

Frequently Asked Questions about the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster DISASTER SPIRITUAL CARE GUIDELINES and DISASTER EMOTIONAL CARE GUIDELINES

Introduction:

The Emotional and Spiritual Care Committee’s mission is to foster emotional and spiritual care to people affected by disaster in cooperation with national, state and local response organizations and VOADs. In 2022 the Emotional and Spiritual Care Committee of National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster completed a series of three webinars about the *Disaster Spiritual Care Guidelines* (ratified 2014) and *Disaster Emotional Care Guidelines* (ratified 2020). Designed specifically for National VOAD member organizations and state/territorial VOAD’s, the three webinars include:

- [Introduction to the *National VOAD Disaster Emotional Care Guidelines & Disaster Spiritual Care Guidelines*](#)
- [Introduction to the *Disaster Spiritual Care Guidelines*](#)
- [Introduction to the *Disaster Emotional Care Guidelines*](#)

Below you will find Frequently Asked Questions created by the task group¹ about the Guidelines documents. Additional questions and comments about the Guidelines and webinars may be sent to the National VOAD Emotional and Spiritual Care Committee at info@nvoad.org.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Where can I find copies of the *Disaster Spiritual Care Guidelines* and *Disaster Emotional Care Guidelines*, and recorded versions of the webinars?

A: At www.nvoad.org/resources, you can view and download the Guidelines and links to the three webinars. Email questions and comments about the Guidelines and webinars to National VOAD Emotional and Spiritual Care Committee at info@nvoad.org.

Q: Where would you suggest I start learning more about the Guidelines?

A: The “Introduction to the National VOAD Disaster Emotional Care Guidelines & Disaster Spiritual Care Guidelines” webinar opens with an initial overview of the

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Guidelines documents, *Points of Consensus*, and the role of an Emotional and Spiritual Care Committee. Additionally, the "Introduction" webinar sets the stage for the next two webinars that focus on the separate sets of *Disaster Spiritual Care* and *Disaster Emotional Care Guidelines*. Reviewing the Quick Reference documents for each of the Guidelines documents may be helpful as well.

Q: What is the relationship between the *Points of Consensus* (POC) for both Disaster Spiritual Care and Disaster Emotional Care and their corresponding Guidelines?

A: National VOAD organizations are required to agree to and abide by *Points of Consensus*. The *Disaster Spiritual Care Guidelines* and *Disaster Emotional Care Guidelines* are companions to their corresponding *Points of Consensus*. Establishing the foundations for each set of Guidelines, the POCs promote consistent quality by defining specific standards, ethical and operational principles for emotional care and spiritual care providers to embrace and follow. The Guidelines provide context, best practices, and desired standards for the provision of disaster spiritual care and disaster emotional care.

Q: Is the National VOAD Emotional and Spiritual Care Committee/ ESCC mandating that disaster response organizations adopt these Guidelines?

A: The ESCC's intention is to provide resources that inform disaster responders of the emotional and spiritual care needs of people impacted by disaster, encourage learning about effective ways to assist, and promote best practices for delivery of caring services that address these needs. Guidelines are intended as tools for operationalizing the Disaster Spiritual Care and Disaster Emotional Care *Points of Consensus*. While there are benefits from sharing common guidelines, compliance with the Guidelines is not required for membership in National VOAD. This is in contrast to *Points of Consensus* by which National VOAD organizations are required to abide.

Q: Why are there two sets of Guidelines instead of just one, since both come from the Emotional and Spiritual Care Committee?

A: The ESCC recognizes the necessity for specialized disaster training. Although emotional care and spiritual care have similarities, there are distinct differences between the two. With a focus on excellence, separate Guidelines documents emphasizing unique principles, skills and ethical standards of each were developed. For example, the *Disaster Emotional Care Guidelines* emphasize the skills, training and ethical standards of disaster emotional care providers, without the expectation that they are also disaster spiritual care providers. The *Disaster Spiritual Guidelines* are focused upon individuals who provide emotional and spiritual care and support from a faith-

based perspective to affected populations and responders. Both disciplines agree to partner together:

Mental health professionals partner with spiritual care providers in caring for individuals and communities in disaster. Spiritual and emotional care are important components of comprehensive disaster care; these share some similarities but are distinct healing modalities. Spiritual care providers are important partners in referring individuals to receive care for their mental health and vice versa.²

The following definitions³ from both the DSC Guidelines and the DEC Guidelines may be helpful:

Disaster Spiritual Care Provider: also known as spiritual care provider - individuals who provide emotional and spiritual care and support from a faith-based perspective to affected populations and responders. They nurture and encourage spiritual perspectives as a source of strength in difficult times. Disaster spiritual care providers come from diverse cultural and spiritual backgrounds to provide sensitive, appropriate care for all persons and to acknowledge and respect every spiritual perspective.

Spiritual Care: A sustaining care that assists persons to draw upon own inner religious and/or spiritual resources. In the context of a disaster, spiritual care responds to the poignant need for spiritual meaning and comfort by providing accompaniment, compassionate care, individual and communal prayer and appropriate ritual. Spiritual care is sensitive to and aware of the varied expressions of faith and belief systems and traditions.

Disaster Emotional Care: An umbrella term that includes a wide range of services intended to offer comfort, support, and resources to individuals, families and communities throughout all phases of the disaster cycle. Grounded in concepts of resilience and behavioral health, and informed by research and best practices, disaster emotional care is intended to mitigate and prevent serious psychological consequences of disaster, to offer appropriate referral for those needing higher levels of care, and to facilitate psychological recovery and a return to adaptive functioning.

² National VOAD Disaster Emotional Care Points of Consensus, Point 8. See also, National VOAD Disaster Spiritual Care Points of Consensus, Point 4.

³ See the National VOAD DSC Guidelines, APPENDIX D: Glossary and Acronyms and the National VOAD DEC Guidelines, APPENDIX E: Glossary and Acronyms

Q: Why are these documents so long?

A: These are comprehensive guidance documents, incorporating best practices and emerging trends in the field of disaster spiritual care and disaster emotional care.

Q: What are some highpoints of the Guidelines that can build interest in pursuing implementation?

A: The *Guidelines* documents contain rich content collected from competent, trained, credentialed, and experienced providers of disaster emotional care and disaster spiritual care. With a focus on excellence in care services, the content addresses working in shared settings, care for diverse populations, integration of care services throughout the disaster cycle, and other nuanced resource information.

Q. How detailed are the Guidelines with implementation procedures for state/territorial VOADs?

A: The *Guidelines* offer suggestions for implementation strategies. Formation of an ESCC within each state/territorial VOAD would be a great start to developing a network of emotional care and spiritual care providers, who could collaborate on creating a right-fit process for implementing the Guidelines. See Section 5 of the *Disaster Spiritual Care Guidelines* and Section 4 of the *Disaster Emotional Care Guidelines*.

Q: Our state/territorial/regional VOAD is unique. How does national-level guidance apply to us?

A: The *Guidelines* are not intended as rigid rules to be followed. Rather, they provide a wealth of information and ideas that can be adapted to fit the needs and resources of a territory, state, or regional VOAD. Cultural awareness and adaptation are key elements of disaster emotional care and disaster spiritual care.

Q: Both Guidelines documents and the associated webinars contain a number of definitions and acronyms. Where can I find more information?

A: Each of the Guidelines documents contains a Glossary and Acronyms list in their Appendices. See “Appendix D” of the *Disaster Spiritual Care Guidelines* and “Appendix E” of the *Disaster Emotional Care Guidelines*.

Q: The webinars mention a number of documents produced by the National VOAD Emotional and Spiritual Care Committee. Could you provide a complete list of the documents that can found on the National VOAD website?

A: National VOAD Committees create “Resources” “Points of Consensus,” and “Guidelines.”⁴ The following can be found at the National VOAD Resource Center page by searching for “ESC” in the drop down Resource Categories window. Direct links may also be found below.

"Resources" (tools, manuals, and written resources developed through a Committee process to assist organizations in their disaster response activities.)

- Light Our Way (2018 Edition, originally published in 2006)
- Light Our Way (Spanish)

"Points of Consensus" (minimal standards, ethical principles or operational principles specific to a relevant topic of the Committee.) To continue as a member of National VOAD, organizations are required to agree to abide by approved Points of Consensus.

- Disaster Spiritual Care Points of Consensus (Ratified 2009)
- Disaster Spiritual Care Points of Consensus (Spanish)
- Disaster Emotional Care Points of Consensus (Ratified 2015)
- Disaster Emotional Care Points of Consensus (Spanish)

Guidelines (expanded operational, behavioral and/or ethical recommendations from the Committee.)

- Disaster Spiritual Care Guidelines (Ratified 2014)
- Disaster Spiritual Care Guidelines Quick Reference (Ratified 2014)
- Disaster Emotional Care Guidelines (Ratified 2020)
- Disaster Emotional Guidelines Quick Reference (Ratified 2020)

Questions Specifically about the *Disaster Emotional Care Guidelines*

Q: What are unique features of the *Disaster Emotional Care Guidelines*?

A: Each section serves as a stand-alone guide on a particular topic. Use the Quick Reference Guide to help you navigate the Guidelines and find what interests you.

⁴ National VOAD Committee Manual (Revised April 2020)

Q: Our organization doesn't have an emotional care program. Is there anything in this document that is useful or relevant to us?

A: Disaster emotional care is about mitigating the emotional consequences of disasters for survivors and responders. Although the Guidelines were written with disaster emotional care providers in mind, the information can be useful to anyone interested in the human element of disaster.

Q: Why is it called disaster emotional care rather than disaster behavioral health?

A: Disaster emotional care is a broad term that includes disaster behavioral health, as well as other approaches to helping people cope with the emotional consequences of disaster. Appropriate and effective care can be provided by people with specialized training in disaster emotional care, including those who are not licensed or certified as behavioral health professionals.

Questions Specifically about the Disaster Spiritual Care Guidelines:

Q: For what settings were the *Disaster Spiritual Care Guidelines* primarily designed to be applied?

A: These Guidelines are primarily designed for “shared settings” rather than private settings such as an individual community of faith. “Shared settings” are defined as settings in which organized disaster spiritual care activities are provided by numerous and diverse organizations to support the spiritual care needs of diverse populations of impacted persons. Examples of shared settings include shelters, points of distribution or dispensing, emergency operations centers, Family Assistance Centers and other settings in which organized disaster spiritual support activities among diverse populations occur.

“Private settings” are defined as locations in which individual faith adherents or homogenous, local communities of faith have full jurisdiction and practice specific methods of disaster spiritual care according to their mission and faith tradition. Examples of private settings may include physical or virtual space in which formal religious activities typically occur; the community of faith has primary responsibility and/or specific communities of faith informally gather.⁵

⁵ National VOAD Disaster Spiritual Care Guidelines, Appendix D, Glossary and Acronyms

Q: Why doesn't National VOAD endorse specific trainings for Disaster Spiritual Care (DSC) providers?

A: Rather than listing particular trainings, the *Disaster Spiritual Care Guidelines* focus on competencies that will help disaster spiritual care providers do their work most effectively. Individual National VOAD member organizations are encouraged to credential their own disaster spiritual care personnel and volunteers in compliance with identity, vetting, qualifications, and affiliation outlined in Section Four. National VOAD member organizations prepare their affiliated DSC providers with knowledge, skills, abilities, and guidance on how to utilize life experience and select training programs to achieve those ends.

Many National VOAD member organizations provide excellent training in disaster spiritual care. Therefore, National VOAD does not endorse a member agency's training over another's. Using the principles outlined in Tables 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6 regarding competencies, and Table 4.9 regarding the development and documentation of competencies, National VOAD member organizations will be responsible for preparing their affiliated DSC providers with knowledge, skills, abilities, and how to utilize life experience and select training programs to achieve those ends.⁶

Q: What do that Disaster Spiritual Care Guidelines suggest regarding local spiritual care providers?

A: As an integral part of the pre-disaster community, local spiritual care providers and communities of faith are primary resources for post-disaster spiritual care. Because local communities of faith are uniquely equipped to provide healing care, any spiritual care services entering from outside of the community support but do not substitute for local efforts.⁷ Whenever possible, DSC providers entering from outside of the local community should coordinate with and refer to local spiritual care providers.

⁶ National VOAD Disaster Spiritual Care Guidelines, Section 4, page 19.

⁷ National VOAD DSC Points of Consensus #3