

COVID-19 Edition

Research-Based | Biblically-Based | Need-Based | Peer-Based | Distance-Based Helping



SPIRITUAL FIRST AID

A Step-By-Step Disaster
Spiritual & Emotional
Care Manual

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Chapter 1. Introduction to Spiritual First Aid

Purpose: In this chapter you will learn what Spiritual First Aid is, what is in the manual, who it helps, how we know it helps (i.e., our research-based approach), and specific ideas for helping remotely.

“Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them... Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I” (Isaiah 58:7, 9).

God’s blessing is being here for us each step of the way. Another blessing is that we can participate in God’s love by being there for others in moments like these, particularly people like those named in this verse who are especially vulnerable.

About Spiritual First Aid

Spiritual First Aid is an evidence-informed, peer-to-peer (i.e., natural helpers, lay helpers), disaster spiritual and emotional care intervention. Spiritual First Aid is the first intervention like this to have been built from the ground up using both biblical wisdom and evidence-informed psychological insights gained from years of our team’s scientific study.

SPIRITUAL FIRST AID IS THE FIRST DISASTER, SPIRITUAL AND EMOTIONAL CARE INTERVENTION TO HAVE BEEN BUILT FROM THE GROUND UP USING BOTH BIBLICAL WISDOM AND EVIDENCE-INFORMED PSYCHOLOGICAL INSIGHTS GAINED FROM YEARS OF OUR TEAM’S SCIENTIFIC STUDY.

Who Spiritual First Aid Helps

- You, the helper, by providing hope-filled Scripture reflections, heartfelt prayers, and practical self-care tips in every chapter.
- Your family, friends, neighbors, church, and community, by equipping you with practical helping approaches grounded in biblical wisdom. Our team’s research has been adapted for the COVID-19 context (e.g., how to help remotely).
- Other helpers and leaders, by applying and sharing what you learn from Spiritual First Aid.
- Spiritual First Aid can be used with almost anyone—regardless of their faith background—because its interventions can be implemented across a continuum that ranges from subtle spiritual care to obvious spiritual care (see Chapter 2).

Manual Overview

For this edition, we adapted Spiritual First Aid for COVID-19 so it can be used to assist individuals and small groups (e.g., couples, families, roommates) while physically distancing, sheltering-in-place, and helping remotely (e.g., online). This manual offers a step-by-step approach to learning and providing spiritual and emotional care for others through Spiritual First Aid’s **BLESS Method**. We developed the **BLESS Method** to take the “guesswork” out of disaster spiritual and emotional care and make humble helping and practical presence more “concrete.”

Grounded in Humility and Practical Presence

Our research has shown that humble helping and practical presence are two ways you can be a more effective helper. Here and throughout the rest of the manual, you will find callout boxes on how to humbly help and provide practical presence. These serve to remind you that humble helping and practical presence are central to Spiritual First Aid and to equip you to integrate both when providing Spiritual First Aid.

- **Humility** involves having an accurate view of your strengths and weaknesses. Humility helps you to be more others-focused. Scripture is clear that humility is essential to service. Jesus instructs his disciples, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all” (Mark 9:35). He also preaches it publicly, saying, “The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted” (Matthew 23:11-12).
- **Practical presence** focuses on meeting immediate practical needs of others through safe, supportive presence in order to facilitate holistic health. It can be difficult to provide physical presence unless you’re staying at home with others. However, providing practical presence is still possible because it is more about making an emotional and spiritual connection.

Grounding your help in humility and practical presence, even when done remotely, increases your ability to hear, understand, and meet the needs of the person you are assisting. People tend to feel the most comfort when they feel their needs are perceived accurately and when they feel others care about them. Especially during COVID-19, when we cannot always provide physical presence, it becomes more crucial that we show others we care about what is going on in their lives with a mindset and spirit of humility and practical presence.

How Spiritual First Aid Helps

Spiritual First Aid helps people positively engage their faith in ways our research has shown reduce distress during times of adversity. Specifically, this method helps reduce distress by identifying and providing for what we have come to call the five core needs. This is accomplished by helping with humility and practical presence.

The goal is to work within constraints and challenges caused by COVID-19 as best as you can to provide practical solutions to address unmet core needs. Trying to fully resolve a person’s struggles during the pandemic is not a realistic goal in most cases. Though you may not be able to address all of a person’s unmet core needs, helping to make even small improvements now can lead to big improvements later. Doing so helps keep problems from “snowballing” and getting worse in the long run. Likewise, our longitudinal studies have shown that addressing unmet core needs early on can improve a person’s trajectory for being able to positively cope over time.

THE GOAL IS TO WORK WITHIN CONSTRAINTS AND CHALLENGES CAUSED BY COVID-19 AS BEST AS YOU CAN TO PROVIDE PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS FOR ADDRESSING UNMET CORE NEEDS.

A Research-Based and Ministry-Based Approach to Helping Remotely While Staying at Home

Spiritual First Aid is based on our team's disaster psychology of religion/spirituality research and the disaster ministry work we have conducted around the globe over the last 15 years on:

- Public health emergencies such as the Ebola outbreak.
- Natural disasters such as Hurricanes Katrina, Michael, and Harvey.
- Technical disasters including the Upper Big Branch Mining Accident.
- Mass shootings such as the Umpqua Community College and Dallas sniper tragedies.
- Post-conflict zones in Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
- Humanitarian crises ranging from the Syrian refugee crisis to the Botswana drought.

TAKING SMALL STEPS TO PROVIDE PRACTICAL HELP TO OTHERS AMIDST A CRISIS LIKE COVID-19 CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE.

During this time, we spent the last four years field testing and refining Spiritual First Aid.

Through these experiences, we have learned that disasters, including public health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, can have a profound negative impact on people's well-being (i.e., spiritually, emotionally, physically) when needs are not met. More positively, we have also discovered that for many, religion and spirituality can help buffer against and reduce common struggles like anxiety, depression, grief, and trauma. Through our disaster ministry work, we also experienced firsthand how overwhelming and difficult it can feel and be when helping.

The good news is that our team's studies show that taking small steps to practically help others amidst a crisis like COVID-19 can make a big difference. Time and time again our research demonstrates that one way churches help others during difficult times is through spiritual and social support. Moreover, we discovered that spiritual support and social support helps people find meaning, hope, and comfort in times of crisis.

But herein lies the paradox: coming together physically in community is one of the most helpful acts a church can do to help the hurting—but in the age of COVID-19, it is this precise behavior that puts people at physical risk.

Though research shows that physical distancing and stay-at-home practices help protect against the outbreak of an infectious disease like COVID-19, studies also show that these practices are starting to take a psychological toll on people around the world. People are reporting higher levels of anxiety, depression, and isolation, just to name a few problems. In addition, COVID-19 creates a host of challenging questions about how best to help. That is why below and throughout—why the manual provides thoughts, tips, and tools on helping remotely while staying at home.

ALL YOU TRULY NEED TO GET STARTED HELPING IS FAITH, COMPASSION FOR OTHERS, YOUR NATURAL HELPING ABILITIES, AND A HEALTHY DOSE OF HUMILITY.

Helping Remotely While Staying at Home: Benefits and Drawbacks

Benefits

- Promotes equitable service delivery.
- Reduces need to travel.
- Has been found to reduce stigma associated with getting help.
- Increases access to support.
- People using virtual support have reported feeling more empowered, as it gives people more control over how they access and receive help.

Drawbacks

- People may lack access to certain technologies, or they are not familiar with using them.
- Lack of physical presence may make it more difficult for some people to develop a connection with the helper.
- Virtual support can also be hindered by internet connection.
- Delays in sounds (videoconferencing and phone).
- Increased possibility of external interruptions.

Within our COVID-19 constraints, there are still incredible opportunities to serve other people. The BLESS Method, explained in the next chapter, offers a step-by-step approach to providing spiritual and emotional care that addresses someone's whole range of practical needs—in a time when they may need it most.

Prayer: God, give us insight into how we can serve others well in this time.

Chapter 2. The BLESS Method

Purpose: In this chapter you will learn about Spiritual First Aid's BLESS Method, five core needs, and the spiritual continuum.

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace" (Numbers 6:24-26).

This well-known blessing in the Bible is often used to end worship services and to send people into another week of loving God and their neighbors. We pray this BLESS Method will bless you as you use it to bless others by addressing their core needs in such a time as this.

About the BLESS Method

The BLESS Method is Spiritual First Aid's assessment and intervention framework for humbly helping and providing practical presence. BLESS represents the first letter of each of the five core needs (Belonging, Livelihood, Emotional, Safety, and Spiritual needs) that Spiritual First Aid was designed to assist. Use the BLESS Method to identify people's most pressing unmet core needs and then respond with the recommended paired interventions. This straightforward and intuitive four-step approach (Attend, Ask, Act, And Repeat) will help you maximize your natural helping skills to provide effective peer-to-peer support. Overall, the BLESS Method is designed to help you remember what and how to help others who are struggling due to COVID-19 with humility and practical presence.

Humbly Help: Begin by Examining Reasons for Wanting to Help

Before you reach out to provide Spiritual First Aid to others, make sure you have humbly examined your motives for wanting to help. Though not meant to be exhaustive, below are a few examples of healthy and unhealthy reasons to consider:

Healthy Reasons

- Your faith or values are motivating you to act and help.
- You feel moved by the stories of vulnerability, anxiety, fear, loss, and loneliness you hear from people around you and in the media.
- You are driven by compassion for those isolated by the public health crisis.

Unhealthy Reasons

- You are motivated by a desire to meet your own needs.
- You want to get "in on the action" to feel powerful, or to put yourself in a "one-up" position over others.
- You like knowing the intimate details of other people's lives, especially when they are going through hard times.
- You want to be known as someone who does good, important things.

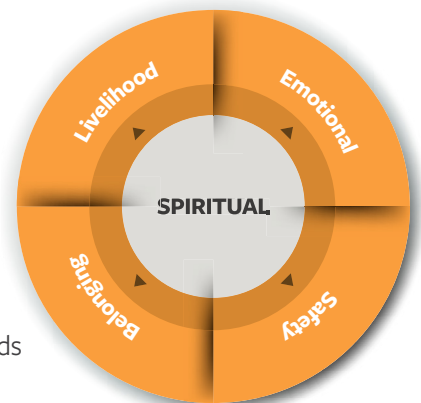
Provide Practical Presence: Start by “Being There”

As you set out to help others, remember that practical presence often speaks more deeply to people’s unmet core needs than any words you could say or advice you could give. This is not to say that you shouldn’t share your thoughts, but remember that “being there” (even remotely) for another person is what often helps the most. Though the practical presence skills we will introduce throughout the manual will likely seem familiar, do not overlook them.

The Five Core Needs

Our research shows that helping people address unmet needs in the wake of a public health crisis can help them gain a sense of meaning, feel connected, and improve resilience. Specifically, our team’s research has identified what we have come to call the five core needs most likely to be affected by disasters like COVID-19:

- Belonging Needs
- Livelihood Needs
- Emotional Needs
- Safety Needs
- Spiritual Needs



Similarly, our research suggests that it is important to recognize that these needs are interconnected. Although only one of these needs is listed as spiritual, all of these needs have a spiritual component. This visual depiction of the five core needs in the time of crisis shows how belonging, livelihood, emotional, spiritual, and safety needs are interconnected and how they can be understood from a spiritual perspective.

Spiritual Care Continuum

We view all the interventions taught in this manual as spiritually oriented. Faith infuses the practice of Spiritual First Aid; it informs who you are (e.g., your worldview, beliefs, identity), gives you motivation to help (e.g., inspires you), and guides how you view and relate with others. However, different people need different things, and your spiritual and emotional care may subtly or obviously address religion or spirituality. That is why for each core need, we suggest a range of spiritually oriented interventions, from what we refer to as subtle spiritual care to obvious spiritual care approaches.



Subtle spiritual care approaches involve listening for cues pointing to faith-related themes. This involves skills appropriate to use for anyone, regardless of their religious background. For instance, you may pray silently for guidance while actively caring for a person's need.

Obvious spiritual care approaches are also provided for each recommended intervention. Examples include the initiation of religious and spiritual conversations and the use of overtly religious and spiritual interventions (e.g., asking a person if it is okay to pray out loud on their behalf). Whether your helping is more subtle or obvious, you can still integrate your faith into the helping process through who you are, who the other person is, and the helping relationship.

Assess and Prioritize Unmet Core Needs

STEP 1. ATTEND

What to observe

Start by taking a posture of humility so you avoid assuming you know what the other person needs most. Begin the conversation as you normally would while also being intentional about creating space for the other person to share her/his story. Use practical presence (meeting immediate practical needs via safe and supportive presence) throughout the process to attend to details discussed or observed. Pay particularly close attention to what could point to an unmet core need. Be cautious not to interrupt; save your questions until the conversation arrives at a natural pause.

Practice Tip: If you give people space to share, more often than not, the most pressing primary need will naturally begin to become apparent. As you listen, look for unmet needs they voluntarily discuss.

STEP 2. ASK

What to prioritize

Once the other person has had some time to talk about their COVID-19 experience, use open-ended questions to clarify anything that may have been confusing, unclear, or that may warrant further conversation. Don't accidentally interrogate the person or push them to talk about things they are not ready to share.

Spiritual First Aid does not try to uncover deeper issues. A good rule of thumb is to ask questions that will help you identify unmet core needs as well as strengths and resources that can help the person cope. Explore what you think appears to be the primary unmet core need causing distress—then ask the person you are helping to prioritize what they think and feel is the most pressing unmet core need they have in that moment.

Practice Tip: Work together to prioritize the most pressing primary unmet core need the person you are helping reports—the one they find most distressing. The goal is not to explore all five core needs in depth. Rather, the goal is to listen to where the conversation is pointing in regards to unmet needs. Then, ask the person what they consider as their

most pressing unmet need. Next, explore further to confirm that what was reported seems to explain their distress. Explore further if the person you are helping struggles to identify their primary unmet core need or if there seems to be a major discrepancy between what they say and what you have observed. Lastly, always make sure you rule out potential safety needs (i.e., don't ignore "red flags"), even if another need has been identified.

Intervene by Addressing Unmet Core Needs

STEP 3. Act

What to do

After you and the person you are assisting have identified what the most pressing primary unmet core need is in that moment, respond with the recommended intervention we have paired with that need (see below and following chapters). Keep in mind that because of the nature of helping amidst COVID-19, you may only have the time or opportunity to address a single unmet core need or be limited in opportunity for interaction. If circumstances permit, it may be possible to address multiple unmet needs in one interaction or over multiple interactions.

Practice Tip: If the person you are helping reports an unmet safety need, this is always what you should address first—even if they report it as not distressing.

STEP 4. And Repeat

If warranted/possible

Address other unmet core needs if warranted and possible. Keep in mind, for some, their second-most pressing need may fall into the same unmet need category, or it may fall into a different unmet need category. For example, someone's two most pressing unmet needs may both be belonging needs. Or, the person's primary unmet need might be a belonging need and their secondary unmet need may be a livelihood need. If more help is warranted but either it is possible in the time you have available, exceeds your ability, or requires necessary resources you lack, explore helping another time, connecting the person to another helper, directing them to a faith-based or community organization, or linking them to resources.

Practice Tip: You may only have enough time to specifically identify and address one unmet core need. This is okay and is likely to be the norm—especially when helping remotely and while staying at home.

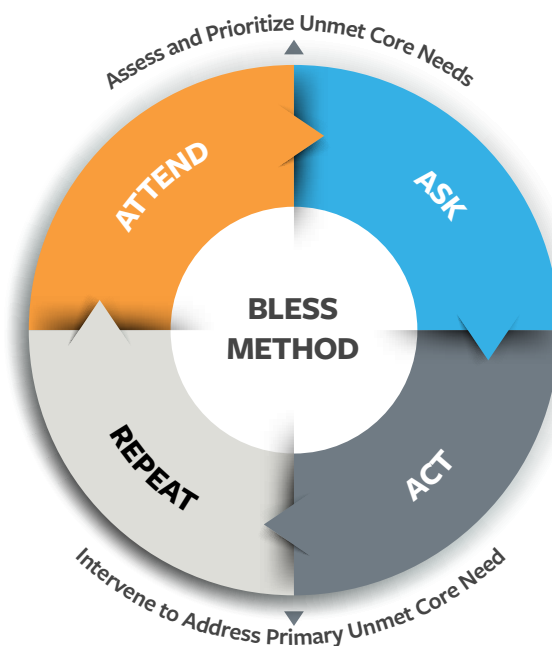
Helping Remotely While Staying at Home: Sample Platforms and Practices

These common technology tools and distancing approaches can be used to deliver Spiritual First Aid during COVID-19. Before using any of the approaches outside of your home, be sure to consult local, state, or federal agencies who have provided information, guidelines, and orders to make sure such actions are still deemed safe and appropriate.

- Video chatting (e.g. Facetime, Zoom, Skype, Google Hangout, Facebook Video, WhatsApp, WebEx, etc.)
- Phone calls
- Text messaging
- Messaging Apps (e.g. WhatsApp, KakaoTalk, WeChat, Facebook Messenger, GChat, Slack)

Next are some ways that you can help in-person while still following physical distancing guidelines.

- Support others you may be sheltering-in-place with through in-person support.
- Talk through a closed window at least six feet away when helping neighbors, friends, and family members.
- Speak to neighbors while maintaining a safe distance from each other from your sidewalk, lawn, porch, driveway, etc.
- Be sure to stay up-to-date about possible changes in practices deemed to be safe and recommended by local, state, and federal agencies.



How to Use the BLESS Method to Assess Unmet Core Needs and Intervene

The 5 Core Needs	Assess Core Needs		Intervene to Address Primary Unmet Core Needs	
	Attend (What to Observe)	Ask (What to Explore and Prioritize)	Act (What to Do)	And Repeat (if Warranted/Possible)
B = Belonging	Relationships	Social Questions	Provide Spiritual Support	Address Secondary Unmet Core Needs
L = Livelihood	Health and Finances	Resource Questions	Connect to Faith-based, Community, and Healthcare Resources	Address Secondary Unmet Core Needs
E = Emotional	Mental Health	Well-Being Questions	Facilitate Lament	Address Secondary Unmet Core Needs
S = Safety	“Red Flags” (hints they are experiencing violence, self-harm, or suicide thoughts/behavior)	Threat and Harm Assessment Questions	Refer and Report	Address Secondary Unmet Core Needs
S = Spiritual	Meaning-Making and Religious Behaviors	Spiritual Struggles, and Ultimate Questions (e.g., about life and death)	Encourage Spiritual Coping	Address Secondary Unmet Core Needs

Prayer: God, we ask for your blessing and that you will help us to bless others.

Chapter 3. Belonging Needs Assessment and Intervention

Purpose: In this chapter you will learn how to understand a person's support system and help connect him or her with others who will help them navigate a time of uncertainty through social and spiritual support.

"Consequently you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household..." (Ephesians 2:19).

As followers of Jesus, we are members of God's household, it's where we find our deepest belonging. When we are secure in belonging to this family by God's grace, we can be sensitive to the needs of belonging that others have in moments of crisis.

About Belonging Needs

People need to belong. But the methods of containing an infectious disease can cause people to experience a loss of connection and ignite feelings of isolation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, mandated shutdowns have often abruptly disconnected a person's usual access to their sources of community. Research shows that social and spiritual isolation is a strong predictor of negative mental health outcomes (e.g., depression, anxiety, suicide risk). People can cope better when they can seek and receive support during a time of uncertainty.

Humbly Help: Treat People as the Experts of Their Own Needs

Humility helps us recognize that each of us has a lot to learn about the best way to help others. If we do not listen and take what people say seriously, we will not offer help that truly addresses their needs.

- Treat people as the expert of their own needs.
- Remember that the people you are helping know their own needs better than you do.
- Do not assume you know what others are experiencing or what they need.
- Remember that helpers who think they need to be perfect are more likely to cause harm.
- Approach every helping interaction with humility, reminding yourself that each person you interact with has something to teach you.

Practical Presence: Engage

Engagement is about connecting emotionally and spiritually with the person you are helping.

- Focus on being present by pushing aside internal and external distractions.
- Convey genuine concern and warmth to the person you are helping.
- Remember that each person you encounter is unique and valuable.
- Offer compassion, not just the appearance of compassion.
- Turn off the inner critic, judge, or jury when listening to other people's stories.

Needs Assessment

STEP 1. Attend to Unmet Belonging Needs (What to Observe)

As you interact with people, make sure to look for changes in the areas noted below, identifying both mild and significant shifts.

Common Signs of COVID-19 Unmet Belonging Needs

- Reported infrequent contact with others.
- Little or no tangible or practical help provided by others and to others.
- Little or no emotional and spiritual support provided by others and to others.
- Discrepancies between the amount or type of support others are providing and what they feel they need.
- Dissatisfaction with support received.
- Struggles to identify how people, groups, or organizations are (or can be) serving as a source of social and/or spiritual support.

STEP 2. Ask About and Prioritize Unmet Belonging Needs (What to Explore)

- How has COVID-19 affected your relationships with others? Family? Friends? Coworkers? Leaders and members of your church?
- Who has been checking in on you since the pandemic?
- Since the pandemic, how have you been in contact with loved ones in your life?
- How have people supported you emotionally since the pandemic? Spiritually? Practically?
- How have you experienced the various forms of help or support you have received? What has been most helpful? Least helpful?
- How open have you been with loved ones about the level and type of support you need right now? What more might you tell them about what you need? When?
- How might family, friends, coworkers, or others be able to support you better if they knew more about what is going on with you?
- Since the pandemic, what type of support have you been able to access in your community? From emergency relief workers or organizations? From people in your neighborhood? From your workplace? From your congregation? From other faith-based organizations?
- How aware are you of people and organizations that are specifically supporting the needs of those affected by COVID-19?
- Which of your existing or potential sources of support do you think will help you the most in handling the challenges you are facing because of COVID-19? Which sources of support might be most helpful now? Which sources of support might be really helpful later, once this time passes?

OBSERVE AND EXPLORE HOW COVID-19 HAS IMPACTED THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS, WITH THEIR CONGREGATION, AND WITH GOD.

Note: If belonging needs are prioritized, still be sure to rule out possible safety needs (i.e., do not ignore “red flags”). If belonging needs are not prioritized, move on to other needs.

Intervention

STEP 3. Act by Providing Spiritual Support for Primary Unmet Belonging Needs (What to Do)

COVID-19 is the cause of significant belonging needs as a direct result of physical distancing, leading to feelings of loneliness and isolation. The pandemic can also cause people to experience spiritual isolation, including feeling disconnected from God and from their place of worship.

It is unhelpful to think you know what people need most, that you “know better.” Everyone is different. Some people want to feel surrounded by support. Others only open up in a few very close relationships. Some people may not seem to want any support from anyone.

People also feel support in different ways. Some want a quiet listener. Others want advice. Others feel most loved by acts of caring service. Others benefit from hearing encouraging words. Some may want spiritual support, whereas others may not. When intact, the spiritual community may offer a layer of protection. Here are some ways to encourage social and spiritual support:

- Help people understand how the pandemic has affected their relationships and social support network.
- Assist people in articulating what level and type of support they need right now.
- Encourage others to ask for the support they need.
- Strategize how to overcome actual or perceived barriers to social and spiritual support.
- Suggest that the person you are helping connect with friends, family, and neighbors via phone or computer.
- If the person reports a lack of caring relationships, look for social resources that can be accessed virtually.
- Help introduce the person to people or organizations that may be able to improve their sense of belonging.
- Support their connections with members of their existing or potential faith community.
- Consider referring people to clergy for spiritual support or to a counselor or psychotherapist (e.g., tele-mental health services) for emotional support.
- Encourage people to ask others to pray for them.
- If the person is comfortable praying, you could also encourage them to pray for others, which has been shown to deepen a sense of interpersonal connection.

COVID-19 IS THE CAUSE OF SIGNIFICANT BELONGING NEEDS AS A DIRECT RESULT OF PHYSICAL DISTANCING, LEADING TO FEELINGS OF LONELINESS AND ISOLATION.

- When appropriate and available, encourage participation in online worship services and other religious gatherings and events.
- Recommend joining online events that promote community support and social connection.

Sample Ways to Address Belonging Needs of Older Adults

- Schedule a regular call time to talk with an older adult; make connecting with them a part of your routine during COVID-19.
- Because many older adults are concerned about being a burden on loved ones, take the initiative in consistently reaching out.
- Encourage older adults to reach out to others in their life.
- Plan to watch a favorite television show or game show while speaking to each other over the phone about what is occurring.
- Do a crossword puzzle or trivia game over the phone.
- Listen to music or read a book on speaker phone.
- Do any number of creative, fun activities that are meaningful to you and your loved older adult.

STEP 4. And Repeat to Address Other Pressing Unmet Needs (If Warranted/Possible)

If other pressing unmet needs are identified but it is not possible to address them in the time you have available, or it exceeds your ability to help, explore helping another time, connect them to another helper, direct them to a faith-based or community organization, or link them to resources.

Select a few of these services from examples below that you will provide to underserved church members and communities, and describe how each will be carried out:

✓	Helping Remotely While Staying at Home: Virtual Care Checklist
Instrumental control	
	Test and become familiar with the telecommunication platform prior to providing services.
	Have a backup form of communication planned in case the initial platform does not work.
	If safety is a concern, make sure the telecommunication platform can provide anonymity (e.g., incoming and outgoing signals can be “unknown”).
Convey empathy using verbal gestures	
	Make conscious efforts to understand and demonstrate verbal understanding.
	Engage in active listening.
	Be mindful of your tone of voice.
Direct communication	
	Discuss intentions, goals, and any privacy concerns at the beginning of the interaction.
	Communicate time and availability for any future follow-ups.
	Speak clearly and slowly, and avoid convoluted language.
	Have open conversations on comfort level of using telecommunication platforms.
	If sound delays or connection are an issue, communicate that you may ask questions repeatedly and/or will be asking the person to repeat.
Acknowledge interruptions	
	Interruptions often provide a glimpse into a person’s environmental context. If appropriate, allow those interruptions to be a part of the person’s overall narrative.

Belonging Needs Assessment and Intervention Steps: Attend, Ask, Act, and Repeat

STEP 1. Attend to Unmet Belonging Needs (What to Observe)

Observed COVID-19 Impact on Belonging Needs (Check the box or boxes that apply)			
No Impact	Mild Impact	Significant Impact	Possible Future

STEP 2. Ask About and Prioritize Unmet Belonging Needs (What to Explore)

✓	Explored COVID-19 Impact on Belonging Needs
	Asked about impact on relationships.
	Have a backup form of communication planned in case the initial platform does not work.
	Asked to prioritize most pressing unmet belonging need.

Note: If belonging needs are prioritized, still be sure to rule out possible safety needs (i.e., don't ignore "red flags"). If belonging needs are not prioritized, move on to other needs.

Primary Unmet Belonging Need Identified:

Secondary Unmet Need(s) Identified:

STEP 3. Act by Providing Spiritual Support for Primary Unmet Belonging Need (What to Do)

<p>Spiritual support resource(s) needed to address primary unmet belonging need:</p>	
<p>Something small that you could do right now to provide spiritual support:</p>	
<p>Subtle spiritual care approaches you could use to provide spiritual support:</p>	
<p>Obvious spiritual care approaches you might use (if appropriate) to provide spiritual support:</p>	

STEP 4. And Repeat to Address Secondary Unmet Needs (If Warranted/Possible)

<p>Follow-up details (if applicable):</p>	
<p>Identify another helper you could refer:</p>	
<p>List of faith-based or community organizations you could recommend:</p>	
<p>Other helpful resources you could share:</p>	

Prayer: God, in a time of physical distancing may we help others to feel more connected and like they belong.

Chapter 4. Livelihood Needs Assessment and Intervention

Purpose: In this chapter you will learn how to respond to livelihood challenges that undermine people's quality of life.

"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4).

A familiar verse that becomes all too needed during dark times, when so many have lost part or all of their jobs and incomes so quickly, and others work jobs that suddenly put their health at risk. In this dark valley, we should be checking in on people's needs and stresses around livelihood.

About Livelihood Needs

COVID-19 causes significant challenges to people's livelihood. Many people worldwide have been infected by the pandemic, causing minor to significant health challenges, even death. Job layoffs, workplace shutdowns, and physical distancing have also caused financial hardships. Concerns over food insecurities have increased because of COVID-19. The pandemic has also led to shortages of necessary supplies. Shortages of healthcare professionals, protective equipment, properly equipped facilities, and medical supplies (e.g., ventilators) all cause major hardships. It is common for such struggles and losses to lead to other losses.

Humble Helping: Do What Needs to Be Done

Pitch in wherever you are needed and able while practicing physical distancing and sheltering-in-place. Maybe you can help someone learn how to use a new technology platform, organize online meetings, pass on resources for financial aid and advocate for disadvantaged groups. Help identify and reach out to older adults, people with a history of chronic illness, or more socially isolated people in your community. Humility means recognizing when there is a need, responding to the need, and understanding that no form of helping is beneath you. What may seem to you like the smallest of jobs might make the biggest difference to someone else. You are still responding to a real need, which in turn allows a new need to emerge.

Practical Presence: Listen

Try to balance questions with active listening, paraphrases, and reflections of feeling and meaning. By doing this, it will sound more like a conversation as opposed to an interview. The goal is connection and understanding of needs to guide how you intervene. Also keep in mind that the purpose of listening is to help offer support, not diagnosis.

- Pause, take a deep breath, and focus on being the best listener that you can.
- Commit to making yourself spiritually and emotionally available in the moment.
- Show curiosity about what the other person is saying.
- While they are communicating, do not worry about what you will say or do next.

- Talk less, listen more.
- Take breaks when you feel yourself getting emotionally tired.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Repeat back paraphrases to affirm what you are hearing them say.

Demonstrating attentiveness, openness, and warmth increases the odds that the person will feel safe to express their concerns, struggles, and needs.

Needs Assessment

STEP 1. Attend to Unmet Livelihood Needs (What to Observe)

Pay attention to the various types of losses a person may have experienced and how these losses interact with his or her spiritual beliefs and sense of meaning. Below are examples of common resource losses.

Common Signs of COVID-19 Unmet Livelihood Needs

Physical health problems	Financial debt
Flu-like symptoms	Unsafe working conditions
Medicine shortages	Travel disruptions
Difficulty maintaining nutrition	Job layoffs
Lack of healthcare access	Lack of appropriate childcare
Hygiene product shortages	Inability to pay bills
Employment difficulties	Housing problems

STEP 2. Ask About and Prioritize Unmet Livelihood Needs (What to Explore)

- How have you been feeling and doing physically?
- Have you been able to practice physical distancing?
- Do you have any health-related questions about COVID-19?
- Are there any special healthcare issues with which you need help?
- Do you have the medicines you need?
- Do you have access to enough food and water to stay well-nourished?
- Have you been able to exercise?

- How would you describe your dietary habits?
- Have you had trouble falling asleep or staying asleep at night?
- Are you sheltering-in-place?
- Do you have the resources you need to continue to shelter-in-place?
- Do you need help with getting groceries or supplies?
- How has the pandemic impacted you financially?
- How has COVID-19 affected your employment?
- Are there any hygiene-related items that you are concerned about running out of?
- Have you struggled with paying your bills?
- Where are you staying? How long can you stay? Is it adequate? Do you feel safe?
- What sort of transportation is accessible to you?
- What sort of steps have you or those in your home taken to help reduce your risk to being exposed to COVID-19?
- Are you interested in connecting with various community resources available to you?
- Could you reach out to your church for help with any of your basic needs?
- Are there any programs that your church or other faith-based organizations are offering that could help provide for some of your livelihood resources?
- Would you be interested in accessing help from any of the faith-based or community organizations providing COVID-19 assistance or services? If so, can I help you get in touch with them?

PEOPLE OFTEN NEED INFORMATION ABOUT WHEN, WHERE, AND HOW TO OBTAIN RESOURCES.

Note: If livelihood needs are prioritized, still be sure to rule out possible safety needs (i.e., don't ignore "red flags"). If livelihood needs are not prioritized, move on to other needs.

Intervention

STEP 3. Act by Connecting to Faith-Based, Community, and Healthcare Resources for Unmet Livelihood Needs (What to Do)

It is common for people to feel uncertain and uneasy amidst COVID-19. Many need information about when, where, and how to obtain resources. Faith-based, community, and healthcare organizations often play an important role in linking people to resources. Connect people with organizations that have a good reputation for responding to crises, as there are entities that wish to take advantage of people when they are most vulnerable.

Here are some ways you might connect people with assistance for meeting practical needs caused by loss of resources:

- As much as possible, try to connect people to sustainable and vetted resources.
- Spend time doing your research about organizations responding to COVID-19 in your area.
- Obtain or develop a list of recommended organizations and resources available in your church or community to have on hand so you can share with others as needed.

- Encourage people to contact their local primary doctor if they begin to develop COVID-19 symptoms.
- Encourage physical distancing if they are presenting no symptoms, and self-quarantining if they are presenting with COVID-19 symptoms.
- Refer people for medical evaluation and care/services when appropriate, including for medications.
- Find out where people in your community can get tested for COVID-19, including associated costs, test availability, and testing policies.
- Share about healthcare organizations and resources available in your area.
- Encourage the use of informal support networks like family, friends, neighbors, churches, and community members to help overcome resource gaps.
- If the person you are helping is open to it, encourage them to connect with a local congregation or clergy assisting with the COVID-19 response.
- Ask people to consider accepting help from volunteers working with trusted faith-based and community organizations.
- Make people aware of available local (and state and federal, if applicable) emergency management resources (e.g., small business loans, unemployment benefits).
- Offer people a list of faith-based and community organizations providing financial assistance or other resources.
- Refer people to faith-based and community case management services when they may not be able to secure the resources or assistance needed to cope on their own.
- Refer people with limited resources to faith-based and community unmet needs committees or long-term needs committees, if in operation.
- If you detect significant psychological patterns of distress, refer people for mental health services and resources available through faith-based, community, and healthcare organizations.

Addressing Economic Challenges

- Promote financial literacy.
- Provide information about vetted financial support programs that may be available in your area.
- Encourage using the Employee Assistance Program if applicable.
- Offer to support and assist in filing for unemployment if needed.
- Explore credible job placement and training opportunities.
- Remind those you are helping to be cautious of financial or employment opportunities that sound “too good to be true.”

Volunteer Through an Organization Providing Home-Delivered Meals to Older Adults

Consider volunteering to help meet the basic needs of older adults. Home-delivered meals are provided nationwide to homebound seniors and organized through county senior services offices. Many have organized routing systems to deliver incredibly healthy and medically suitable meals with loving-kindness. While senior centers organize home-delivered meals differently, this programming is essential to the health and well-being of the most vulnerable older adults and it is often not possible without volunteers. In the context of COVID-19, many older adults are afraid to have people come into their homes, and some even canceled the home services senior centers provide. More than ever, the older adults these offices serve require both emotional and practical support. This means people need to both check in on them and provide tangible support, such as grocery shopping, arranging for medication delivery, or running other errands.

STEP 4. And Repeat to Address Other Pressing Unmet Needs (if Possible/Warranted)

If other pressing unmet needs are identified but it is not possible to address them in the time you have available or it exceeds your ability to help: explore helping another time, connect to another helper, direct to a faith-based or community organization, or link to resources.

Helping Remotely While Staying at Home: Encourage Best Health Practices

- Stay home as much as possible and restrict direct interactions with others except for vital reasons (e.g., you are deemed an essential employee, need groceries, or need urgent medical care).
- Remember, even if you don't have COVID-19 symptoms, you could still be carrying the virus and put others, especially vulnerable groups (e.g., older adults and the immunocompromised), at risk by not practicing physical distancing.
- Avoid close contact with people in general and especially those who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Isolate yourself from others in your home if you think might be getting sick or show symptoms of illness.
- Cover your cough in the bend of your arm.
- Sneeze with a tissue and then immediately throw the tissue into the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Follow the Centers for Disease and Prevention Control recommendations for using a facemask.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Stay informed to keep pace with changing health recommendations.

**Livelihood Needs Assessment and Intervention Steps:
Attend, Ask, Act, And Repeat**

STEP 1. Attend to Unmet Livelihood Needs (What to Observe)

Observed COVID-19 Impact on Livelihood Needs (Check the box or boxes that apply)			
No Impact	Mild Impact	Significant Impact	Possible Future

STEP 2. Ask About Unmet Livelihood Needs (What to Explore)

✓	Explored COVID-19 Impact on Livelihood Needs
	Asked about impact on work and having enough resources.
	Asked about support received from others (and if needed: openness to support, support available, support desired, and barriers to support).
	Asked to prioritize most pressing unmet livelihood need.

Note: If livelihood needs are prioritized, still be sure to rule out possible safety needs (i.e., don't ignore "red flags"). If livelihood needs are not prioritized, move on to other needs.

Primary Unmet Livelihood Need Identified:

Secondary Unmet Need(s) Identified:

STEP 3. Act by Providing Spiritual Support for Primary Unmet Livelihood Needs (What to Do)

<p>Spiritual support resource(s) needed to address primary unmet livelihood need:</p>	
<p>Something small that you could do right now to provide spiritual support:</p>	
<p>Subtle spiritual care approaches you could use to provide spiritual support:</p>	
<p>Obvious spiritual care approaches you might use (if appropriate) to provide spiritual support:</p>	

STEP 4. And Repeat to Address Secondary Unmet Needs (If Possible/Warranted)

<p>Follow-up details (if applicable):</p>	
<p>Identify another helper you could refer:</p>	
<p>List of faith-based or community organizations you could recommend:</p>	
<p>Other helpful resources you could share:</p>	

Prayer: God, help us to serve others as they face stressful, practical, urgent needs related to their livelihood.

Chapter 5. Emotional Needs Assessment and Intervention

Purpose: In this chapter you will learn how to identify emotional distress and facilitate lament to help emotions begin to settle amidst COVID-19.

“In my distress I called to the Lord; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears” (Psalm 18:6).

In this verse, we are reassured in our trust that God hears each of us. We’re also reminded how deeply important it is to be heard when we’re emotionally aching, and how helpful it is to be there for someone else in their distress.

About Emotional Needs

COVID-19 has disrupted life rhythms and daily activities. This has led to a significant increase in people reporting emotional struggles. Many people are struggling with a wide range of psychological challenges. People are having difficulty balancing disruptions with the need to find ways to resume their typical activities. These disruptions have caused further psychological challenges. However, the more you are able to address gaps in a person’s emotional needs, the more likely they will be able to identify and practice healthy coping strategies, thereby reducing future stress.

Humble Helping: Be More Other-Oriented

- Avoid using platitudes to respond to religious and spiritual concerns (e.g., “God only tests the strong with COVID-19”).
- Try to understand the person’s experience no matter how different it is from your own point of view.
- Make a mental note when a person’s perspective challenges your understanding of suffering in some way and “hold your tongue.”
- Avoid giving advice unless asked.
- Avoid approaching the situation as an expert.
- Do not get defensive and dig in your heels when challenged.
- Remind yourself that you are there to provide support to help, not to be right.
- Remember that Spiritual First Aid is about the other person, not about you.
- Apologize quickly when the person reacts negatively to something you say or do.

Provide Practical Presence: Normalize

People find comfort in feeling understood. Many people may have a nagging sense that their reactions and concerns about COVID-19 are abnormal or “crazy,” and it can be helpful to hear that others are going through similar struggles. Doing so can bring a sense of relief to people who are confused, ashamed, or afraid about how they are coping with the pandemic.

- Discuss common stress reactions (e.g., feeling anxious, sad, fearful).
- Acknowledge the difficulty of the situation and what they are going through.
- Show accurate understanding of their experience by reflecting back what they are sharing (e.g., “it sounds like you are feeling lonely”).
- Let people know when they are having a normal reaction to an abnormal situation and that it’s okay to struggle.
- Look for strengths in the person, and, when appropriate, affirm those strengths and provide encouragement (e.g., “despite being exhausted, you have somehow been able to be there for your family”).

Needs Assessment

STEP 1. Attend to Unmet Emotional Needs (What to Observe)

Look for stress reactions and significant impairment in functioning, including major changes in one or more of the following:

Common Signs of COVID-19 Unmet Emotional Needs

Unstable emotions	Over or under alert
Rapid or slow speech	Spiritual distress
Erratic behaviors	Changes in daily activities
Disheveled appearance	Problems at work
Negative thoughts	Relationship issues

Strong stress reactions in the wake of this pandemic are to be expected; however, if a person’s stress reactions continue over the long term—or if these reactions start to interfere significantly with the person’s everyday life and functioning—then those reactions become cause for concern (see chapter 9 for how to address safety needs).

STEP 2. Ask About Unmet Emotional Needs (What to Explore)

- Since the pandemic, have you noticed any concerning changes in yourself?
- How has COVID-19 impacted your stress level?
- How are you doing emotionally?
- How would you rate your emotional distress since the pandemic, on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest?
- What do you need right now emotionally?
- What do you think would help reduce your level of emotional distress right now?
- What or whom would be most emotionally supportive for you right now?
- What are some ways you've coped with stress in the past that you think may help you now?

Note: If emotional needs are prioritized, still be sure to rule out possible safety needs (i.e., don't ignore "red flags"). If emotional needs are not prioritized, move on to other needs.

10 Ways to Cope During a Period of Lament

Following are some general coping strategies you can suggest to others that can help them endure:

1. **Breathe** – Inhale and exhale slowly and deeply.
2. **Talk** – Share your feelings with someone you trust when you feel ready.
3. **Mental picture** – Envision a stop sign to halt painful thoughts.
4. **Entertainment** – Let yourself laugh or learn.
5. **Walk** – Engage in other light exercise (if able).
6. **Grieve** – Release the emotions holding you down.
7. **Music** – Listen to or sing a soothing song.
8. **Journal** – Don't avoid facing your experience and pain.
9. **Connect** – Find others' inspiring stories.
10. **Rest** – Give your body permission to recover.

Intervention

STEP 3. Act by Facilitating Lament for Unmet Emotional Needs (What to Do)

If people are expressing frustration, sadness, grief, fear, and/or emotional pain, focus on being present and available by "sitting with their suffering." Acknowledge their pain, and begin working toward practical ways to address their most significant emotional need(s).

- Help others cling to hope and faith in times of sorrow.
- Reflect back the feeling they are experiencing (e.g., “this is scary,” “it’s devastating,” “you worry about those you love the most”).
- Create a safe space for people to share their emotions and receive help understanding and regulating their emotional reactions.
- Do not push people to share more than they want to share.
- Resist the urge to “fix” or “rescue” them from that suffering.
- Focus on being present in the moment with the person you are helping.
- Validate and normalize any negative thoughts and feelings (e.g., anger, resentment, hurt, fear) people might be experiencing. These may include negative feelings toward God or their faith, and that’s okay.
- When appropriate, remind people that there are numerous examples throughout Scripture of people expressing negative emotions, including negative feelings toward God.
- Avoid the temptation to answer a person’s broad religious “why” questions (e.g., “Why would God let this pandemic happen?”) and instead redirect the conversation to the person’s pressing emotional, spiritual, and physical needs.
- It may help to tell people that significant stress is to be expected during a public health emergency.
- If a person seems overwhelmed, it can be helpful to give them permission to take breaks from thinking and talking about what is happening.
- Encourage people to give themselves physical breaks, too.
- Recommend they foster a routine practice of treating themselves with self-compassion whenever they experience negative emotion.
- Remind people that distressing feelings typically come and go, and encourage them to cultivate the practice of riding the wave of negative emotions instead of trying to suppress or avoid them.
- Help people connect with voices of lament by reading and journaling about the Psalms.
- Support people in identifying individuals and strategies that might help them address emotional needs.
- Encourage people to recount the individuals and strategies that have helped them through difficult times in the past.
- Connect them to a pastor, spiritual director, professional mental health professional, or healthcare provider.

HELP OTHERS CLING TO HOPE AND FAITH IN TIMES OF SORROW.

REMIND PEOPLE THAT DISTRESSING FEELINGS TYPICALLY COME AND GO, AND ENCOURAGE THEM TO CULTIVATE THE PRACTICE OF "RIDING THE WAVE" OF NEGATIVE EMOTIONS INSTEAD OF TRYING TO SUPPRESS OR AVOID THEM.

Address Unmet Emotional Needs of Older Adults Through Intentional Structured Conversations

Some of the most culturally sensitive, respectful, and impactful ways to connect with older adults is to reminisce. All you have to do is invite older adults to talk openly about their childhood, adolescent, and adult experiences. Frequently, older persons would rather spend time reminiscing than talking about their current emotional and psychological state. In the context of COVID-19, asking about favorite memories can serve to unplug and help foster meaning. Recalling earlier experiences is often perceived by older persons as an acknowledgement of their wisdom, and expressing an interest in their well-being. Here are some sample questions to foster reminiscing:

- Can you share a favorite childhood memory?
- How far back can you remember?
- Might you remember about what it was like in elementary school?
- What is the most impressive thing you can remember from your teenage years?
- Are there meaningful life events that come to mind from middle age or older adulthood?
- Who were the influential people in your life?
- Can you tell me about your work?
- What were some of the significant relationships you had through early adulthood?
- Can you tell me about major life events (e.g., travel, accomplishments, marriage, children)?

Supporting Children’s Unmet COVID-19 Emotional Needs

Take steps to make sure your needs are being met by other adults—don’t put that burden on children. Keep in mind, children often follow the lead of their parents and/or caregivers when it comes to responding to a crisis. Children are like sponges, and they absorb your reactions, words, and energy. Talking about difficult issues like COVID-19 with children isn’t easy. Remember, you are there for your children, not the other way around. Before you share with your kids, give yourself the time you need to notice and process those feelings, so that you can be fully present to your children’s needs and feelings. Here are some ways to support children during COVID-19:

- Spend extra time with your children.
- Seek to instill hope among your family; the goal is to strike a tone that is hopeful but also honest.
- Use age-appropriate language that is congruent with your child’s developmental ability to understand the situation.

- Try to maintain routines to help your child regain some sort of normalcy through COVID-19.
- Discuss what they are hearing, affirm their feelings about what they're hearing, help fill in any knowledge gaps, and answer any questions they have.
- Monitor and limit media exposure and monitor your child's time online, and, depending on their age, use of social networking sites.

STEP 4. And Repeat to Address Other Pressing Unmet Needs (If Possible/Warranted)

If other pressing unmet needs are identified but it's not possible to address them in the time you have available, or it exceeds your ability to help, explore helping another time, connecting to another helper, directing to a faith-based or community organization, or sharing resources.

Helping Remotely While Staying at Home: COVID-19 Spiritual and Emotional Care Band Aids

These are unprecedented times. It is important to think creatively about how to do what you can to be an encouragement to others, including small gestures. The following are not meant to serve as a replacement for practical presence or for intervening with Spiritual First Aid. Rather, think of the ideas below as some spiritual and emotional care bandages that can be used to help protect and cover loved ones' spiritual and emotional scrapes and wounds. Similarly, research has shown that such altruistic acts can also have positive benefits for the person doing the helping. By using spiritual and emotional care "band aids" to help others, you are also helping yourself.

Here are some ideas you might try:

- Call a friend or loved one by phone or invite them to a video chat.
- Do your best to transfer routine in-person social interactions with others online (e.g., coffee meetings, game night with friends).
- Send an email to let others know how you are doing and check in on how they are doing.
- Mail a handwritten letter.
- Send the postcard that you never got around to mailing.
- Email or text some meaningful pictures to a loved one. Leave an encouraging or humorous voicemail.
- Create a brief video to share via social media, text, email; transfer to a DVD or other medium and mail if the friend or loved one doesn't have access to the aforementioned.

- Purchase a picture frame capable of recording a short audio message to give away.
- Drive by the homes of others with encouraging handmade signs in your vehicle’s windows—or use erasable window paint or chalk.
- Send a care package with homemade items, or items you already own.
- Encourage the use of positive and helpful online messaging boards.
- Write encouraging messages to others using sidewalk chalk on driveways or walkways.
- Let others know your availability and how they might connect with you.
- Consider hosting an online group, page, or website around an interest or hobby.
- Create a virtual church small group to study Scriptures (like the Psalms) through an online platform or group call.
- Share words of encouragement (e.g., quote, favorite Bible verse) with others on social media to let them know you are thinking of them.
- Re-share something positive you’ve seen online or post an encouraging note to someone’s social media account.
- Use prayer chains or call-down trees to connect with individuals not as comfortable with more current technology platforms.

For any of these items suggested that involve something physical changing hands, including via mail or delivery service, be sure that you and the person you are sending them to are following the latest guidelines on cleaning, disinfecting, and hygiene.

Emotional Needs Assessment and Intervention Steps: Attend, Ask, Act, And Repeat

STEP 1. Attend to Unmet Emotional Needs (What to Observe)

Observed COVID-19 Impact on Emotional Needs (Check the box or boxes that apply)			
No Impact	Mild Impact	Significant Impact	Possible Future

STEP 2. Ask About Unmet Emotional Needs (What to Explore)

✓	Explored COVID-19 Impact on Emotional Needs
	Asked about impact on emotions and stress level.
	Asked about support received from others (and if needed: openness to support, support available, support desired, and barriers to support).
	Asked to prioritize most pressing unmet emotional need.

Note: If emotional needs are prioritized, still be sure to rule out possible safety needs (i.e., don't ignore "red flags"). If emotional needs are not prioritized, move on to other needs.

Primary Unmet Emotional Need Identified:

Secondary Unmet Need(s) Identified:

STEP 3. Act by Providing Spiritual Support for Primary Unmet Emotional Need

Spiritual support resource(s) needed to address primary unmet emotional need:	
Something small that you could do right now to provide spiritual support:	
Subtle spiritual care approaches you could use to provide spiritual support:	
Obvious spiritual care approaches you might use (if appropriate) to provide spiritual support:	

STEP 4. And Repeat to Address Secondary Unmet Needs (If Possible/Warranted)

Follow-up details (if applicable):	
Identify another helper you could refer:	
List of faith-based or community organizations you could recommend:	
Other helpful resources you could share:	

Prayer: God, as mental health issues press heavily upon many, guide us with the right questions, ability to listen, and insight about when to act.

Chapter 6. Safety Assessment and Intervention

Purpose: In this chapter you will learn how to help protect people from potentially harmful and life-threatening challenges.

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1).

We trust that God is our ultimate help. We also know that often the way God helps us is through each other. We need refuge and strength—and we need to be looking out for each other’s safety—in times of serious trouble like this.

About Safety Needs

Mandated physical distancing, sheltering-in-place, and city lockdowns are necessary to help prevent spreading of the pandemic. However, it is important to note the seriousness of major health threats and other safety concerns that may arise during COVID-19. It is important that efforts are made to protect people from serious harm and to enhance a sense of security, especially for vulnerable groups (e.g., older adults).

Humble Helping: Check In With The Person You Are Assisting

Check in regularly to make sure you are tracking with the other person. It is important to understand and come to accept that, as a helper, you are sometimes going to make mistakes. Humility will help you acknowledge your missteps and make corrections in how you are assisting. This is particularly important to practice when assessing and addressing safety needs.

Here are a few ways you can do this:

- Acknowledge that you are listening by occasionally repeating back what you have heard or read (e.g., texting) to make sure that you are understanding what is being shared.
- Ask if the support you are providing is actually helping.
- Don’t get upset or defensive if the other person says you are not understanding or are not helping.
- If the person says your support is not helping, ask what you could do differently, and do your best to try and change up what you have been doing based on their suggestion(s).

Practical Presence: Err on the Safe Side

- Know your limits of competence, scope of care, and personal capacity for helping.
- Protect the privacy of the people you are helping, but recognize when referral or reporting is needed (e.g., contact information for mental health providers, first responders, shelter supervisor, crisis hotlines, proper authorities).
- Take all comments about suicide, self-harm, domestic violence, and threats against others seriously.
- Encourage hopefulness.

- Pray silently for courage and wisdom, for both you and the other person.
- Call a crisis or suicide hotline to help you and the other person make the decision if they are likely to be safe for the near future.
- Be cautious of making promises, and only commit to what you can follow through on.
- Set realistic expectations for follow-up.
- Practice self-care to help prevent burnout and compassion fatigue.

Needs Assessment

Though physical distancing practices will help save lives during COVID-19, such practices can at the same time heighten vulnerabilities for some, including groups like those noted below:

Common COVID-19 Unmet Safety Needs of Vulnerable Groups

- People with underlying mental health illnesses may find themselves at higher risk of self-harm or suicidal thoughts and behaviors.
- Individuals in domestically violent relationships may find themselves unable to get away from their perpetrators.
- Older adults and people who were homebound prior to COVID-19 may find themselves more isolated or less able to access the resources they need.
- People with pre-existing or chronic medical conditions have a higher risk of contracting COVID-19 and may need to self-isolate in order to protect their health and therefore find themselves more isolated or less able to access the resources they need.

STEP 1. Attend to Unmet Safety Needs (What to Observe)

Health Safety

- Symptoms of illness mirroring the flu—like fever, cough, difficulty breathing, and loss of smell.
- Age and history of chronic illness.
- People with underlying medical conditions.
- Exposure to people who have traveled to places where a major disease outbreak has occurred.
- Exposure to healthcare industry workers.
- Exposure to people in general.
- Living in a household with someone under quarantine.

BE SURE TO ASK FOR HELP AND TO REFER PEOPLE TO MENTAL HEALTH, EMERGENCY, HEALTHCARE, AND/OR LAW ENFORCEMENT PROFESSIONALS WHEN DEALING WITH POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS SITUATIONS.

Interpersonal Safety

- Hints that they don't feel safe in their home.
- Hearing loud crying or screaming from nearby homes.
- Signs of financial coercion.
- Fear about their current living situation.
- Increased sensitivity to safety and specific people (e.g., romantic partner; parent).
- Domestic violence indicators like physical, emotional, and sexual abuse.
- Indications children in the home may be seen as an outlet for taking out frustration.

Suicide Risk and Harm to Self

- Talks or hints about suicide: "My problems will end soon," "I am a burden—they would be better off if I were gone."
- Regular talk or online posts about feeling desperate, lonely, or isolated.
- Emotional reactions such as desperation, anger, guilt, worthlessness, loneliness, burdensomeness, sadness, hopelessness, and helplessness. (But remember that many of these emotions may be common even in people not contemplating suicide or self-harm.)
- If possible, listen for indicators of self-injury (e.g., cutting on arms or legs).

Threat to Others

- Easily and quickly loses control of their anger.
- Verbal tirades toward others.
- Posts violent content on social media.
- Hints or makes veiled specific or general threats about or to others.
- Makes overt specific or general threats about or to others.

EVEN IF PEOPLE DO NOT RAISE CONCERNS ABOUT SAFETY AND SECURITY, YOU SHOULD STILL INQUIRE ABOUT THEIR CURRENT SITUATION AND SAFETY NEEDS.

STEP 2. Ask About Unmet Safety Needs (What to Explore)

Pay attention to your intuition when responding to people who may feel unsafe about their health, current living situation, and/or relationships. Even if people do not raise concerns about safety and security, you should still inquire about their current situation and safety needs. Keep in mind that people may be afraid to reveal that they have been in contact with someone who has contracted the illness.

Here are questions you can ask to assess common safety needs:

Health Safety

- How have you been feeling physically?
- Have you or has someone you've been in contact with shown flu-like symptoms?
- Have you been in contact with someone who has the virus?

- How are you doing with physically distancing?
- Have you attended a large gathering recently?

Interpersonal Safety

- How has COVID-19 affected your sense of personal safety and security?
- Do you feel safe where you are staying?
- Are there people around you that make you feel unsafe?
- Do you feel safe in your relationships?
- Are you worried about the safety of any of your friends, loved ones, or neighbors?

Suicide Risk and Harm to Self

It is important to ask directly about suicide and harm to self. This communicates that you are comfortable talking about safety concerns. It is normal to feel uncomfortable asking such direct questions at first. It can be helpful to practice out loud—virtually with another helper or a loved one—to role play before you begin working with people. Asking about suicide indirectly (i.e., “are you thinking of hurting yourself?”) is ineffective, as those at risk often believe that ending one’s life will end pain. Additionally, you will not get the information needed for referral by asking indirectly. Below are ways to ask directly about suicide or harm to self:

- Try to avoid the word “commit” when referring to suicide. This word is affiliated with crime (e.g., committing assault) and can further isolate.
- Have you thought of ending your life? ...of suicide?
- Have you thought about how you would end your life?
- Do you have a plan? Might you have any thoughts on how to disable the plan?
- Are you currently using drugs or alcohol? Drugs and alcohol can make things worse, and we need to guard against them.
- Part of you may want to die, and maybe part of you might also want to live? If so, can you share some reasons you have for living?
- Might there be a family member, friend, or spiritual leader who we can reach out to and include in this discussion?
- Have you ever been seen by a mental health care provider? Was it helpful? Would you be willing to get additional support from a licensed counselor or psychologist?

Remember to try to balance these questions with active listening, paraphrases, and reflections of feeling and meaning.

Research Supports Asking Directly About Suicide

In the field of suicidology, there are many lay models that teach helpers to ask directly about suicide, which should be followed by listening and trying to understand the distress. Asking directly about suicide helps the other person feel more understood and more hopeful about getting help. The research on asking and then direct referral (without taking the time to understand the distress) is not so good. Some studies point to this further isolating the person, resulting in the referral not being followed through, and lowered chances of help. Other studies report just the number of referrals that were suggested, but do not show data on whether the referral was utilized.

As a lay helper, your role is not to try to perform a formal psychological suicide assessment. Instead, think of asking about suicide as another way you can make a connection with a person suffering so you can assist that person in getting professional help. The goal is then to make *warm handoff* (referral) to a licensed mental health professional, healthcare professional, first responders, or proper authorities. This increases the odds that the person you are assisting will be more open and less resistant to seeking professional support. The research says anything less than this isn't helpful. Chances are, referral won't be utilized and can even do harm.

Threat to Others

- Have you thought about hurting anyone recently?
- Have you given serious thought to hurting someone in the past?
- Do you have a history of anger problems?
- Would other people in your life describe you as someone who could easily “fly off the handle?”
- Have you ever had a run-in with the authorities as a result of your anger?

Intervention

STEP 3. Act by Referring or Reporting for Unmet Safety Needs (What to Do)

The goal is safety. Remember, people may be fearful and reluctant to reach out for assistance due to the stigma of illness, the uncertainty of healthcare response, and the safety concern of disclosing information. After connecting with someone and understanding their distress, you can then connect them with additional services (referral) or report the conversation to someone who can help. Keep in mind, it can sometimes be difficult to know the true level of risk.

Here are some steps you can take to help address unmet safety needs:

Health Safety

- Provide basic safety protocol, such as washing hands, using a face mask if coughing, physical distancing, and disinfecting.

- Provide information about where trusted and vetted healthcare services and resources can be obtained.
- Follow local public health agency and healthcare guidelines for when, where, and how to get help for suspected COVID-19 cases.

Interpersonal Safety

- Consult with a local, state, or national abuse hotline for guidance on how to best help.
- Steer people away from offers of help that sound too good to be true from unknown sources that seem to be targeting women, children, older adults, and/or marginalized or vulnerable groups.
- Don't try to personally insert yourself into the situation in the case of interpersonal violence, human trafficking, or gender-based violence; this is more likely to cause harm than to help.
- Take a less overt approach to intervening in situations where others may be experiencing interpersonal violence, like providing resources through text or emails.
- If you believe a person may be a victim of interpersonal violence, human trafficking, or gender-based violence, do not take action into your own hands. Instead, report your suspicion to local law enforcement immediately.

IF YOU BELIEVE A PERSON MAY BE A VICTIM OF INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE, HUMAN TRAFFICKING, OR GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, DO NOT "TAKE ACTION INTO YOUR OWN HANDS." INSTEAD, REPORT YOUR SUSPICION TO LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT IMMEDIATELY.

Suicide Risk and Harm to Self

- If there are immediate risks of suicide or harm to oneself, express your concern: "I am hearing there is risk to your life and I am concerned about you. Would you like me to help you find someone to drive you to get help?"
- If available, have an appropriate caregiver sheltering-in-place with the person needing assistance to accompany them to the hospital. Because of COVID-19, don't advise them to just show up at the hospital; have them call before departing to get instructions for how to proceed.
- If there is not an appropriate caregiver sheltering-in-place available to provide transportation, reach out to a local suicide or crisis hotline for how to get the person to a proper treatment center during the pandemic.
- If the person is not willing to seek safety or receive additional services, be prepared to make a referral right away—independent of their consent—by contacting 911 or law enforcement to ask for a welfare check.
- As you make referrals for suicide risk or harm to self, let people know that you care for them and have confidence that these professionals are better equipped to help them in this way.
- Let proper authorities know if the person you are helping may be at risk of suicide or harm to self by calling 911.

LET PROPER AUTHORITIES KNOW IF THE PERSON YOU ARE HELPING MAY BE AT RISK OF SUICIDE OR HARM TO SELF BY CALLING 911.

Threat to Others

- Let law enforcement know if the person you are helping could be a threat to others and let the person(s) being threatened know if at all possible.

Helping Remotely While Physically Distancing:

Where to find reliable COVID-19 information, resources, and crisis assistance.

To be able to provide accurate information about COVID-19 will require that you stay informed by following updates disseminated by local, state, and federal public health agencies. Seek out and listen to trusted sources that are monitoring COVID-19 and issuing updated information, resources, and recommendations. Though not meant to serve as an exhaustive list, here are a few agencies that you might consider looking to for information and that you might share with others (in alphabetical order).

Sample Agencies to Get Information and Resources:

- Administration for Community Living (i.e., Coronavirus resource page for older adults and those with disabilities; Eldercare Locator)
- Center for Faith and Opportunity Initiatives at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- Department of Homeland Security Center for Faith and Opportunity Initiatives
- Healthcare Ready
- Johns Hopkins University CSSSE Interactive Web-Based COVID-19 Dashboard
- NAMI (National Alliance of Mental Illness) Coronavirus Helpline
- National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- World Health Organization (WHO)

Sample Crisis Helplines:

- Call 911
- Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746
- National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233 and TTY 1-800-787-3224
- National Institute on Drug Abuse Hotline: 1-800-662-4357
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255
- SAMHSA (substance abuse) National Helping: 1-800-662-4357
- The Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-422-4453

STEP 4. Repeat Address Other Pressing Unmet Needs (If Warranted/Possible)

If other pressing unmet needs are identified but it's not possible to address them in the time you have available, or it exceeds your ability to help, explore helping another time, connect to another helper, direct to a faith-based or community organization, or link to resources.

**Safety Needs Assessment and Intervention Steps:
Attend, Ask, Act, and Repeat**

STEP 1. Attend to Unmet Safety Needs (What to Observe)

Observed COVID-19 Impact on Safety Needs (Check the box or boxes that apply)			
No Impact	Mild Impact	Significant Impact	Possible Future

STEP 2. Ask About Unmet Safety Needs (What to Explore)

✓	Explored COVID-19 Impact on Safety Needs
	Asked about impact on safety – health safety, safety from others, safety from oneself, and/or threat toward others.
	Asked about support received from others (and if needed: openness to support, support available, support desired, and barriers to support).
	Asked to prioritize most pressing unmet safety need.

If safety needs are not prioritized, move on to other needs.

Primary Unmet Safety Need Identified:

Secondary Unmet Need(s) Identified:

STEP 3. Act by Providing Spiritual Support for Primary Unmet Safety Needs (What to Do)

<p>Spiritual support resource(s) needed to address primary unmet safety need:</p>	
<p>Something small that you could do right now to provide spiritual support:</p>	
<p>Subtle spiritual care approaches you could use to provide spiritual support:</p>	
<p>Obvious spiritual care approaches you might use (if appropriate) to provide spiritual support:</p>	

STEP 4. Repeat to Address Secondary Unmet Needs (if Warranted/Possible)

<p>Follow-up details (if applicable):</p>	
<p>Identify another helper you could refer:</p>	
<p>List of faith-based, community, or healthcare organizations you could recommend (remember to ask for help and to refer people to mental health, emergency, healthcare, and/or law enforcement professionals when dealing with potentially dangerous situations):</p>	
<p>Other helpful resources you could share:</p>	

Prayer: God, as safety felt like it disappeared so quickly around the globe, may we help the person we're talking with today along the path toward the safety they need.

Chapter 7. Spiritual Needs Assessment and Intervention

Purpose: In this chapter we share how to help people struggling with ultimate concerns and spiritual struggles when providing Spiritual First Aid.

“Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, ‘I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!’” (Mark 9:24).

Jesus was talking with this father whose son needed healing. The pain of experiencing his son’s suffering led him to this remarkable moment of both doubt and faith. Jesus didn’t recoil from the man’s confession; he stayed and provided what was most needed. Neither should we recoil from people who are wrestling with faith, doubt, and meaning in this time.

About Spiritual Needs

COVID-19 is causing some people to question meaning and suffering. For example, some may wonder why God allows suffering through illnesses. Our research shows that disasters like COVID-19 can cause what we refer to as a meaning rupture. Examples of a meaning rupture include loss of purpose in life, awareness of mortality, and a sense of lacking control over one’s situation or life.

Humble Helping: Cultivate Greater Helper Humility

Below are research-proven strategies that will help you strengthen the virtue of humility:

- Pray for humility.
- Read Scripture verses and look to biblical examples of humility.
- Through self-reflection, identify your strengths as well as areas where you need growth.
- Consider how overconfidence and preconceived notions might interfere with your ability to help effectively.
- Seek awareness of the ways that helping may meet your own needs (e.g., to be “in the action,” for personal gain or benefit, or desiring praise from others).
- Tune into your other-oriented reasons for helping (e.g., faith, altruism, social interest, compassion) and seek to enhance these motives.
- Think about a time that you did not respond well to positive feedback (e.g., let praise go to your head, acted with false humility, were unable to accept positive feedback). How might you respond differently based on what you learned?
- Maintain a willingness to continually learn about yourself, others, and spiritual and emotional care.

Practical Presence: How to Help Across Spiritual and Religious Differences

Below are some ways to provide practical presence to others who may believe differently than you. Though not an exhaustive list, here are some guidelines for how to think about and approach faith differences when providing Spiritual First Aid. Following these guidelines can help you from accidentally causing harm to people struggling with spiritual needs.

- Do not coerce or force beliefs; remember, people are in a vulnerable state.
- Listen carefully for a person's spiritual language.
- Respect individual differences and traditions (e.g., culture, gender, ethnicity, religion).
- Be sensitive to instances in which services are not desired or appropriate, and do not impose yourself on others.
- Your goal is to have your own religious and spiritual identity help and not hurt the process of forming a relationship and responding to other people's needs.

Needs Assessment

The research that our team has conducted around the world after countless disasters and other challenging events has revealed that it is not just how religious or spiritual a person is that predicts their resilience in the face of adversity. Rather, our studies show that resilience during hardships comes from how people engage and utilize their faith.

STEP 1. Attend to Unmet Spiritual Needs (What to Observe)

It can be difficult to know someone's faith background or what they may be struggling with spiritually. Sometimes a person's subtle actions, dress, or practices will point to their spiritual concerns, but these might be misleading. The best way to figure out where someone stands is to listen carefully to how they talk about their faith identity and COVID-19. We stress how they talk because often tone and word choice indicate distress, especially regarding questions about life and death issues. For example, you may pick up on ambivalence or frustration as a person describes their spiritual community or a recent sermon they watched online.

Common Signs of COVID-19 Unmet Spiritual Needs

Questions about faith	Questions about good and evil
Questioning God	Redefining moral values and life priorities
Anger at God	Making promises to, bargaining with, and challenging God
Realization of mortality	Struggling to find meaning
Withdrawal from faith and church	Questions about forgiveness
Concern about hereafter	Belief they are being punished for sins

STEP 2. Ask About Unmet Spiritual Needs (What to Explore)

- How are you doing spiritually?
- How has the pandemic affected your faith?
- How has the pandemic affected your relationship with God?
- How would you rate your spiritual distress since COVID-19 began, on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest?
- What would help reduce your level of spiritual distress?
- How have you tried to make sense of what has happened?
- In what ways has COVID-19 changed what you view as most important in life?
- What gives you a sense of meaning or purpose in life?
- In what ways has your faith helped you throughout this experience?
- Are there ways your faith has caused you to struggle amidst the pandemic?
- In what ways has your faith motivated you during this time of crisis?
- What helps sustain you and keeps you going?
- Where do you find the most spiritual support right now? What or who provides that? Where else could you find spiritual support?
- What spiritual practices, rituals, or disciplines are important to you?
- What gives you comfort and peace of mind?
- What is the source of your strength and hope right now?

Note: If spiritual needs are prioritized, still be sure to rule out possible safety needs (i.e., don't ignore "red flags"). If spiritual needs are not prioritized, move onto other needs. But also remember that Spiritual First Aid considers all needs spiritual needs.

INTERVENTION

STEP 3. Act by Encouraging Spiritual Coping for Unmet Spiritual Needs (What to Do)

Start by attending to loss of meaning. Your goal is to enable people to draw on their worldview in effective ways as they work through these questions. Also help them see that it will likely take time to regain a sense of meaning and purpose. A person must first establish some sense of control over daily aspects of their life; this will put them in a better position to make meaning of their experience in the future.

Word of Caution

Do not push or force spiritual issues or spiritual disciplines if the person is not open to doing so or is not ready to work through such struggles. For some people, you have to allow space for some anger, disappointment, and questioning. Avoid the temptation of arguing about the spiritual and religious questions that are making them feel overwhelmed. Similarly, don't feel like you have to have all of the answers. Philosophical arguments are not what people need; this sort of response is more likely to compound their unmet spiritual needs. Remember, you are there to help position people on a trajectory to finding meaning and purpose over time.

Here are helpful questions to consider prior to using obvious spiritual care approaches to intervention:

- Is the person I'm helping welcoming of me addressing faith more directly in our helping relationship?
- What might I hope that sharing in this way will accomplish?
- Is this an appropriate time and context for this sort of approach?
- Will engaging in this way be more likely to help or hinder my ability to help?
- Will the person I'm supporting likely welcome or reject these sorts of actions?
- Could using more overt spiritual care approaches be useful in this particular situation?
- Could this person's particular problem be negatively impacted or made worse if I interact in this manner?

COVID-19 experiences can call into question two assumptions that usually provide people with a sense of spiritual security:

- The belief that God will keep them physically and emotionally safe.
- The belief that the world is a just and orderly place.

A massive stressor like COVID-19 can dominate a person's attention and cause seismic shifts in their beliefs about and sense of connection with God (e.g., viewing God as punishing). This in turn may amplify their psychological distress. Following are some ways you can help people who are struggling with this loss of meaning and spiritual struggles as a result of shattered assumptions:

- Assure the person that it is normal to experience what feels to them like major shifts in their values, beliefs, faith, priorities, perspectives, or philosophy.
- Remind people it will take a while to make sense of everything that happened.
- Let them know that it is okay not to have it all figured out.
- Do not rush to “fix” a spiritual problem.
- Once they are ready, let the person tell you about their religious/spiritual beliefs and struggles.
- Respect the feelings behind a person's ultimate and spiritual questions.
- Ask the person to identify Scripture that can normalize feelings, offer comfort, foster hope, and foster faith.

**REMINDE PEOPLE IT
WILL TAKE A WHILE
TO MAKE SENSE OF
EVERYTHING THAT
HAPPENED.**

Sample Encouraging Scriptures

God sees us (Genesis 16:13)

We can look to God when we're helpless and confused (Chronicles 20:12)

God hears us (Jonah 2:2)

We are loved by Christ (Romans 8:35, 37)

God is with us (Psalm 23:4)

We can choose to trust God (Habakkuk 3:17-18)

God is for us (Lamentations 3:33)

We can choose to not be bullied by fear (Isaiah 41:10)

God knows our suffering (Exodus 2:25)

We can choose to release our fears to God (1 Peter 5:7)

God is near the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18)

We're made to share one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2)

God receives us when we're overwhelmed (Matthew 11:28)

We are still being called to love those closest to us (Proverbs 17:17)

God shows up in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:10)

We are called to love our neighbors (John 13:34)

God's love can't be separated from us (Romans 8:39)

We are to care for the vulnerable (Acts 20:35)

- Give space (and permission) for the person to experience negative emotions toward God.
- Ask them how they might partner with God in problem-solving.
- Remind yourself that it is unrealistic to assume you can settle questions that usually require an extended process and conversations with trusted spiritual relationships, including friends and clergy within the individual's community.
- If appropriate, encourage the person to identify and reestablish any personally important spiritual practices (e.g., prayers, devotions, reading the Bible, worship) once they feel they are ready.
- Help the person identify sources of spiritual support, such as trusted family members, friends, or other mentors, including how to connect while physically distancing and sheltering-in-place.
- Pray silently on behalf of the person and for wisdom as you help.
- Offer a prayer of encouragement and hope on behalf of the person once permission has been granted.

How to Pray with Others in Crisis

- Approach praying with people with sensitivity.
- Ask if they would like you to pray for them, and respect their decision if they decline.
- Inquire if there is anything about which you could pray for them.
- When praying, do your best to incorporate some specifics that the person shared, like names and other meaningful details.
- Offer a simple prayer out loud; don't worry about what you will say.
- If appropriate, you might also ask the person if he or she would like to also say a prayer.

STEP 4. And Repeat to Address Other Pressing Unmet Needs (If Warranted/Possible)

If other pressing unmet needs are identified but it's not possible to address them in the time you have available, or it exceeds your ability to help, explore helping another time, connecting to another helper, directing to a faith-based or community organization, or sharing resources.

Sample COVID-19 Spiritual Coping Strategies

Here are some other suggestions that you might recommend to others you are assisting to help with spiritual concerns and struggles:

- Use spiritual disciplines like praying and reading Scripture.
- Keep a spiritual or prayer journal.
- Seek spiritual support from family, friends, and congregation.
- Increase participating in online church services and activities.
- Seek a connection with God.
- Listen to hopeful and inspirational music.
- Sing a hymn to yourself or out loud that reminds you of God's goodness.
- Look to God for strength, support, and care.
- See God as a safe haven.
- Re-read books on faith that may have helped you through other difficult periods.
- Focus on faith when feeling worried.
- Carry a notecard with you of your favorite Scripture verses.
- Understand what one has control over and surrender what is beyond your control to God.
- View God as loving and merciful.

Helping Remotely While Socially Distancing: Maximizing Remote Care

There is no perfect formula for how you should connect with people or how often you should connect. Everyone feels connection in a different way. Here are some tips to try:

- When possible, provide both audible and visual support, because it has been found to increase the likelihood of the other person feeling more socially satisfied.
- Remind yourself and the person you are helping that it is normal to feel stressed or annoyed when sound delays interrupt communications or lead to feeling like you have to keep repeating yourself.
- Be aware that using technology can sometimes make it hard to draw boundaries in the helping relationship (e.g., unclear of when socializing should end).
- Try to avoid feeling pressured to fill silences or pauses in the conversation.
- When helping others who might report significant social anxiety, ask them if being able to turn off the video camera might help.

Spiritual Needs Assessment and Intervention Steps: Attend, Ask, Act, And Repeat

STEP 1. Attend to Unmet Spiritual Needs

Observed COVID-19 Impact on Spiritual Needs (Check the box or boxes that apply)			
No Impact	Mild Impact	Significant Impact	Possible Future

STEP 2. Ask About Unmet Spiritual Needs (What to Explore)

✓	Explored COVID-19 Impact on Spiritual Needs
	Asked about spiritual impact—on faith, belief in or relationship with God, questions of meaning.
	Asked about support received from others (and if needed: openness to support, support available, support desired, and barriers to support).
	Asked to prioritize most pressing unmet spiritual need.

Note: If spiritual needs are prioritized, still be sure to rule out possible safety needs (i.e., don't ignore "red flags"). If spiritual needs are not prioritized, move on to other needs. But also remember Spiritual First Aid considers all needs spiritual needs.

Primary Unmet Spiritual Need Identified:

Secondary Unmet Need(s) Identified:

STEP 3. Act by Providing Spiritual Support for Primary Unmet Spiritual Need

<p>Spiritual support resource(s) needed to address primary unmet belonging need:</p>	
<p>Something small that you could do right now to provide spiritual support:</p>	
<p>Subtle spiritual care approaches you could use to provide spiritual support:</p>	
<p>Obvious spiritual care approaches you might use (if appropriate) to provide spiritual support:</p>	

STEP 4. Address Secondary Unmet Needs if Warranted and Possible (What to Do Next)

<p>Follow-up details (if applicable):</p>	
<p>Identify another helper you could refer:</p>	
<p>List of faith-based or community organizations you could recommend:</p>	
<p>Other helpful resources you could share:</p>	

Prayer: God, in this time of spiritual upheaval for many, may you meet them in their belief and in their unbelief with your love and grace.

About the Humanitarian Disaster Institute

Founded in 2011, Wheaton College's Humanitarian Disaster Institute (HDI) is the country's first faith-based academic disaster research center. Our mission is to help the church prepare and care in a disaster-filled world. HDI carries out our mission through research, training, convening, and resourcing.

About HDI's M.A. Degree and Trauma Certificate

HDI offers an M.A. in Humanitarian & Disaster Leadership at Wheaton College Graduate School that can be completed in one year on campus or two years online (which includes a week of on-campus coursework at the beginning and end of the program). We have also partnered with the School of Psychology, Counseling, and Family Therapy at Wheaton College Graduate School to offer a new Trauma Certificate in a specialized track specifically tailored to humanitarian and disaster responders. Learn more at wheaton.edu/HDL.

Contact Us

Our website and social media accounts provide ongoing updates and resources for preparing your church for COVID-19. You can also find more information about Spiritual First Aid, including additional tools and related research.

Website: www.wheaton.edu/hdi

Email: hdi@wheaton.edu

Facebook: facebook.com/WheatonHDI

Twitter: twitter.com/WheatonHDI

Instagram: [@wheaton_hdi](https://www.instagram.com/wheaton_hdi)

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Authorized Training, Certifications, Licenses, and Resource Development Services: To inquire about arranging an authorized SFA training, certification, manual licensing agreement, or resource development services (e.g., adapting SFA for your organization's needs) please email hdi@wheaton.edu with “Spiritual First Aid Inquiry” in the message's subject line.

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