



DEALING WITH DISASTER DISTRESS

Visiting Nurse & Hospice Care Offers FREE Support Counseling for ANYONE Suffering A Loss

Disasters, especially those with great loss, have the potential to cause emotional distress. “Loss of any kind is never easy, and with the Thomas Fire and now the mudslides, we feel our community’s pain and challenges,” stated Lynda Tanner, President and CEO of Visiting Nurse & Hospice Care (VNHC). “If you or someone you know is struggling during or after this disaster, please know you are not alone. At VNHC, our bereavement services are available for free to anyone in the community.”

VNHC Bereavement Services include: individual counseling, support groups, information, and referrals. There is no charge for any of our services thanks to generous contributions. Call VNHC Bereavement anytime at 805-308-9602 or email bereavement@vnhcsb.org, and your inquiry will be returned by the next business day.

WHY IS SUPPORT COUNSELING IMPORTANT?

Experiencing great loss means life as you know it has changed. You may find yourself grappling with how to adjust to these changes while longing for things to be the way they used to be. It is natural to feel a range of deep emotions in the coming days, weeks, months, and years. Though social pressures may urge you to move along and “get over” your loss and grief, it is important to understand that your grief is real and natural and you will heal in your own time.

Some people are more at risk than others:

- Survivors living or working in the impacted areas
- Loved ones of victims
- First Responders, Rescue & Recovery Workers

Stress, anxiety, and depression are common reactions after a disaster. Warning signs of distress may include:

- Sleeping too much or too little
- Stomachaches or headaches
- Anger, feeling edgy or lashing out at others
- Overwhelming sadness
- Worrying a lot of the time
- Feeling guilty but not sure why
- Feeling like you have to keep busy
- Lack of energy or always feeling tired
- Drinking alcohol, smoking or using tobacco more than usual, using illegal drugs
- Eating too much or too little
- Not connecting with others
- Feeling like you won’t ever be happy again

TIPS FOR COPING WITH STRESS AFTER A DISASTER

- **Take care of yourself.** Try to eat healthy, avoid using alcohol and drugs, and get some exercise when you can; even a walk around the block can make a difference.
- **Reach out to friends and family.** Talk to someone you trust about how you are doing.
- **Talk to your children.** They may feel scared, angry, sad, worried, and confused. Let them know it's okay to talk about what's on their mind. Limit their (and your own) watching of TV news reports about the disaster. Help children and teens maintain normal routines to the extent possible. Role model healthy coping.
- **Get enough "good" sleep.** Some people have trouble falling asleep after a disaster; others keep waking up during the night. If you have trouble sleeping:
 - Only go to bed when you are ready to sleep
 - Don't watch TV or use your cell phone or laptop computer while you're in bed
 - Avoid eating (especially sugar) or drinking caffeine or alcohol at least one hour before going to bed
 - If you wake up and can't fall back to sleep, try writing in a journal or on a sheet of paper what's on your mind.
- **Take care of pets or get outside into nature when it's safe.** Nature and animals can help us to feel better when we are down. See if you can volunteer at a local animal shelter- they may need help after a disaster. Once it's safe to return to public parks or natural areas, find a quiet spot to sit in or go for a hike.
- **Know when to ask for help.** Signs of stress can be normal, short-term reactions to any of life's unexpected events- not only after surviving a disaster, but also after a death in the family, the loss of a job, or a breakup. Talk to your physician if you notice increased levels of:
 - Depression (including having thoughts of suicide)
 - Anxiety
 - Alcohol or Drug Use

Key steps to alleviate the pain of loss include, but are not limited to: seeking support from family and friends; intentionally taking care of yourself; allowing yourself to express your grief and finding ways to remember and honor your loved one. Bereavement counseling may also help by providing you with a safe space and dedicated time to process your grief, by learning coping tools, and receiving support as you adjust to life after loss.

Support Groups: You may be interested in receiving support with your loss while connecting with others who are also on their grief journey. VNHC offers Group Support, which is a fundamental way to combat isolation and recognize the normal grief process.

WE CARE AND WE'RE HERE WHEN YOU NEED US MOST

The VNHC Bereavement Team can be reached by phone and email.

- **Call 805-308-9602**, leave a message with your name and number and a bereavement counselor will call you back by the next business day. As the VNHC Bereavement Team is with clients throughout the day, when you call you will receive an automated message.
- **Email bereavement@vnhcsb.org**, and the VNHC Bereavement Team will call or email you back by the next business day.

About Visiting Nurse & Hospice Care

Visiting Nurse & Hospice Care (VNHC) is the leading nonprofit provider of comprehensive home health care, personal care, palliative care, hospice care, and related services necessary to promote the health and well-being of all community residents. Established in 1908, VNHC is one Santa Barbara's oldest nonprofit organizations serving the greater Santa Barbara area, and Santa Ynez and Lompoc Valleys. VNHC's mission is to provide compassionate and trusted care for all. For more information, visit vnhcsb.org or call 805.965.5555.

