



# Disaster Mental Health Informational Session

American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists  
11/13/2024



**American  
Red Cross**

# Welcome



Roger D. Smith, J.D.  
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# Introductions



**Jack Herrmann, MSEd**

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**Sara Joyce, LCSW**

Manager, Individual Support Programs



**Shannon Goodhue, PhD, LICSW**

Sr Program Manager,  
Disaster Mental Health



**Rodney Jong, MS, LMFT**

Disaster Mental Health Volunteer

# Agenda



- American Red Cross Overview
- Disaster Cycle Services
- Disaster Mental Health Practice
- Characteristics of Volunteers for DROs
- Next Steps for Interested Volunteers
- Questions

# American Red Cross Response



Every day, more than **24,000 people** receive assistance from the American Red Cross – that's about **1,000 people helped every hour.**



- We respond to an emergency **every 8 minutes**, and average almost **65,000** disasters every year.
- The vast majority of disasters we respond to are single and multi-family home fires.
- To do that work, we proudly invest **90 cents of every dollar** into our lifesaving mission.
- **95%** of our disaster relief workers are volunteers.



# U.S. Disaster Response Highlights

## U.S. 2024 Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters



This map denotes the approximate location for each of the 24 separate billion-dollar weather and climate disasters that impacted the United States through October 2024.



More than 4.5 million meals and snacks served with partner



More than 112,000 households received over 903,000 relief items



Over 301,000 overnight shelter and hotel stays provided with partners



Some 123,000 households supported with financial assistance and recovery aid

# Mission Statement



**The American Red Cross prevents and alleviates human suffering in the face of emergencies by mobilizing the power of volunteers and the generosity of donors.**

# Fundamental Principles of the Global Red Cross Network

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Humanity

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Impartiality

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Neutrality

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Independence

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Voluntary Service

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Unity

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Universality



# Disaster Cycle Services



**Training**



**Preparedness**



**Feeding &  
Distribution**



**Sheltering**



**Community  
Mobilization**



**Spiritual Care**



**Health Services**



**Mental Health**



**Casework**



**Disability Integration**

Logistics • Workforce Support • Partnerships • Technology • Planning

**Single and  
Multi-  
Family  
Fires**

**Small  
Floods,  
Tornados**

**Tornados,  
Floods, and  
Wildfires**

**Large  
Floods,  
Wildfires, &  
Hurricanes**

**Mass  
Fatalities**

**Community  
Preparedness  
& Education**



## Disaster Mental Health



Disaster Mental Health volunteers respond to the psychosocial and emotional needs of impacted individuals, families, communities.

- Provide direct, short-term support to individuals and families who survived disasters by:
  - Building skills to manage symptoms
  - Providing Psychoeducation
  - Connecting to community resources
- Support the Red Cross workforce
- Engage communities and community leaders in promoting mental health resilience before, during, and after disasters
- Offer training to the Red Cross workforce and the community

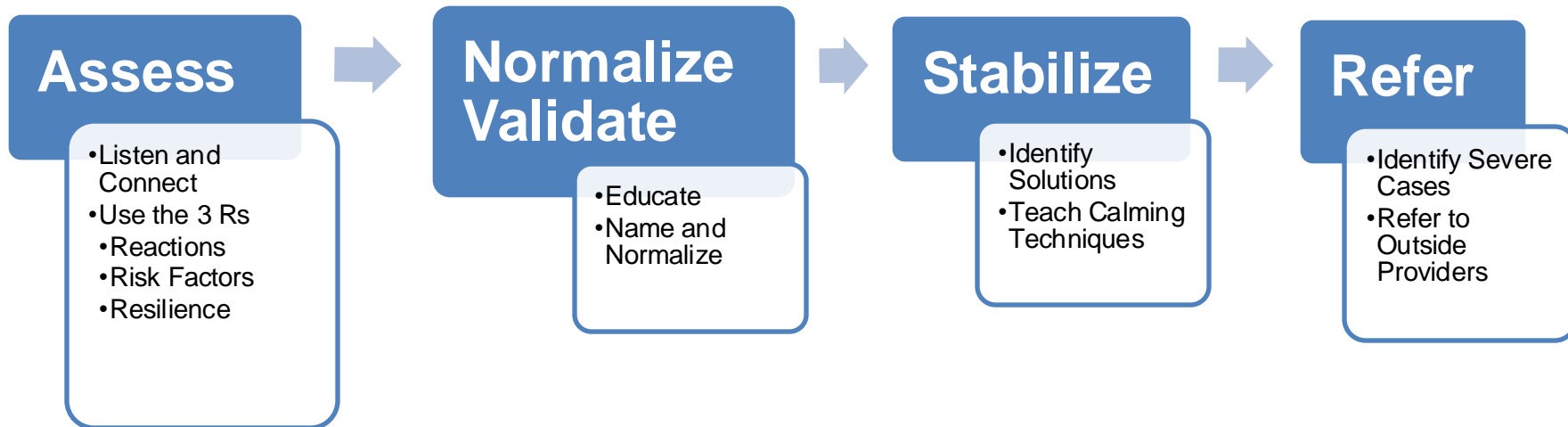
# DMH Volunteers...



- Assist survivors from the first hour to weeks after the event
- Have conversations that vary in length from minutes to hours based on client need, with a max of 3 meetings.
- Help clients manage emotions, organize thoughts, connect to support systems, use coping strategies, and problem-solve.
- Help Red Cross workers process difficult experiences



# Disaster Mental Health Triage Process



# Red Cross Disaster Mental Health Responders

## Do Not...

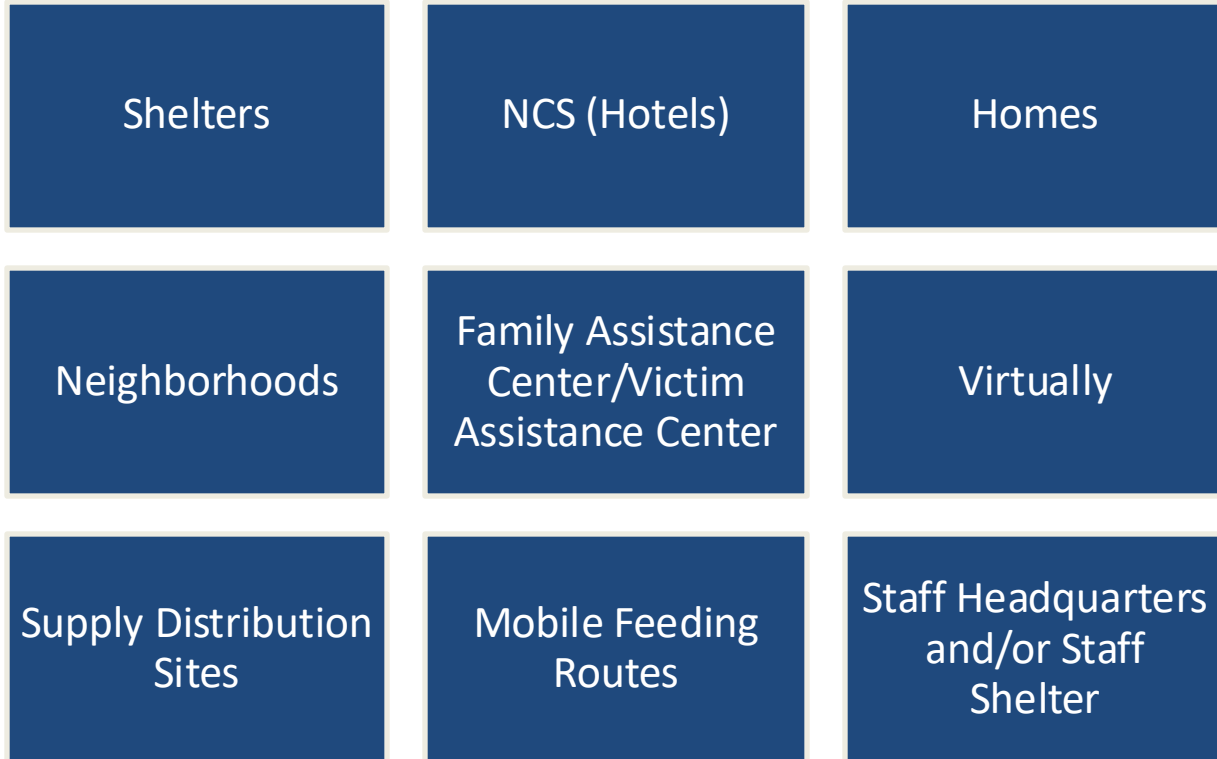


- Provide therapeutic modalities that require sustained engagement with a client.
- Conduct formal mental health evaluations or diagnostic interviews
- Provide psychological debriefings (e.g., CISD)

### **Why Not?**

- Clients must focus on immediate, physical needs first.
- Disasters can cause destabilization of a person's home, family, employment, health, and mental health. Initiating mental health interventions beyond crisis support is inappropriate and potentially dangerous.
- Crisis events change a person's mental health presentation. It is not appropriate to pathologize typical reactions to extreme stress.
- Individual DMH volunteers are not available for the weeks to months of commitment required for an appropriate long term therapeutic relationship.

# DMH Service Delivery Sites



# Differences from Traditional Mental Health Services?



Traditional Treatment	Disaster Mental Health Response
Office Based	Wherever clients are located
On-going, long-term relationship	Short-term support with a maximum of 3 meetings
Diagnose and treat mental illness	Provide skilled support and referral for treatment
Focused on personal history and long-term functioning	Focused on immediate needs for stabilization, healthy coping, problem solving, and harm reduction
Use treatments such as psychotherapy, CBT, EMDR, etc.	Use solution-focused crisis modalities
Workday has known start time, end time, and location	Workday times and location may change constantly. Flexibility is required. Extreme flexibility is needed if deployed to a major disaster.

# Local/Regional Opportunities



## Small Disaster and Emergency Response

- Respond to single and multi-family house fires, small scale natural disasters, transportation emergencies, etc.
- May support in-person or virtually depending on the event and circumstances
- Often participate in a shift schedule

## Preparedness & Training

- Participate in disaster mental health planning, drills & exercises
- Provide training to help communities prepare for disasters (e.g., Psychological First Aid).

**Every area is a little different, find out more at your local chapter!**

# National Response Opportunities



Large scale disasters that exceed local capabilities

## Deploy in-person

- Typically a 10-14 day assignment
- Travel, accommodation, and meals provided
- **Work Environment**
  - Assigned to various service delivery sites
  - Go to where the clients are
  - Provide face-to-face interaction
  - Connect with local resources
  - Offer training and other support to communities

## Deploy Virtually

- Answer referrals to DMH via telephone
- Workforce support calls
- Typically a 10-14 day assignment
- Computer/internet access and ability to use RC Care systems required

# DMH Eligibility



Volunteers must meet Red Cross Disaster Mental Health program standards, competencies, training and professional licensure requirements to serve the organization.

## **Licensed Mental Health Professionals:**

- Master's degree or higher
- Valid license/certification in any U.S. state/territory as a:
  - Psychiatrist
  - Psychologist, School Psychologist
  - Social Worker (including non-clinical licenses)
  - Professional Counselor, School Counselor, or Marriage and Family Therapist

## **Psychiatric Nurses:**

- Registered Nurse license
- 2+ years clinical experience working in a psychiatric setting (verified by current or previous employer letter)

# Professional Liability Protection



Red Cross Disaster Mental Health workers are not required to obtain their own professional liability insurance coverage to participate in Red Cross activities.

When Disaster Mental Health workers are engaged in assigned disaster relief activities (i.e., performing their official duties as agents of the Red Cross), they are covered by the Red Cross corporate insurance program for their liability when the following conditions are met:

- The Disaster Mental Health worker engaged in the activity while under the control and supervision of an authorized Red Cross employee or volunteer.
- The Disaster Mental Health worker adhered to Red Cross and Disaster Mental Health standards and procedures when engaged in the activity.
- The Disaster Mental Health worker did not act in an illegal, unethical, or grossly negligent manner.

# Volunteer Experience



## Volunteer Rodney Jong

The family systems orientation of a LMFT is helpful in understanding the recovery dynamics of families in a disaster.

Disaster Mental Health workers provide emotional support to disaster survivors and also and also educate other Red Cross workers on the risks of compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma.

# Key Characteristics of Effective Volunteers



**Resilience:** Handle high-stress environments and adapt to changing situations.

**Flexibility:** Willingness to take on various roles and tasks as needed.

**Empathy:** Strong ability to understand and share the feelings of others, crucial for supporting affected individuals.

**Teamwork:** Collaborate effectively with diverse teams and local responders.

**Problem-Solving Skills:** Quick thinking and resourcefulness in addressing unexpected challenges.

**Cultural Sensitivity:** Respect and understanding of different cultures, beliefs, and lifestyles.

**Physical Stamina:** Manage physically demanding tasks and long hours.

**Communication Skills:** Communicate clearly and effectively, even in chaotic situations.

# What to Expect on Deployment



- As a volunteer, you represent "**The American Red Cross**".
- Deployment expenses such as travel, meals and lodging will be covered by the American Red Cross, using donor funds.
- Lodging may be in a congregate staff shelter without the conveniences you have at home.
- Disasters are chaotic. The earlier you go, the more chaotic it likely will be.
- Expect lots of activity and confusion. Information will change rapidly.
- Expect to hurry up and wait.
- You may be asked to help with activities outside of Disaster Mental Health such as cleaning or setting up reception areas, distributing water/food, and other such duties.
- It may be difficult to meet your specific personal health needs, such as dietary restrictions or traveling with personal medical equipment (such as a CPAP) early in an operation. Consider what is best for you.
- Some of the HARDEST work you will ever do, but the some of the most REWARDING.

# Specific Conditions You May Encounter



- Water Disruption
- Power Outage
- Limited Food or Food Options
- Extreme Weather Conditions (e.g., heat, humidity, extreme cold)
- Accommodation Shortages
- Limited Access to Healthcare Services (e.g., pharmacies, urgent care)
- Emotional Stress
- Challenging Travel Conditions
- Lack phone/internet
- Poor Air Quality
- Excessive Walking
- Exposure to Respiratory/Infectious Diseases (COVID, Flu, West Nile, etc.)



# Accommodation and Personal Preparedness



- You may be sharing some type of sleeping accommodation, assigned to a staff shelter or shared hotel room.
- Bring personal supplies if you will need them, though only bring that which you can personally carry. Pillows, sheets, and towels may be provided. Blankets will be provided if needed.
- Dress appropriately and bring proper sleep attire. This will be appreciated by others sharing the staff shelter or room and possibly save you from an embarrassing situation.
- Be flexible and open. You may meet a new best friend.
- Be tolerant and respectful. You may learn about a new generation, culture, belief, or lifestyle.



Attendees will receive a follow up email with a link to apply or you can apply now via this QR Code:



Requirements include:

- Red Cross Volunteer Background Check
- Complete 8.5 hrs. of virtual training
- Connection with local DMH team

Questions? [Shannon.Goodhue@redcross.org](mailto:Shannon.Goodhue@redcross.org)



# Questions?

