



IMPACT MISSIONS

# COMMUNITY MINISTRY APPLICATIONS OF DISASTER RESPONSE CHAPLAINCY

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The work of Disaster Response Crisis Care Team Chaplains—supporting those who've experienced devastating loss—offers valuable lessons for caring for anyone navigating a difficult season. At the heart of this ministry is the recognition that crisis and loss often lead to isolation. Simply acknowledging someone's pain and showing genuine care can significantly boost their resilience.

This doesn't require specialized training. Often, it's as simple as turning a casual "How're ya doin'?" into a sincere moment of connection:

"No, really—how are you doing? I know it's been a hard season, and I truly want to hear."

Then, take time to listen—without judgment or agenda. Ask open-ended questions that invite conversation and connection. If needs arise, offering referrals to resources—whether for food, financial assistance, counseling, or support groups—can be a powerful act of care. Make it your mission to know the helpers in your community and be ready to connect others to them.

Support people in making their own decisions and rebuilding their lives. Avoid giving "pat answers." Instead, practice the Ministry of Presence—being there as they process their journey toward a "new normal."

### A helpful framework is the First Aid model:

- Some people just need a moment to breathe and assess their situation.
- Some just need a "band-aid."
- Others need temporary support until professional help arrives.
- And some require immediate intervention beyond what we can offer.

## What Does Spiritual and Emotional First Aid Look Like?

It involves helping people find meaning in their experience and drawing on their own spiritual resources to foster resilience—defined as the ability to adapt well to adversity, trauma, or stress.

For some, spirituality and religious practice are central to coping. For others, meeting basic needs like food and shelter takes precedence. In those cases, spiritual care might look like a grocery delivery or an offer to babysit—acts that create emotional space for healing.

Start by establishing a connection. Help them feel emotionally and physically safe. If they express needs, be ready to share information about available services.

Ask open-ended questions to explore:

- Their current and future concerns
- Fears about loved ones
- Physical and emotional losses
- The severity of their struggles
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As one colleague wisely said, “The key to a visit is to get the person to share their lament—the pain they’re experiencing and why. Then, help them explore the emotions tied to that lament and offer support.”

Guide them in identifying their most immediate need, then brainstorm responses and resources. Help them create an action plan with achievable steps. Meeting small goals can restore a sense of control and reduce stress. Encourage them to seek and give support. Help identify trusted people they can connect with, and explore any reluctance to seek help—especially where stigma around mental health exists. Sometimes, helping others can also be a healing act, giving purpose during a time of struggle.



## Promote Positive Coping Strategies

Watch for negative coping behaviors like isolation, workaholism, anger, or substance use. Encourage positive actions such as:

- Seeking social support
- Engaging in uplifting activities
- Setting goals
- Changing expectations or priorities
- Practicing relaxation techniques
- Exercising
- Pursuing counseling

If someone is emotionally overwhelmed, disoriented, or unresponsive, they may need more than a listening ear. Offer a calming presence, help them name their anxiety, and guide them through grounding techniques. Then, connect them with professional help.

## Know Your Limits—But Never Underestimate Your Impact

You won't "fix" someone in one conversation, especially if their pain runs deep. Know your role as a "first aid provider" and refer when needed. But never underestimate the power of presence. Simply knowing someone cares can be a lifeline on the journey to healing.

