



Disaster Distress Helpline Videophone for American Sign Language Users

- *What is the Disaster Distress Helpline?*

The Disaster Distress Helpline (DDH) is a 24/7, year-round, confidential, multi-lingual crisis counseling and emotional support resource for survivors, responders, and anyone in the U.S./territories struggling with distress or other mental health concerns related to any natural or human-caused disaster. Calls and texts to 1-800-985-5990 are answered by trained counselors from a network of independently operated crisis centers located across the country.

- *Overview: Disaster Distress Helpline Videophone for American Sign Language Users*

The DDH Videophone (“DDH VP”) offers a 24/7 direct connection to trained DDH counselors fluent in American Sign Language (ASL). People who are Deaf, hard of hearing, (“HoH”) or anyone for whom ASL is their primary or preferred language can dial the DDH hotline 1-800-985-5990 via their videophone-enabled device OR access the “ASL Now” option via the DDH website at <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline>.

- *Why a DDH VP for ASL users?*

While most people impacted by disaster will be able to bounce back fairly quickly with help from their support networks, others may experience significant emotional distress or other mental health concerns that can impede recovery. Deaf and hard of hearing people may be especially at risk for disaster-related distress. Barriers to accessibility for mental healthcare, emergency preparedness, and disaster relief services are just a few distress risk factors that Deaf/HoH people face throughout the disaster cycle.

In addition, the vast majority of crisis hotlines are set up to accommodate hearing, not Deaf/HoH, callers. While video Relay connections can offer 3rd-party interpretation between ASL users and hearing counselors, the responding counselor still may not fully understand the needs or be able to communicate effectively via the interpreter, especially if the caller is in crisis. While crisis chat and text services can seem like a sufficient alternative to hearing hotlines, Deaf people might understandably assume that responding chat/text counselors may not understand their needs as Deaf individuals, and therefore may be resistant in accessing these options.

- *Can a hearing person utilize the DDH VP option? Can I access the DDH VP, or can I refer anyone to the service, regardless of whether they or I are Deaf or HoH?*

The DDH VP is intended for American Sign Language users, regardless of fluency level or whether they are fully Deaf or hard of hearing. The common denominator is that ASL is the language being used between the caller & counselor. Callers who cannot communicate at all in ASL should not use the DDH VP. These callers should call or text the DDH 1-800-985-5990 via their standard phone device.



- *Who answers DDH VP calls?*

The national Disaster Distress Helpline is a network of independently operated crisis centers located across the United States. DeafLEAD is the not-for-profit crisis center that staffs and responds to DDH VP calls, 24/7/365. DeafLEAD's mission is to "provide individuals who are Deaf and hard of hearing with comprehensive, unified and continuous support by enhancing socio-emotional development, effective communication and leadership through education." Learn more about DeafLEAD at <https://www.deafinc.org/deaflead/index.html>

- *Who funds and operates the Disaster Distress Helpline?*

The DDH is funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA; a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) and is administered by the nonprofit Vibrant Emotional Health; Vibrant also administers the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-TALK) for SAMHSA, of which the DDH is a sub-network. Learn more about SAMHSA at <https://www.samhsa.gov/> and Vibrant at <https://www.vibrant.org/>.

For media inquiries about the Disaster Distress Helpline Videophone for ASL users, please contact Hannah Collins, Senior Marketing and Communications Manager, at hcollins@vibrant.org.