

Dos

- Demonstrate calm assurance.
- Tune your heart, eyes, ears, and mind to the person to whom you are listening.
- Accept people as they are.
- Invite people to talk – then listen to what they say.
- Cry if you are so moved.
- Pray aloud when asked, avoiding Christian language unless you are very sure they share the faith.
- Return friendly touch.
- Respect confidentiality.

Don'ts

- Interrogate, or ask questions to satisfy your curiosity.
- Try to fix problems.
- Take sides—political, religious, or other.
- Blame, criticize, or defend anyone.
- Pray with survivors unless asked.
- Try to convert survivors to your faith tradition.
- Give advice.
- Judge reactions.
- Try to explain or answer “why?”
- Give groundless assurances.
- Repeat rumors.
- Photograph without permission.
- Confront or argue.
- Make psychological interpretations.
- Take notes.

You might say...

*My heart goes out to you.
Friends here share your grief.
I can see the pain in your eyes.
I am here to see how you are doing.
I believe God is here with you in your suffering.
Say nothing at all (just be there).*

Avoid saying...

*I know how you feel.
I was blessed not to have experienced the disaster.
At least you have another child.
He/She is in a better place.
God only gives such pain to those who can handle it.
It's just stuff.
This was God's will.
Others have experienced worse.
You did the best you could (unless the person has said that to you.)
Everything will be all right.*



A Volunteer's Guide to Ministry of Presence

As a volunteer, the most important gift you give to survivors is your presence. You bring hope, connection, and love.

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance appreciates your serving in this way and trusts you will be blessed while you are cleaning up, rebuilding, and reclaiming homes and lives. Here are some suggestions for doing informal emotional and spiritual care – Ministry of Presence – with survivors.

The key is tuning your heart to both your inner wisdom and to the survivor, listening and seeing with the ears and eyes of your heart.



Barry Carlin



Ministry of Presence video: <https://vimeo.com/112711343>

Self Care for Volunteers video: <https://vimeo.com/112544185>

For more, see *Light Our Way*, a book Presbyterian Disaster Assistance published with partners in disaster work. <http://pda.pcusa.org/pda/resource/light-our-way/>

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PDA National Call Center, for work teams: (866) 732-6121

OUT OF CHAOS, HOPE

Common Reactions to Disaster

It is common for people who have survived disaster to have signs of stress, including...

- A need to tell their stories again & again
- Confused thinking
- Difficulty making decisions
- Memory dysfunction
- Tears
- Anger
- Grief
- Feeling overwhelmed and hopeless
- Changes in eating and sleeping routine
- Difficulty praying
- Change in level of involvement with faith community
- Questioning faith
- Anger at God
- Questioning "Why?"

Most people heal with their own inner resilience and the support of family, friends, and folks like you.

As a volunteer you can foster hope by listening to their stories, encouraging/ reminding them of their connection to family/community, and encouraging good self-care.

What You Can Do

Tune your heart to your inner wisdom and the survivor.

Connect by doing simple things like offering a handshake or bottle of water.

Invite Story Telling

"Where were you when it happened?" "What was your first response?"

"Would you like to tell me what happened?" "How was that for you?"

Listen – the most important tool for ministry of presence.

Convey that you are listening with . . .

Facial expressions and head nods - natural empathic expressions and slight smiles; no bobble head.

Eyes - Maintain appropriate eye contact. Avoid staring, and don't keep looking away.

Posture – Lean slightly toward survivor with open posture, avoiding crossed legs and arms.

Short Oral Responses - Say a single word or short phrase to indicate you are listening, like *Yes, Yeah, or Uh-huh.*

Ask clarifying questions to be sure you're understanding:

"Are you saying...?" "Could you tell me more about ...?"

Restating: *"What I hear you saying is ..."* *"You are concerned about...am I right?"*

Reflecting: *"So you say you are not comfortable about ..."*

Encourage Connection to Community

- Remind survivors of connections to family and friends; e.g., if you hear one mention her grandchild in passing, when there's a break, say, "I'd love to hear about your grandchild."
- Encourage connecting to community beyond family.

Encourage Self-Care

Encourage survivors to

- Take breaks to play with children/grandchildren/friends.
- Rest.
- Eat nutritious food.
- Exercise.
- Enjoy the things that give pleasure like music, reading, conversation.
- Laugh.

Build Hope

Remind them of their own resilience by asking: "When you faced other difficult times, what helped you pull you through?"

Refer or gently hand off to care leaders when you . . .

- See/hear anything that sounds like a person might need more in-depth assistance than you can give.
- Sense someone needs to talk longer than you can afford to listen.