

Community Healing and Support

In all acts of social violence there is a delicate relationship between social and personal healing. Often communities take action to protect the community and the social system, at the same time neglecting the needs and suffering of their communities' most vulnerable and traumatized persons. Social healing is a necessary but not absolute panacea for personal healing. We need both.

- When disaster strikes **all members of the community are affected**, not just those who are directly injured and killed. A solidarity forms almost instantly among community members.
- While community trauma can induce feelings of powerlessness, disconnection, and mistrust, **strong community leadership** can readily overcome this.
- Outside helpers can fill important gaps and can be very beneficial, but they must be properly **supervised by community leaders and professionals**; beware the "disaster tourists."
- Community networks need to be **continuously strengthened**, monitored, tested and be up and ready to aid the community in the time of an acute disaster.
- All citizens need to **be disaster prepared**. Know how to reach your children, spouse, loved ones, and friends at a moment's notice. Know how to contact immediately the police, fire station, and hospital. Follow basic disaster management precautions in the home.
- Remember that all violent situations, even if not directly affected, **will re-activate prior experiences of trauma** - e.g. assault history, experience of 9/11. This re-action can lead to fear, anxiety, and other symptoms of emotional distress. This is usually temporary.
- The symptoms of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder including insomnia, flashbacks, nightmares, worry, anxiety, and sadness are **normal reactions** to witnessing violence. Few people go on to develop serious mental health problems.
- Community members can **mobilize altruistic behavior, work (school), and spirituality**; these most important social instruments of healing.
- Those who have been directly affected - either injured or had an unnatural death in the family - will need community support for years. People who have experienced violence can feel lonely, isolated, and a burden on the family and community. **Sustained community support over time is critical** to their personal healing.
- All survivors of violence as well as their communities require **social justice** to heal. Trauma survivors cannot heal without justice being attempted and hopefully achieved.

In a time of crisis communities through well-intentioned actions can reduce the suffering of all community members as well as aid the enhanced solidarity of all community members to reduce old patterns of prejudice, grievances, and social inequality.

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