

Mental Health, Grief and Bereavement Tip Sheet

The intersection of mental health and disasters is one of the more culturally sensitive aspects of response and recovery work and one of the least funded among philanthropic disaster investments. This is a summary of the full [Mental Health, Grief and Bereavement Toolkit](#).

Overview

Following a disaster, communities are often faced with mental health crises. The loss of homes and belongings, the death of loved ones and pets, the destruction of community supports and displacement of friends and family can all lead to enhanced emotional distress, anxiety, depression, suicidal tendencies and grief. The stress of living through a crisis and its aftermath exacerbates prior vulnerabilities as well as creating new ones. We know this to be true in almost every aspect of disaster and humanitarian crises, whether the underlying inequity is a condition of substandard housing, food insecurity, access to general healthcare or proximity to a hazard.

Several factors affect a community's capacity to respond appropriately and effectively to the trauma and grief that accompany disasters and crises. Survivors are often diverse and have equally varied individual and communal approaches to mental health assessment and interventions. Needs are different for a single, traumatic event compared to repeated disasters that occur where environmental, ecological and financial vulnerabilities are present. Access to medical care, insurance that adequately covers mental healthcare, and the social determinants of health (e.g., food, emotional and spiritual support, financial stability) influence preparedness for the impact of disasters.

Mental Health, Grief and Bereavement in a Disaster Context

The impact of a disaster is not over once a disaster has passed and/or an individual has an opportunity to reflect and adjust. A disaster can be seen as a "[trauma with a capital T](#)," to distinguish it from smaller-scale traumatic events one may encounter in life such as life or job changes, relationship breakdowns or financial stress. The [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#) states that trauma "has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being."

Recommendations for Blue Sky Times

- Be ready to support organizations after a disaster occurs.
- Support research, analysis and education on health issues and mental health concerns post-disaster.
- Fund crisis support counselors in non-traditional settings.

Recommendations for Times of Disaster

- Be ready for the long haul.
- Be ready for complexity.
- Reward innovation.
- Partner and co-fund projects.

Key Takeaways

- Mental health, grief and bereavement are underfunded, and yet, are some of the most critically needed services for a full, equitable and healthy recovery.
- Philanthropy can have a tremendous, long-term impact.
- Long-term funding for mental health services and counseling programs is vitally important for the recovery of the affected individuals and the community as a whole.
- Education and awareness campaigns can help encourage individuals to take advantage of counseling programs.
- Media messaging that is appropriate and tailored to specific populations is extremely important. The more people know about available counseling programs, the more people will seek help.

What Donors Are Doing

- The [Center for Disaster Philanthropy](#) (CDP) through its [COVID-19 Response Fund](#) has provided several grants linked to mental health and disasters. These include a \$250,000 grant in 2020 to the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) to expand their work on mental health support related to COVID-19 and other disasters, and a \$500,000 grant to [Vibrant Emotional Health](#) to support its Crisis Emotional Care Team. Through its [Global Recovery Fund](#), CDP provided two grants in 2020 to support mental health and bereavement including a \$200,000 grant to support [Doctors without Borders \(MSF\)](#) mental health outreach and services to victims of violence in urban slums in Venezuela, and a \$336,000 grant to the [Australian Red Cross Society](#) for bushfire support including bereavement payments to next of kin for people who died in the fires.
- The [New York Life Foundation](#) provides extensive funding for mental health, bereavement and grief support to disaster victims and survivors. This includes a \$1.25 million grant to the [National Alliance for Grieving Children's Grief Reach program](#) to support childhood bereavement efforts.
- In 2019, the [John Ben Snow Memorial Trust](#) supported the work of the [Trauma Intervention Program of Northern Nevada](#) with a \$5,000 grant to train volunteers to provide mental health and trauma intervention after disasters and emergencies.
- [Johnson & Johnson's Corporate Giving](#) program invested \$5 million through a grant to [Save the Children](#), which was used to partially support a new program dedicated to mental health and psychosocial support for children in the United States and around the world.

Further Reading

- National Child Traumatic Stress Network: [Helping Young Children Heal After the Tornado/Hurricane/Earthquake/Tsunami/Crisis](#)
- Child Care Aware of America: [Emergency Preparedness Resources for Childcare Providers](#)
- Child Care Aware of America: [Helping Children Cope with Violence and Disasters](#)
- Collaborative for Children: [Helping Child Survivors of Disaster: A Practical Guide for Caregivers](#)
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network: [Parent Guidelines for Helping Youth After a Mass Violence Attack](#)
- Natural Hazards Center: [Children and Disasters Special Collection](#)

