

Questions with Brief Answers - ECHO Show #12 “Mental Health Care During Crisis”

(Taping Date: Tuesday, June 28th – 3:00-7:30 at TPT / Air date August 2005)

1. What do we mean by taking care of your emotional or mental health needs following a mass-disaster affecting hundreds or thousands of people?

Answer:

- ◆ The surprise that comes with destruction or loss can have a big impact on us. A tornado, fire, or disease outbreak can catch us off guard.
- ◆ A mass-crisis such as a Tsunami, disease outbreak, or attack like 9-11 affects many people all at once stretching professional resources unlike a personal problem affecting one person or family.
- ◆ A mass-disaster might also have short-term impact and long-term impact on how you feel or your emotional health. Examples:
 - Short-term impact: The hard work of dealing with a crisis may affect how you feel, in many different ways. You may feel angry, afraid, sad, or extremely tired.
 - Long-term impact: Because a mass-crisis forces us to address immediate needs like shelter and safety, we may not realize how a mass-crisis affects us emotionally for weeks, months or years after the crisis is over.

2. Dealing with a crisis can actually make some people physically sick. What kinds of problems can people have?

Answer:

- ◆ Not being able to get enough sleep – or sleeping too much.
- ◆ Headaches
- ◆ Trouble catching your breath.
- ◆ A rapidly beating heart – or a heavy, “pounding” heartbeat causing chest pain.
- ◆ Eating too much – or eating too little.
- ◆ Nausea, or stomach problems.
- ◆ Difficulty in concentrating, or remembering things.
- ◆ Abuse of alcohol or drugs.

3. Should you feel bad about needing help with handling your emotions or mental health needs?

Answer:

- ◆ Some people are afraid they will be thought of poorly or judged if they admit they are struggling with their emotions but it’s important that people realize *everyone* struggles with their emotions in a crisis and there are medical resources to help people heal their feelings just like they would see a doctor to get well from a physical illness.
- ◆ Talk openly to people and try to “normalize” the need to share your feelings.
- ◆ Seek health care and other professional resources that support emotional health needs rather than go to people who may not understand the kind of help you need to ease emotional pain.
- ◆ Not getting help for mental health matters can cause more problems because the healing process is delayed making it harder for life to “get back to normal.”

4. What are some things you can do to take care of yourself during a crisis?

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Answer:

- ◆ Everyone responds differently to a crisis. You may feel angry, afraid, sad, or extremely tired. You might not feel like working or doing much of anything.
- ◆ Make sure you get enough rest and eat healthy food.
- ◆ Take the time to exercise – even if it's just a short walk, once or twice a day.
- ◆ Get back to your regular routine as soon as possible such as going to school, work or social activities.
- ◆ Talk about how you're dealing with the crisis – with family or friends, or someone in your community -- community leader, an elder, a spiritual guide or healer. Telling people how you feel is a healthy thing to do.
- ◆ Learn as much as you can about what's happening. Knowing what to expect can help you deal with the crisis.

5. How can we help children deal with a crisis?

Answer:

- ◆ Children look to their parents for how to react to a crisis so it is important for parents to be able to explain the situation in an age appropriate manner.
- ◆ Encourage children to express their feelings and ask questions about what they think about what they are experiencing as a way to help them share their thoughts and feelings.
- ◆ You may need to seek out help in talking to your children about your situation from your local resources like health departments, social workers, human services and ethnic agencies.
- ◆ Also seek help from some of the same sources you would use for yourself – family, friends, community or religious leaders, and health professionals.
- ◆ Parents should monitor their children's behavior for unusual behavior such as loss of appetite or interest in activities, aggression or depression as these may be signs that the child needs professional help.

6. What sources of help are available when you're dealing with a crisis?

Answer:

- ◆ Health care providers (clinics) with counselors and doctors are excellent health care sources for dealing with grief, loss and emotional trauma following a mass-crisis.
- ◆ Local county health departments and social service agencies can provide resources for culturally specific needs including interpreters, etc.
- ◆ Ethnic agencies in your community might also be helpful sources for support (Name some in Minnesota if you wish but make sure you mention Minnesota!)
- ◆ Religious institutions may be one source of support including churches, Buddhist temples, mosques, religious leaders, counselors and more.
- ◆ It's important to rely on several sources for help so there is someone available at all times following a mass-crisis.
- ◆ Telephone hotlines or websites may offer mental health workers, therapists, social workers and other professionals people can reach out to for help day or night.

7. What can I expect if I see a therapist, doctor or other professional who offers help with handling emotions as a result of mass-crisis?

Answer:

- ◆ They may help you talk about what's happening, and sort out what's happening to you.
- ◆ Anything you say to a therapist or health care professional is private and cannot by law, be shared with others.
- ◆ In some cases, mental health care professionals may recommend medicines to help clients deal with their emotions. Like antibiotics that ease physical ailments, some medications can help ease emotional symptoms associated with a crisis.
- ◆ If you seek professional help, look for someone you can trust – someone who understands your language and culture.

