

VCC EMERGENCIES MINISTRY

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Tip sheets for faith communities in Victoria

• Self Care

"Compassion in times of crisis"

Self-care involves the need to develop a vision for one's life and then develop a plan that allows one to live out that vision. It involves 'caring for the whole' – body, mind, and spirit. It involves understanding that before we can be effective in caring for others we must be effective in caring for ourselves.

Self care must begin prior to a disaster or emergency. Life for a faith leader can be stressful, and added pressures and responsibilities during disasters multiply. Faith leaders will be caring for disaster affected individuals and communities facing loss, disruption and chaos. Disaster recovery can last for months and even years. It is both rewarding and emotionally exhausting. Not adequately caring for yourself during disaster times will have an impact on your own coping mechanisms and capacity to function effectively.

- Lack of time to focus on personal well-being
- Loss of time for personal prayer and religious study
- Substance abuse
- Participation in violent or abusive relationships
- Lack of energy, tiredness
- Lack of money for resources
- Guilt – feeling that others are more important
- Belief that self-care will not work, can't be done
- Lack of knowledge
- Fear
- Feeling of weakness
- Ego

Make a Plan for Self Care and Practice Daily

Develop a plan for self care that you can use daily and that includes identifying tools and routines that work for you. These tools and routines will then be available to you during times of disaster, and help you to manage high stress levels.

Self & Family

- Improve self-awareness.
- Know your areas of strength and vulnerability.
- Learn to recognise signs of stress in yourself, family, and others.
- Look for signs of compassion fatigue.
- Identify stress management techniques that work for you.
- Practice a healthy diet and regular exercise.
- Help, and take care of, your family. Taking care of your family and ensuring they have their needs met will help you better take care of yourself and your congregants. Family can include those people whom we love and with whom we live, as well as those people with proximity to our lives, whether it is a traditional family, or a colleague.
- Develop support structures in your life.
 - Talk to other religious leaders and develop peer support.
 - Share emotions when appropriate and communicate openly with friends, family, and colleagues.
- Avoid risky behavior – practice a balanced lifestyle. Professional Life
- Monitor use of self-soothing behaviors (i.e. alcohol, caffeine, cigarettes and food consumption).
- Avoid prolonged or excessive use of substances, which can aggravate stress, if abused.

COMPASSION

CARE

COMMUNITY

DIGNITY

HOPE

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"Compassion in times of crisis"

Professional Life

- Learn skills in reconciliation and conflict resolution, and also stress- and time-management techniques.
- Limit work hours – set boundaries and take time off.
- Define clear purposes and goals.
- Attend to your own spiritual life.
- A spiritual leader must manage expectations of others and self:
 - Be realistic about what you can and cannot do.
 - Recognise the different roles people look to you to fill during times of disaster.
- Assess your administrative and spiritual care capabilities
 - What are your competencies and expertise?
 - What types of care are you trained to provide?
 - Do you have any physical, emotional, or cognitive considerations that would impact your work?

Know about compassion fatigue and recognise the signs

People who are in helping professions are particularly susceptible to “compassion fatigue.” This occurs with individuals who are caregivers and have constant exposure to the suffering of others. It comes from secondary stress or trauma experience from hearing of the suffering of others. Some of the signs of compassion fatigue include:

- Sleep disturbances
- Irritability
- Anxiety
- Lack of focus during worship/study/spiritual practices
- Intrusive thoughts
- Difficulty separating work life from personal life
- Depression
- Avoiding intimacy or seeking excessive or inappropriate intimacy/sexual expression
- Increase in ineffective and/or self-destructive behaviors
- Diminished sense of purpose/enjoyment with vocation
- Decreased functioning in non-professional situations
- Loss of hope

Seek Help

Seek professional advice. Normal stress reactions will often reduce after days or weeks following a disaster. However, if stress symptoms persist for over a month or begin to interfere with normal daily activities, this may be a sign sustained traumatic reaction and it may be necessary to help yourself or help others to link with professional mental health services.

- Lifeline: 13 11 14
- Suicide Line: 1300 651 251
- Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement: 1300 858 113
- Better Health Channel: www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au



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