

## HEALING HEALERS AFTER TRAUMA

A Resource from Odyssey Impact™  
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**“It never goes away. It just never really goes away.”**  
Father Bob Weiss, Catholic priest, Newtown

### WHO HEALS THE HEALERS?

#### Personal Faith

Many faith leaders rely on their practice of faith in times of turmoil

#### Faith-based and Community-based First Responders

Many faith leaders have found fellow faith leaders, counselors, therapists, and emergency personnel especially helpful in times of turmoil

#### Personal relationships and health practices

Many faith leaders have found their practices of personal health prior to a crisis helpful in times of turmoil, including relationships with family and friends.

### WHAT INHIBITS HEALING?

Judith Herman in *Trauma and Recovery* notes, “Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. They violate the victim’s faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis.”

The human spirit is ruptured in the aftermath of human-caused disasters, and faith leaders, like in response to the disaster in Newtown, experience immense challenges in offering adequate care. Caring for a grieving community may be inhibited by the following subsequent experiences:

- **Compassion Fatigue and Stress**
- **Personal and Community Expectations for Leadership**

# NEWTOWN

## WHAT EXPANDS RESILIENCY?

*"We're not gonna let the darkness overwhelm us but the darkness is there. It's still a part of life."- Father Bob Weiss, Catholic priest, Newtown*

Faith leaders in Newtown discovered what trauma survivors have been discovering in wide ranging communities that suffer from violence. They cannot live as if the tragedy never occurred, yet they can be agents of hope in the midst of overwhelming suffering. The following practices are especially helpful:

- **Personal Self Care**
- **Caring Relationships**
- **Acknowledging What's Happened in Safe Ways**

"Only true safety will provide the emotional security needed to begin the healing process commonly known as mourning. Giving voice to all they have experienced – the terror and the helplessness, the sense of moral outrage, and personal violation, the sorrow, hurt, anger, and grief – becomes the first essential step in piecing together a coherent narrative. Yet none of this can happen without the presence of a caring other." Deborah Van Deusen Hunsinger, *Bearing the Unbearable: Trauma, Gospel, and Pastoral Care*, p. 11.

## HELPFUL TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

### DISASTER

An event, or series of events, that overwhelms a person or a group's capacities to cope.

### TRAUMA

An event, or series of events, that leaves a lasting impression of harm or loss.

*"That's what a tragedy is... unexpected, absolute horribleness."*- Lori Veillette, EMT

### GRIEF

Feeling a great sense of loss.

*"I keep expecting him to be there. Have I just gone insane? Is this real? Did he even ever exist?"*

*- Francine Wheeler mother of Ben Wheeler*

### CHILDREN'S TRAUMA AND GRIEF

Feeling a great sense of loss during primary development stages.

*"He describes 12/14 as the day hell came to his school. He has gone through cycles of grief, same as any adult."*

*- Nicole Hockley mother of Dylan Hockley*

# NEWTOWN

“Talking to children about actual violence comes down to a few core elements: being a reliable, trustworthy adult, telling the truth, letting children or youth guide the conversation, and encouraging safety.” Kate Wiebe in Kraus, L. (et.al.), *Recovering from Un-natural Disasters*, WJK Press, 2017.

In the aftermath of 12/14, churches like First Congregational Newtown created spaces for children and parents to talk, ask questions, or find more information about caring for grieving children. These gatherings were led by faith leaders and trained first responders.

“Children (0-18) have their own ways of dealing with trauma, according to their age and stage of development. Their reactions are difficult to predict and/or may not show up for some time. This tip sheet outlines the common reactions of children who experience disasters and traumatic events, or hear about them happening to family or friends, and suggests ways religious leaders can support children and their caregivers.”

[http://www.n-din.org/ndin\\_resources/tipsheets\\_v1208/24\\_NDIN\\_TS\\_Children.pdf](http://www.n-din.org/ndin_resources/tipsheets_v1208/24_NDIN_TS_Children.pdf)

Youth Ministry leaders can find additional resources and practical guides for youth ministry care and programming in the aftermath of trauma at [www.ictg.org](http://www.ictg.org).

## **THE LIFE-CYCLE OF A DISASTER**

You can find a graphic and explanation of the phases of a collective trauma at [www.ictg.org](http://www.ictg.org).

“The physical, emotional, and spiritual ripple effects of violence are far-reaching; effects that experts say can even pass through generations, when not responded to in healthy ways. They temporarily overwhelm a group’s ability to cope and sometimes permanently alter a group’s composition.

...Though the way out of the dark valley does exist, the journey is neither easy or quick.” Kraus, L. (et.al.), *Recovering from Un-natural Disasters*, WJK Press, 2017

Grieving communities like Newtown traverse multiple phases of reaction and response to collective trauma. For example, “In this first year we were alternating our meltdowns. Sometimes we’d meltdown together, then the kids would come to our aid.”- Mark Barden, Father of Daniel Barden

## **COMPASSION FATIGUE, COMPASSION STRESS, SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS**

The natural, predictable, treatable, and preventable unwanted effect on a secondary person as consequence of working with suffering people through a caregiving relationship. (See Charles Figley and Storm Swain’s works for further descriptions)

# NEWTOWN

## HELPFUL RESOURCES FOR FAITH LEADERS

**Self-Care For Religious Leaders** [http://n-din.org/ndin\\_resources/tipsheets\\_v1208/09\\_NDIN\\_TS\\_SelfCare.pdf](http://n-din.org/ndin_resources/tipsheets_v1208/09_NDIN_TS_SelfCare.pdf)

**Disaster Spiritual Care** [http://n-din.org/ndin\\_resources/tipsheets\\_v1208/10\\_NDIN\\_TS\\_DisasterSpiritualCare.pdf](http://n-din.org/ndin_resources/tipsheets_v1208/10_NDIN_TS_DisasterSpiritualCare.pdf)

**Faith Communities & Trauma Resilience** [http://n-din.org/ndin\\_resources/tipsheets\\_v1208/13\\_ND-IN\\_TS\\_TraumaResilience.pdf](http://n-din.org/ndin_resources/tipsheets_v1208/13_ND-IN_TS_TraumaResilience.pdf)

**Emergency Action Plan (EAP) for Faith Communities** [http://www.n-din.org/ndin\\_resources/tipsheets\\_v1208/07\\_NDIN\\_TS\\_ActiveShooter.pdf](http://www.n-din.org/ndin_resources/tipsheets_v1208/07_NDIN_TS_ActiveShooter.pdf)

**Training for Youth Ministers** <http://www.ictg.org/youth-ministry.html>

**Training for Spiritual Directors** <http://www.ictg.org/spiritual-formation.html>

## RELEVANT ORGANIZATIONS

**National Disaster Interfaith Network** <http://www.n-din.org/>

**Institute for Congregation Trauma and Growth** <http://www.ictg.org/>

**National Child Traumatic Stress Network** <https://learn.nctsn.org/>

**Heeding God's Call: Inspiring Hope, Raising Voices, Taking Action to End Gun Violence** <http://heedinggodscall.org/>

**Sandy Hook Promise** <http://www.sandyhookpromise.org/>

## USEFUL BOOKS

*Recovering from Un-natural Disaster* Laurie Kraus, David Holyan, Bruce Wismer

*Trauma and Transformation at Ground Zero* Storm Swain

*The Little Book of Trauma Healing* Carolyn Yoder

*Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy* William Worden

*Stilling the Storm* Kathleen Smith

*Help the Helper* Babette Rothschild

*Risking Connection in Faith Communities* Jackson Day

*Disaster Spiritual Care* Stephens, Stephen Roberts, Willard Ashley

*Bearing the Unbearable* Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger

*101 Trauma-Informed Interventions* Linda Curran

*Secondary Traumatic Stress: Self-Care Issues for Clinicians, Researchers, and Educators* B.Hudnall Stamm