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National Disaster Distress Helpline Turns 10

Honoring 10 years of 24/7/365 Disaster Crisis and Emotional Support

NEW YORK, NY (April 11, 2022) – The national Disaster Distress Helpline (DDH) commemorates 10 years of providing crisis counseling and support to people experiencing emotional distress related to natural or human-caused disasters. This commemoration comes after an unprecedented period of disasters in recent years, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

The DDH is a free and confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year, hotline available by calling or texting 1-800-985-5990. Spanish-speakers can call the hotline and press “2” for 24/7 bilingual support, and callers to the hotline can also connect with counselors in over 100 other languages via 3rd-party interpretation services. Deaf or hard-of-hearing American Sign Language users can contact the DDH through a videophone option via any videophone-enabled device and dialing 1-800-985-5990, or by selecting the “ASL Now” option on the DDH website at disasterdistress.samhsa.gov.

“Since launching in 2012, the Disaster Distress Helpline has served as a vital resource of support to anyone in the U.S. and U.S. Territories experiencing difficult emotions or other mental health concerns related to natural or human-caused disasters,” said Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D., HHS Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use and the leader of SAMHSA. “We are proud to support a program that ensures people have somewhere to turn during times of distress and uncertainty.”

“Research shows that people experiencing distress or other mental health concerns related to disaster can benefit from specialized crisis and emotional support services. Over the past 10 years, the DDH has played a significant role in the national disaster behavioral health preparedness, response, and recovery framework by offering year-round, 24/7 supportive counseling services. By always being available, whether immediately after a disaster event or years later, the DDH has helped thousands of survivors and responders move forward on the path of recovery,” said Christian Burgess, Director of the Disaster Distress Helpline.

The origins of the DDH date back to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, through New York City's local crisis hotline at the time, LifeNet, managed by Vibrant Emotional Health (then the Mental Health Association of New York City). The need for a permanent, national network of call centers dedicated to providing 24/7/365 disaster crisis counseling to anyone in the U.S. became clear after the tragic events of 9/11, as the emotional impacts were felt far beyond New York and would last for years, long after temporary services would phase down their operations.

In 2005, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline was created by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA), and Vibrant Emotional Health was named as the administrator. The Lifeline saw its first major surge in calls after Hurricane Katrina that same year, but while survivors, loved ones of victims, and emergency responders may be at higher risk for suicidality following a difficult recovery from a disaster, the vast majority of those in distress will *not* experience suicidal ideation, and so, a unique, separate service was still needed for disaster distress.

Following the Deepwater Horizon explosion and subsequent Gulf Coast oil spill, in 2010 SAMHSA and Vibrant launched the Oil Spill Distress Helpline, a sub-network of the Lifeline meant to be a temporary support resource for affected communities, but ended up serving as the foundation from which the DDH hotline and other infrastructure was created. On February 28, 2012, the national Disaster Distress Helpline went live with a permanent sub-network of Lifeline crisis call and text centers, serving all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and five U.S. territories.

“Over the last 10 years, the Disaster Distress Helpline has helped countless people get through difficult times and navigate the psychological effects of disasters. FEMA is proud to partner with DDH and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration as we work together to serve disaster survivors on their road to recovery,” said Anne Bink, FEMA Associate Administrator.

“The American Red Cross has been pleased to partner with the Disaster Distress Helpline since 2012 in order to provide much-needed emotional support to individuals and communities impacted by disaster. Given the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the increased number of natural disasters due to climate change, the Disaster Distress Helpline has proven to be an invaluable supplement to the American Red Cross' Disaster Mental Health response,” said Karen Koski-Miller, Disaster Mental Health Lead at the American Red Cross.

“As a long-serving DDH call center, we know the value of being there for those impacted by any disaster, large or small, natural or man-made. It means so much to provide a listening ear, a place to express sorrow, a safe space to grieve. We were honored to be able to help when Hurricane Harvey overwhelmed emergency services in Houston, when survivors of the Las Vegas mass shooting—many of whom came from our own local towns and cities—needed to share their stories, and when wildfires raged and destroyed thousands of homes,” said Sandri Kramer, Director of Community Relations & Special Projects at Didi Hirsch.

“But not until the pandemic have so many of us been both survivors as well as crisis counselors; we might have silently cried with our callers over the loss of their loved ones, remembering ours, or perfectly reflected their fears as our own,” she said. “While these shared experiences might have made it a little more challenging at times to provide emotional support, it has also very much strengthened our belief in the power of connection and the healing relief it provides.”

Over the years, in addition to its many partnerships, the Disaster Distress Helpline has launched a number of programs to help those in emotional distress because of a disaster, including the DDH Text option, [multilingual services](#), [Strength After Disaster](#), the [DDH Videophone Option](#), the [Disaster Emotional Prep Kit](#), and the [Online Peer Support Communities](#) (Healthcare Workers Impacted by COVID-19, Parents and Caregivers Impacted by COVID-19, and Survivors of Mass Violence).

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About the Disaster Distress Helpline

The Disaster Distress Helpline (DDH) is the only national hotline dedicated to providing year-round crisis counseling to individuals experiencing emotional distress related to natural or human-caused disasters. This multilingual crisis support service is available 24/7 via telephone and SMS to residents in the United States and its territories. Call or text 1-800-985-5990 to connect with a trained counselor. The Disaster Distress Helpline is funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and administered by Vibrant Emotional Health. Visit disasterdistress.samhsa.gov and strengthafterdisaster.org. Follow the DDH on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

About Vibrant Emotional Health

Vibrant Emotional Health is a non-profit organization that helps individuals and families achieve emotional wellbeing. For over 50 years, our groundbreaking solutions have delivered high-quality services and support, when, where and how people need it. We offer confidential emotional support through our state-of-the-art contact center and crisis hotline services that use leading edge telephone, text and web-based technologies and include the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, Disaster Distress Helpline, NFL Life Line and NYC Well. Through our community wellness programs individuals and families obtain supports and skills they need to thrive. Our advocacy and education initiatives promote mental wellbeing as a social responsibility. Each year we help more than 2.5 million people live healthier and more vibrant lives. We're advancing access, dignity and respect for all and revolutionizing the system for good. Visit vibrant.org. And follow Vibrant on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).