



Self Care

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.

Common Barriers to Self Care and Wellness

- 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
- Too tired or lack of energy
- Too expensive.

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 areas of strength and vulnerability
 - Learn to recognise signs in yourself
 - Look for signs of compassion fatigue
 - identify stress management techniques that work for you
- Practice a healthy diet and regular exercise
- Take care of your family ensuring their needs are met.
- Develop support structures in your life
 - Talk to peers and develop team support
 - Share common emotions when appropriate and communicate openly with friends, family and professionals.
- Avoid risk behaviour - practice a balanced lifestyle
- Monitor use of self soothing behaviours (i.e. alcohol and cigarettes)
- Avoid prolonged or excessive use of substances, which can aggravate stress, if abused.

Professional

- 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 purpose 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

Continued on reverse

Compassion in Times of Crisis

- Assess your 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 the helping profession are particularly susceptible to 'compassion fatigue'. This occurs with individuals who are in helping professions 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 disturbance, irritability, anxiety
- Lack of focus during worship
- Intrusive thoughts
- Difficulty separating work life from personal life
- Depression
- Increase in ineffective and/or self destructive behaviours
- 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

Mensline: 1300 789 978

Sane: 1800 187 263 www.sane.org

Better Health Channel: www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

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