

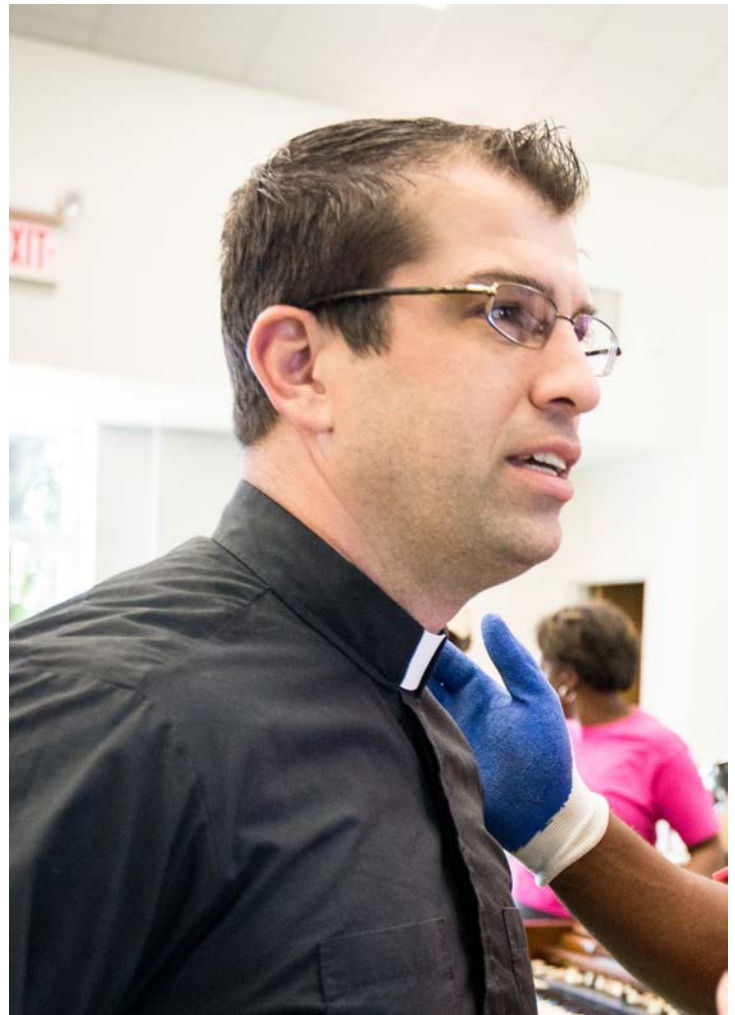
Your Spiritual, Emotional, Mental and Physical

Well-Being

In the aftermath of a tragedy, the importance of our spiritual, emotional, mental and physical (SEMP) well-being can easily be overlooked. Using the “SEMP Paradigm of Care,” here are a few simple coping strategies that may help relieve some of the apprehension and uncertainty that often accompany traumatic events. In a crisis, you will either react to the event or act to cope with the event. In stressful situations, often people react rather than act. Reacting can lead to increased anxiety, doubt and fear. Acting constructively lets you take responsibility for your own well-being and choose effective coping strategies.

Spiritual coping strategies

1. Spend time in **prayer**. Try to dedicate time each morning and evening in a quiet place away from distractions.
2. Sing **hymns or spiritual songs**. Try to remember the lyrics and melodies of favorite hymns or songs. Meditate on them or sing them aloud. Write them down from memory.
3. Read or recite **Scripture**. Try to read or recall favorite Bible verses and recite them aloud. Meditate on them and commit them to memory.
4. Join in **fellowship** with your family and/or faith community. Talk to and be with your pastor, family or church friends. Don't separate yourself from fellow believers. Attend worship, Bible study and organizations. Surround yourself with other believers.
5. Read **devotional materials** appropriate to your circumstance. Find a good inspirational book. Read the catechism. Review helpful tracts or biblical studies.



6. Reach out to **faith partners**. Find that special person who shares the same commitment to Christ. Join him or her in activities and study. Spend time with him or her. Set up a daily or weekly get-together.

Emotional coping strategies

1. **Reach out to people who care**, identifying your feelings and fears. Talk out your thoughts and feelings with loved ones.
2. **Spend time in enjoyable activities with friends and family.**
3. **Write out your feelings.** You're dealing with an abstract but very powerful loss — the loss of expectations and assumptions. There is a grief process that accompanies loss and that process consists of stages of shock, denial, bargaining, anger, depression and acceptance.

These stages are not smooth and orderly. They surface, retreat and resurface in a disorderly



fashion. It helps to recognize which stage of grief you are experiencing. We base much of our lives on the belief that life is reasonably predictable and controllable. We live our lives based upon our expectations for the future. When our beliefs and expectations are challenged or removed, we lose our equilibrium and our world is shaken. You know from previous crises in your life that you will eventually regain your equilibrium.

4. Recognize anger as a secondary emotion.

Anger is often a surface emotion that covers up a deeper emotion such as fear, hurt or feelings of powerlessness. When you find yourself feeling angry, search for the deeper emotion and work with it instead. Write about it. Talk about it.

- 5. Be cautious **not to take out your anger on friends and relatives.**** It will be much harder for them to be emotionally supportive if they are feeling attacked by you. Snapping at them will cause you to feel worse about yourself. As

stated in No. 4 above, talk with them about the emotions causing your anger and ask for their cooperation and support.

Mental coping strategies

- 1. Get the facts** about the problem from reliable sources rather than relying on the rumor mill to provide information.
- 2. Recognize that **you have time**** to form a plan and that you may never have to activate it.
- 3. Talk it out.** Brainstorm your problem-solving ideas with your loved ones to get their input and ideas.
- 4. Give your thoughts a break** from constantly thinking about the “what if” that scares you. **Shift your focus** to the here-and-now needs of your loved ones, activities you enjoy and the things you need to get done.
- 5. Structure your time.** Large segments of unstructured time will tempt your thoughts

to center endlessly around what troubles you most. Your interpretation of what is happening will therefore become more catastrophic and less objective.

- 6. Remind yourself of your abilities and strengths.** Self-statements such as, “I can handle this uncertainty,” get you back in touch with the fact that you’re steering your own ship. You are not a bottle tossing and turning on life’s seas.
- 7. Set short-term goals.** What are some things that you want to accomplish in the near future?

Physical coping strategies

- 1. Adequate rest** is the foundation of stress management. Establish a routine and get to bed at a reasonable hour.
- 2. Exercise** is an excellent tool for dealing with stress. It also will help you sleep better if it’s done several hours before bedtime. Talk to your doctor before starting any exercise routine.
- 3. Eat well-balanced and regular meals.**
- 4. Choose activities** that allow you to **relax** in your off-work time (fish, read, quilt, paint, hunt — whatever you like to do).
- 5. Avoid alcohol and drugs** as a means to cope unless your doctor gives you a needed prescription.

Sharing Christ’s love

The mission of the church is to reach out in mercy and compassion to those in need, motivated by Christ and His Gospel, and according to the Lutheran confession of faith. It is important to remember this mission when debriefing survivors as well as responders. Sharing God’s love as found in and through Christ is essential to the emotional, physical and spiritual well-being of those affected by a disaster.

In sharing Christ’s love:

- › We act as the instrument through which faithful and compassionate believers in Jesus Christ extend the mercy of a loving God to others.
- › We seek to alleviate human suffering and elevate the human condition by responding to emergencies and enabling struggling people to become self-sufficient.

No one is immune from the chaos of a disaster but Christ’s mandate and example of love for the whole person remains our supreme example for life in this world and for care of the needy — body and soul.

The Gospel changes chaos into compassion: Christ’s people are people of compassion rather than chaos.

When faced with a destructive disaster, uppermost in the minds of our LCMS families and their communities are these three questions:

- › Where can we turn for material, spiritual and emotional resources?
- › Who will help us cope with the immediate and transitional needs related to the disaster?
- › How do we begin the road back from relief to recovery and stability?

Compassion is sympathy for the suffering of others with the desire and ability to help.

Chaos is a state of complete disorder and confusion caused by a lack of preparation.

Chaos is a reflection of human nature during a disaster.

Compassion is a reflection of Christ’s nature during a disaster.