

# Disaster Response Outreach Packet

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A comprehensive guide for community  
responders, volunteers, and helpers supporting  
individuals and families after a disaster.



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# 01



## Purpose of This Packet

The Disaster Response Outreach Packet provides clear, simple tools to help responders offer emotional support, stabilize distressed individuals, share accurate information, and connect people with needed services. It is designed for non-clinical helpers—community volunteers, church groups, neighborhood leaders, youth workers, and frontline staff—who encounter survivors in the days and weeks after a disaster.

# 02



## Core Principles of Outreach

### Safety First

- Prioritize physical safety, medical needs, and urgent risks.
- Approach calmly; introduce yourself; explain your role.

### Dignity & Respect

- Speak gently and avoid rushing.
- Honor cultural practices, community norms, and personal boundaries.

### Empathy Over Fixing

- You don't need perfect words—presence is the intervention.
- Avoid trying to solve everything; aim to stabilize, not treat.

### Clear, Simple Information

- Provide small, helpful pieces of information at a time.
- Repeat as necessary (stress impacts memory and concentration).

# 03



## Key Emotional First Aid Steps

### a. Check Safety & Basic Needs

Ask:

- “Are you safe right now?”
- “Do you need medical attention?”
- “Is there a place you can rest or get water?”

### b. Offer a Grounding Welcome

A calm tone sets the stage.

Example:

“Take your time. I’m here with you. We’ll go step by step.”

### **c. Stabilize Strong Reactions**

Use:

- Slow breathing together
- 5-4-3-2-1 grounding
- Hand-on-heart reset
- Cold water / fresh air if available

### **d. Validate Their Experience**

Short phrases:

- “That was frightening.”
- “You’re not alone.”
- “Your feelings make sense.”

### **e. Gather Only What’s Needed**

Ask simple questions:

- “Who is with you?”
- “Where did you sleep last night?”
- “Do you have your medication?”
- “Is anyone you care about missing or injured?”

## **f. Connect to Practical Help**

Guide them toward:

- Temporary shelter
- Water, food distribution
- Medical stations
- Counseling lines
- Emergency numbers
- Local community hubs

## **g. Ensure a Warm Hand-Off**

Don't send them off alone if they are distressed.

Walk with them or find someone stable to accompany them.

# 04

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## Outreach Script for First Contact

You can use this simple script when walking through shelters, neighborhoods, or affected communities:

### 1. Introduce Yourself

“Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I’m here with \_\_\_\_ to check on how people are coping after the storm.”

### 2. Offer Presence

“Is it okay if we talk for a few minutes?”

### 3. Gentle Assessment

“How have you been managing since everything happened?”

“Is there anything you need right now?”

#### **4. Stabilize if Needed**

“Let’s take one slow breath together.”

#### **5. Connect to Supports**

“There’s a distribution center near here. I can show you where.”

“Would you like to speak with someone from the medical team?”

“I can help you find your next steps.”

# 05



## Quick Outreach Checklist

### Carry:

- Water
- Notepad + pen
- Charge bank for phones
- Local resource list
- Copies of the Quick Reference Tools
- Comfort items: wipes, tissues, small snacks

### Remember:

- Approach calmly
- Listen more than you speak
- Keep instructions simple
- Use reassurance, not false promises
- Stay aware of your surroundings
- Work in pairs when possible

# 06

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## Recognizing When Someone Needs More Support

### URGENT REFERRAL NEEDED IF A PERSON:

- Is talking about wanting to harm themselves or others
- Appears disoriented or cannot answer simple questions
- Cannot stop crying or shaking
- Is having a panic episode that does not settle
- Has not slept in several days
- Reports hallucinations
- Is medically unstable (chest pain, trouble breathing, high fever, wounds)

### ACTION:

- Stay with them
- Move to a quiet space
- Contact emergency services or the nearest clinic
- Do not leave the person until help arrives or a hand-off is complete

# 07

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## Outreach Mini-Tools

### – Use On the Spot –

#### a. 1-Minute Grounding

Feel your feet on the ground. Let's breathe in for a count of 4... and out for a count of 5.”

#### b. Community Breathing

“Let's take one breath together. In... and out... You're doing well.”

#### c. Orienting Statement

“You are safe enough right now. I'm right here.”

#### d. Small Daily Steps

“What is one small thing you can do today that feels manageable?”

# 08



## Special Considerations for Children & Youth

- Get down to their eye level
- Use short, simple sentences
- Ask, “Who is taking care of you?”
- Bring them to a caregiver quickly
- Offer comfort items (snack, water, activity sheet)
- Normalize feelings: “Many kids feel scared after storms. You’re not alone.”

# 09



## Community Cultural Guidance

- Respect spiritual and faith-based coping (prayer, psalms, hymns)
- Understand that some people may minimize distress as “being strong”
- Normalize emotional responses without judgment
- Engage kinship networks—neighbors, extended family, church family
- Encourage community-based support activities (cooking together, cleanup, music)

# 10



## Resource List Template

**You can customize this with local partners:**

- Emergency Numbers
- Shelters
- Health Centers & Clinics
- Food Distribution Points
- Water Distribution Points
- Counseling & Mental Health Lines
- Community Hub Contacts
- Volunteers & Coordinators

# 11



## End-of-Day Debrief for Outreach Workers

**After outreach, gather your team for a quick check-in:**

- What went well today?
- Who needs follow-up tomorrow?
- Did anyone experience distressing situations?
- Do we need more supplies?
- What support does our team need?

Remind responders: *You cannot pour from an empty cup.*

# 12



## Closing Message

Every act of kindness after a disaster—one conversation, one breath, one moment of calm—helps rebuild emotional safety. Your presence is part of the healing.