THE ROLE OF SPIRITUAL CARE IN DISASTERS

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Spirituality is a part of culture.

There is a significant difference between spirituality and religion.

Spirituality can be religious or non-religious.
Spirituality refers to an inner belief system. It is a “spirit-to-spirit” relationship to oneself, others and the God of one's understanding. Everyone is a spiritual being.

“Spirituality is a personal quest for the transcendent…” Rabbi Eric Lankin
Religion refers to the externals of a belief system: places of worship, prayers, traditions, rites, etc. While everyone is a spiritual being, not all spiritual beings are religious.
“Disaster effects the entire fabric of a community that existed prior to the event and can cause traumatic stress among the whole community. Disaster recovery is in large part the rebuilding of community, the re-tying of the thousands of strands of relationship in the fabric of our being together that have been severed by the disaster.”

Rev. J Robinson, Jr
An individual who expresses affirmation of life in a relation with a higher power (as defined by the person), self, community and environment that nurtures and celebrates wholeness.

Handbook of Nursing Diagnosis
Carpenito, 7th ED.; 1997
A sense of awe and wonder.
A sense of community.
A sense of personal mission.
Enthusiasm for continuous discovery and creativity.
A sense of well-being and joy.
"The state at which an individual or group experiences or is at risk of experiencing a disturbance in the belief or value system that provides strength, hope, and meaning to life."

Handbook of Nursing Diagnosis Carpenito, 7th ED.; 1997
SIGN OF POTENTIAL SPIRITUAL DISTRESS

- Reconsidering core tenets of religious beliefs.
- Question like “Why did God do this?”
- Questioning justice and meaning.
- Feeling far from previously held beliefs.
- Closing off from loved ones.
- Feeling a need to be cleansed.
- Feeling despair, hopelessness.
- Feeling guilty, feeling of shame.
- Wondering about life and death.
- Crying.
- Anger toward responders, family, God.
WHAT IS SPIRITUAL CARE?

- Anything that assists an individual, family or community in drawing upon their own spiritual perspective as a source of strength, hope and healing.
- Anything that nurtures the human spirit in coping.
Offer presence and hospitality.
Meet, accept and respect persons exactly as they are.
Do No Harm - Never evangelize, proselytize or exploit persons in vulnerable need.
Spiritual Care Providers provide sensitive, appropriate care for all persons and celebrate and respect every spiritual perspective.
WHAT LEADS TO A SPIRITUAL FOCUS/CRISIS?

Physical causes:
- Accidents
- Disasters
- Disease/major medical issues
- Lack of sleep/food/water
Emotional experiences or transitions

- Birth/ Death
- Marriage/separation/divorce
- Joining /leaving a faith community
- Change in lifestyle
- Moving
- Job loss
- Loss of a friendship
- Near death experiences, of self or a loved one
Community Faith Leaders:

- Persons who have different levels of education and training pertaining to their own faith traditions and its systems of instruction and certification.
- Primarily support their own members.
- Already recognized by the community and will be sought out for spiritual support.
Chaplains:

- Have completed the education and certification to be a faith leader in their own tradition.
- Have completed series of courses to heighten awareness of diverse faith traditions. Hospital Chaplains also take courses in Clinical Pastoral education to help them function in institutional settings.
ETIQUETTE STANDARD AND CODES OF BEHAVIOR

- Respect for diverse faith traditions.
- Concern for confidentiality.
- Prohibition of proselytizing or evangelizing.
- Respect for social diversity.
- Descriptions of professional boundaries that guarantee safety of clients.
- Mechanisms for ensuring that caregivers function at appropriate training and education levels.
Have you ever listened to someone share their feelings?

Have you ever helped provide a quiet area?

Have you ever prayed with or for someone affected by a disaster?

Have you ever left flowers or other objects at a memorial site?

Have you ever offered a hug, provided food/shelter/care/clothing, etc?
Things to say:
“I am so very sorry.”
“My heart is with you”
“What can I do to help you at this time?”
“My sympathy for your loss”

- Offer prayer, if requested.
- Support people in finding their own solutions.
- Permit people to share their memories/stories.
- Listen actively and without judgment.
- Share your emotions sincerely and appropriately.
Avoid clichés.
Don’t avoid using a deceased victim’s name.
Do not preach.
Be cautious about giving advice.
Beware of making promises.
Encourage people to be connected with loved ones.
Seek/ refer to Mental Health when appropriate.
Grief looks different in other cultures.
Be open-minded.
Demonstrate respect.
Recognize that is difficult to express feeling in a second language.
Similarities between the two healing modalities:

- Concern for emotional well-being.
- Practice of attentive listening as part of care.
- Embracing a holistic view of a person.

Both disciplines offer comfort and bring relief from undue stress. Each group is in a unique position to refer client’s to each other’s care as appropriate.
Is a body of psychological interventions that mitigate acute distress while not interfering with the natural healing process.

These interventions include:

- Pre-incident training
- Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)
- Psychological First Aid
- Long term Counseling and Therapy

The Mental Health Sector of SMART and other community organizations offer these trainings.
LONG TERM RECOVERY

Activities for this stage may include:

- Community Spiritual Assessment
- Spiritual Care Interventions to kindle hope
- Attention to emotional and spiritual issues around anniversary dates
- Organized community services of memorial and remembrance
- Retreat opportunities for care givers
Hope consists in asserting that there is at the heart of being, beyond all data, beyond all interventions and all calculations, a mysterious principle which is in connivance with me…

There can be no hope that does not constitute itself through a we and for a we.

Gabriel Marcel
QUESTIONS

WHO? WHAT?
WHERE? WHEN? HOW?
WHY? WHICH? HOW MUCH?
HOW MANY? HOW LONG? HOW FAR?
WHAT FOR? WHAT NEXT? THEN
WHAT? WHY ME?
REFERENCES


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