "Let's talk about what you are feeling."

DON'T: Tell your child to stop feeling something without explanation.

- Encourage your child to attend memorial services or commemorate the loved one that they lost.

Example: "Would you like to go to the funeral/memorial service?"

DON'T: Force your child to go.

FACT SHEET: COMMON STRESS AND EMOTIONAL REACTIONS AFTER DISASTER

There are a number of common reactions people have when they are exposed to a traumatic event. We know that these are normal and we know it helps to talk or write about them.

- Initial euphoria, relief
- Guilt about surviving or not having suffered as much as others
- Anxiety, fear, insecurity, worry
- Pervasive concern about well-being of loved ones
- Feelings of helplessness, inadequacy, being overwhelmed
- Vulnerability or shame, anger over vulnerability
- Loss of sense of power, control, well-being, self-confidence, trust
- Irritability, restlessness, hyper-excitability, impatience, agitation, anger, blaming
- Outrage, resentment
- Frustration
- Cynicism, negativity
- Mood swings
- Despair, grief, sadness
- Periods of crying, emotional “attacks” or “pangs”
- Feelings of emptiness, loss, hopelessness, depression
- Reawakening of past trauma, painful experiences
- Apathy, diminished interest in usual activities
- Feelings of isolation, detachment, estrangement, “no one else can understand”
- Denial or constriction of feelings; numbness
- “Flashbacks,” intrusive memories of the event, illusions, pseudo-hallucinations
- Recurrent dreams of the event or other traumas
- Poor concentration
- Mental confusion, slowness of thinking
- Forgetfulness
- Amnesia (complete or partial)
- Inability to make judgments and decisions
- Preoccupation with the event
- Repetitive, obsessive thoughts and ruminations
- Over-generalization, over-association with the event
- Loss of objectivity
- Confusion regarding religious beliefs/value systems; breakdown of meaning and faith
- Self-criticism over things done/not done during trauma
- Awareness of own and loved ones’ mortality

Adapted from: <http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/dtac/CommonStressReactions.asp>

FACT SHEET: HANDLING DISASTER-RELATED STRESS

Disasters create a tremendous amount of stress. If this stress goes unrecognized and unmanaged, it can increase until it feels impossible to cope with everyday problems. If you recognize and handle stress properly, however, it can become something healthy that gets you through the challenges of each day and the trauma of another disaster.

What is stress?

Stress is a unique and personal response from our bodies and minds to meet the demands of different situations. These situations trigger an instinctive "fight or flight" response that increases blood pressure, heart rate, respiration, and blood flow to muscles. Originally, these reactions helped people prepare for a physical conflict, or to escape from one. Now, they usually serve to direct our mental and physical resources to a particularly difficult or trying situation with positive results.

Managing Stress

Some approaches that help you manage negative stress in your life are to:

- **Talk it out. You're not in this alone.** Your family, friends, and neighbors are feeling some of the same anxieties you're experiencing.
- **Try physical activity.** Release the tension of stress by walking in the evenings or some other type of exercise
- **Know your limits and make time for relaxation.** Try to reduce the amount of time you spend worrying about the things you cannot change. Cut down or eliminate the activities that cause you stress.
- **Take control.** Find out what you can do to move your family or those you know closer to recovery.
- If you feel your problem is more serious or if you're experiencing hopelessness or extreme anger, you may want to consider **seeking help** from a physician or mental health professional. **It's a sign of strength to seek help when you need it.**

Adapted from: <http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/dtac/HandlingDisaster.asp>

FACT SHEET: POST DISASTER TIPS FOR PEOPLE WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

- Do a personal assessment of what you need assistance with now. Don't be afraid to ask for help.
- Do not be alarmed if you experience the following common psychological and emotional reactions, but seek medical attention if they persist for more than a few weeks following a disaster. These experiences may include:
 - Anxiety
 - Irritability
 - Depression
 - Moodiness
 - Feeling isolated
 - Unwelcome memories of the disaster
 - Nightmares about the disaster or other traumatic events
 - Inability to fall or stay asleep or sleeping excessively
- It is not unusual for stress to make medical conditions worse.
- Not all reactions will occur directly after the disaster. Strong emotions may surface days, weeks, or months after the disaster.
- Talk to someone about how you are feeling.
- After a disaster the independence that you experienced before may be limited. You may not be able to deal with your environment as you did before. Needing help with simple tasks such as straightening your house may make you feel vulnerable. After a disaster many people need support or help.

Adapted from: "Preparing for Disaster for People with Special Needs." American Red Cross.
<http://www.redcross.org/prepare/location/home-family/disabilities>

FACT SHEET: SPECIAL CONCERNS OF OLDER ADULTS FOLLOWING A DISASTER

Each age group is vulnerable in unique ways to the stresses of a disaster. Different issues and concerns become relevant during the emotional recovery. In older adults some disaster stress reactions may be experienced immediately, while others may appear months later. Here are some of the symptoms you or a loved one may be having.

Many who survive a disaster experience a strong desire to withdraw from others. They may withdraw even from those to whom they are the closest. Overcoming the tendency to isolate oneself takes real strength and discipline. A few ways to break the isolation barrier are to:

- **TALK:** It takes courage to reveal what you are thinking and feeling to someone else. Talking can be very comforting and healing. Talking is worth it.
- **ASK FOR HELP:** Research shows that people who ask for help come through disasters stronger and healthier than those who view seeking help as a weakness.
- **BE WITH PEOPLE:** Life does not return to normal overnight. You have survived a disaster. That doesn't mean your life is over or that you don't deserve to be happy again. Do something good for yourself. Now is the time to do it!

Adapted from: <http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/dtac/resources.asp#grantee>

FACT SHEET: DISASTER AND THE ADULT WITH A SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESS

People with serious mental illness often do well immediately following disaster. They can be an asset to the community. People with serious mental illnesses can often contribute to disaster recovery by volunteering as part of an organized disaster relief effort.

The following advice is designed to help the person with a serious mental illness continue on their road to recovery following disaster.

- Reconnect with your regular mental health service delivery system. If it is disrupted, connect with mental health disaster recovery services to insure your recovery is continuous.
- It is a good idea to help locate peers and help them reconnect with their service provider.
- Consider sharing your experiences with others.
- It's ok to be alone sometimes. You may need time to deal with your losses and personal issues.
- Get involved in the disaster recovery effort as long as you are not overwhelmed by it.
- Work with your provider to make a disaster preparedness plan for the future.

Reference:

Responding to the Needs of People with Serious and Persistent Mental Illness in Times of Major Disaster. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Washington D.C., 1996

FACT SHEET: EXERCISE PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET – STRESS

Thank you for your participation in today's simulation. An exercise like the one today gives all of us an idea of what we may have to do in similar situations.

It's quite natural to be a little excited or anxious about participating before the drill begins.

You may find some parts of the drill exciting and others somewhat tedious. If you ever become very uncomfortable or wish to discontinue your participation, say "TIME OUT" so the worker understands your discomfort and can assist you.

After this drill, you may experience some normal stress for a short time. The reality is that this drill is practice for an extremely stressful and frightening situation. It is quite natural to be somewhat shaken by even a simulated situation such as this.

During actual events many people experience stress reactions such as:

- Shock
- Fear
- Grief
- Anger or Resentment
- Guilt or Shame
- Helplessness
- Hopelessness

Many also experience physical changes such as:

- Tension
- Fatigue
- Difficulty sleeping
- Aches or pains

These are normal reactions to very stressful events. Intense or extremely strong emotional reactions are not necessarily a sign that a person will have future trouble. Actually most people can have very strong reactions and recover fairly quickly. We are often stronger or more resilient than we know!

In the extremely unlikely event that you do experience extreme or ongoing stress reactions after this drill that seem to interfere with your normal routine or life, please talk to someone. Talking to a friend, family member, your doctor, counselor, or spiritual leader about your experience can be very helpful.

For more information about stress and disaster, check out these Web Sites.

www.redcross.org

www.ptsd.va.gov

www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov

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