



INSTITUTE FOR
COLLECTIVE TRAUMA
AND **GROWTH**

A PASTORAL GUIDE FOR RESPONSE TO COLLECTIVE TRAUMA

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FOR REGIONAL LEADERS

CHECKING IN WITH THE LOCAL LEADERS

Personally contact each of your local clergy and parachurch ministry leaders to ask:

- How are you?
- How is your congregation / organization? (Are there any in your group who are direct survivors of the event?)
- What would be most helpful for you and your congregation / organization right now?

PROVIDING IMMEDIATE RESOURCES

Resource any clergy or leaders who have direct survivors or live in close proximity to what happened.

- Compile a list of denominational leaders and local therapists than can be shared easily in a variety of formats (e.g., hard copy, electronic version, social media, etc.) including specialized areas (children, bilingual, etc.) If you don't know any local therapists personally, encourage them to call on who they know and trust.
- Encourage them to proceed through local response practices in pages 3-8 of this guide.



FOR LOCAL LEADERS

CHECKING IN WITH THE MEMBERS AND NEIGHBORS

First, check to see that everyone in your congregation / organization is out of harm's way.

- Are there direct survivors among your congregation / organization who are now at the hospital, in hotels, or making their way home?
- If people are in the hospital or at a hotel, how long until they return home?
- Is your congregation / organization in direct proximity to survivors who came from out of town and are now in the hospital or local hotels?
- **If congregation or community members have lost homes, identify organization partners or congregation members who are coordinating and/or offering available housing. This may include identifying a point person within the congregation to help coordinate and serve as a lead liaison.**



SELF CHECK

- **How impacted are you?** Does this bring up the personal past for you in a debilitating way? Is what happened overwhelmingly meaningful to you because of what was done or who was impacted? Do you feel you can be an effective leader right now for others who are grieving by lending a stable self to others who feel especially vulnerable and frenetic? For the last question, if not, communicate clearly to a responsible person who can assist in delegating an assistant in your place. If yes, proceed.
- **Activate your congregation's trained care team** if you have one in place (i.e.: Deacons or Stephens Ministers, etc), they can help with prayer chains, ministry of presence and support to those who attend the gathering, etc.
- **Make time for a brief meal and some water and proceed.**

IMMEDIATE CONGREGATIONAL CARE AFTER COLLECTIVE TRAUMA

Gather

- **Plan a gathering for tonight that at least includes fellowship. It may include a vigil as well.**
- Designate space for children, youth, and families to share their stories of impact in informal, self-paced ways. Have refreshments available or a potluck meal. Whether a part of a vigil or in a self-paced way, like with stations around a room, provide opportunities to light candles, write a lament or statement of grief, write a wish for how things could have gone better, write a blessing for survivors, draw pictures. If young children will be present, designate a play area with age-appropriate toys. The gathering should be planned for 2-3 hours, as people need.
- Depending on proximity and number of people impacted, a second night of similar activity may prove helpful.
- Is your congregation an appropriate place for local community responders to gather and find some respite? For example, do you have a community hall where people can find refreshment or meet with a local therapist?
- Will you or members of your congregation participate in planning and/or attending local community-wide vigils?



CARING FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

As your congregation gathers, consider helpful ways of interacting and talking with children:

- If you are avoiding discussing explicit details for age-appropriate reasons, simply acknowledge that many young people and adults are very sad right now because people died, and were hurt by another person, or were hurt by a natural disaster. As they ask questions, follow their lead. It is ok to say that you do not have the answers to specific questions being asked. Be honest about not knowing, and very careful not to guess, assume or project answers to things you do not know for certain.
- If you discuss explicit details, stick to facts and follow older children or teenagers' lead in discussion.
- If younger children have limited vocabulary, they may be invited to draw or color about what they may be thinking and/or feeling. Along with drawing or coloring, older children may be invited to discuss their thoughts or feelings. Be careful not to force this or any other activity. Instead, prioritize being available to listen and provide a caring presence.
- **Acknowledge what they express . . . For example, "It sounds like / seems like, you're thinking about / feeling . . . [use their words or images]". Clergy and leaders also ought to acknowledge what parents express, too.**
- Identify information detailing who to can help or assist. If survivors are in the hospital, ask if they feel they have enough support there or whether there is anyone else who might also be helpful for them or if they are having trouble contacting anyone (e.g., family, friends, therapists, etc.)



WORSHIP

- Quiet yourself and pray, with gratitude, for the Holy Spirit's guidance.
- Consider the Scripture for this week in light of what's happened. It may be just right, or you may feel a nudging to include another passage.
- Consider the music for this week in light of what's happened. What first sounds will welcome the congregation to worship in light of what's happened? What hymn or song to begin?
- Consider the prayers. What words reflect where the congregation is right now and the presence of God amid sorrow, grief, and mourning?
- Consider the experiences of children and youth for worship in light of what's happened. Do your ordinary practices provide opportunity for children and youth to express, explore, and practice their spirituality in light of what's happened? Are there any changes that should be made in order to ensure children and youth feel included with the whole of the congregation? Will teenagers also have space to meet with youth leaders, aside from the whole of the congregation, as needed?
- **Provide information - both verbally and in writing - about who to contact if a congregant's experience feels overwhelming.**



ONGOING CONGREGATIONAL CARE AFTER COLLECTIVE TRAUMA

- Proceed with planning any funeral / memorial services needed among your congregation.
- Consider whether your congregation may be appropriate for offering funeral / memorial services or reception services to local families whose loved one died and who may not have a formal church community and may be looking for one.
- Consider having prayer stations available during the week for members to make use of as desired.
- **As you begin to move forward, members of the congregation / organization may feel a range of impact, with some ready to move forward more readily than others. Resuming ordinary practices may feel stabilizing to some, while others may benefit from trauma specific resources (e.g., referral list of therapists, keeping prayer stations open for multiple weeks, adding fellowship opportunities, etc.).**



KEEP IN MIND

- Present trauma often reminds people of past trauma, particularly events or experiences they did not perceive as being effectively cared for. It is normal for survivors to bring up the past. Consider ways you can care for the past and the present together.
- Children and teenagers process along developmental stages. They will revisit past events, to process anew, as they develop more capacities to do so. Knowing this can help you not to force children and youth to process through language or concepts they cannot fully appreciate yet (e.g., extensive talk therapy, metaphors, euphemisms, etc.), while also recognizing they may seek out caring adults at later stages in order to review what happened and their experiences.
- **Trauma overwhelms a person or a group's capacities to cope. Trauma, like healing, art, and beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. What overwhelms one person, may not overwhelm another person for a range of reasons. Let the survivor be the guide for what feels debilitating.**
- As survivors feel they have effective resources to cope, they find their way through pain and suffering. Focus on identifying what resources feel truly effective to survivors and helping connect them with those opportunities.

For more information, visit www.ictg.org





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