

VCC EMERGENCIES MINISTRY

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Tip sheets for faith communities in Victoria

• Emotional Spiritual Care

"Compassion in times of crisis"

During disasters in Victoria, people will seek emotional and spiritual care. The Faith community will be asked to support affected individuals with respect to social and religious diversity. This tip sheet will guide you as you help the community recover from the impact of disaster.

Guiding Principles for Providing Spiritual Care.

- Offer a safe space for affected individuals and communities to begin the process of recovery
- Meet, accept and respect persons as they are
- DO NO HARM - never evangelise, proselytize, or exploit people who are vulnerable
- Protect confidentiality
- Respect diversity - cultural, linguistic and religious
- Function at levels appropriate to your training and educational background
- Help affected individuals normalise what has happened
- Know available resources and assistance and refer on where necessary

Spiritual Stress Reactions to Disasters

Many people will experience spiritual stress reactions after a disaster. (See Tip Sheet "Faith Communities & Disaster Mental Health" to learn about different types of stress reactions and coping practices.) Some common spiritual stress reaction include:

- Reconsidering core tenets of religious beliefs
- Questioning justice and meaning
- Feeling far from previously held beliefs
- Suddenly turning away from or to God (or other spiritual leader)
- Loss of meaning and purpose
- Sense of isolation from God and religious community
- Being angry at God, divine beings or spiritual leaders
- Familiar faith practices seem empty (prayer, scripture, hymns)

Spiritual Care Practices

Spiritual care providers can provide a sense of support and hope. This is done through practices that validate an individual's experience and bolster/nurture the spirit.

- Understanding and normalising what has happened
- Carrying out a ministry of presence
- Identifying and solving immediate, concrete problems
- Encouraging people to talk about experiences and being an active and supportive listener
- Recognising normal stress reactions and finding resources to address serious problems
- Supporting and paying attention to anniversaries and other important dates.

Emotional Spiritual Care Training

To be effective in the role of providing emotional spiritual care, it is important to become educated in various aspects of disaster response and recovery. Contact VCC EM at www.vccem.org.au or (03) 7037 6010 for more information about training programs.

COMPASSION

CARE

COMMUNITY

DIGNITY

HOPE

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"Compassion in times of crisis"

Referral for Mental Health Services

When working with individuals who are coping with a disaster, personal support providers are in a unique position to help others identify mental health needs and to make referrals to services as required. Referral is the act of recommending that an individual speak to a mental health professional who is trained to handle the difficulties and complexities of his or her needs.

When to Refer

You should refer an individual when you realise that the individual needs help beyond your capability and level of training and experience. Refer people on when:

- An individual self-identifies as a psychiatric patient in need of care (or is so identified by his/her legal guardian)
- You have difficulty maintaining real contact with the person
- A person hints at or talks openly about suicide
- A person is socially isolated
- A person presents imaginary ideas or details of persecution
- You become aware of child abuse or any criminal activity You see the development of persistent physical symptoms (psychosomatic)
- You become aware of dependency on drugs and alcohol
- The person is or talks about engaging in risky behaviour (carelessness toward self and others)

How to Refer

- Before contacting a mental health provider, inform the person concerned about your intentions
- Let the affected person know that you care for them and explain the reasons and process of referral
- Assure the person that you will continue your support of them until the referral is complete and a handover has taken place
- Ask the Centre Manager, DFFH or Lead Agency about referral pathways.
- Each Relief and Recovery centre managed by Local Government will have contact details for referring affected persons on for mental health support.



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