



Spiritual &
Relational first aid

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Disasters are one of the biggest moral and biblical justice issues facing the church and society.

HDI is an example of an organization at work around the globe equipping the church to help underserved and vulnerable populations challenged by disasters and humanitarian crises.

The one- or two-page resources are practical how-to guides for a variety of disaster spiritual and emotional care topics.

- [Assessing Survivors Mental Health](#)
- [Listening and Attending Skills](#)
- [Disaster Spiritual Care Points of Consensus](#)
- [Helping Children Cope with Traumatic Events](#)
- [How to Minister to Disaster Survivors](#)
- [Helping Volunteers Talk About Stress](#)
- [How to Refer Disaster Survivors for Mental Health Care](#)
- [Recognizing and Preventing Burnout In Yourself](#)
- [Strategies for Self-Care](#)
- [Helping Volunteers Talk About Stress](#)
- [How to Refer Disaster Survivors for Mental Health Care](#)
- [Tip Sheet: Confession: The Posture for Engaging in Justice Work](#)
- [Slow Kingdom Coming](#)
- [Ethical Storytelling](#)

<https://www.wheaton.edu/academics/academic-centers/humanitarian-disaster-institute/resources/>



A close-up, low-angle shot of a person's legs and feet as they run on a rocky trail. The person is wearing dark leggings and running shoes with red and black accents. The ground is covered in small grey rocks and dry, brown grass. The background is a blurred, hilly landscape under a bright sky.

Identify your coping style and strength

Sprinters

Distance runners

Israelites

- Exodus 14 – the great escape
- Exodus 15 - the song of Moses & Miriam
- Exodus 15: The waters of Marah (3 days later...)
- Great in a crisis response, grumbling in the longer process



The Double ABC-X Stress Model

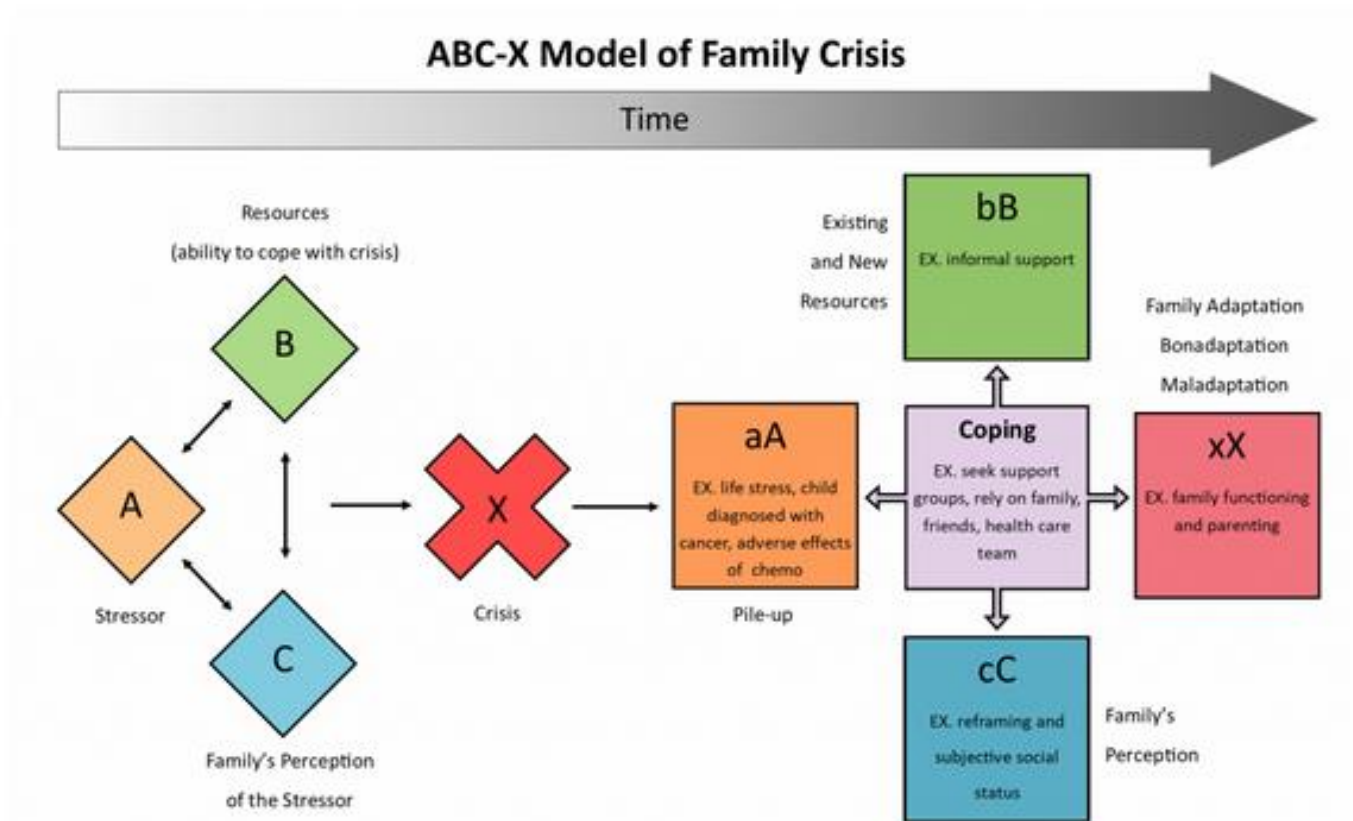


Figure 1. The image above is an adaptation of the ABC-X model by McCubbin, H. I., & Patterson, J. M. (1983). *The family stress process: The Double ABCX Model of family adjustment and adaptation.* In H. I. McCubbin, M. Sussman, & J. M. Patterson (Eds.), *Social stress and the family: Advances and developments in family stress theory and research* (pp. 7-37). Haworth.



Types of stressors

- Psychological
- Relational
- Situational



Psychological Stressors

Murthy, R.S. & Lakshminarayana, R (2006)

Women are more affected than men

Prevalence rates connected to degree of exposure AND resources of physical and emotional support.

Spiritual & Relational coping strategies reduce the impact of the exposure



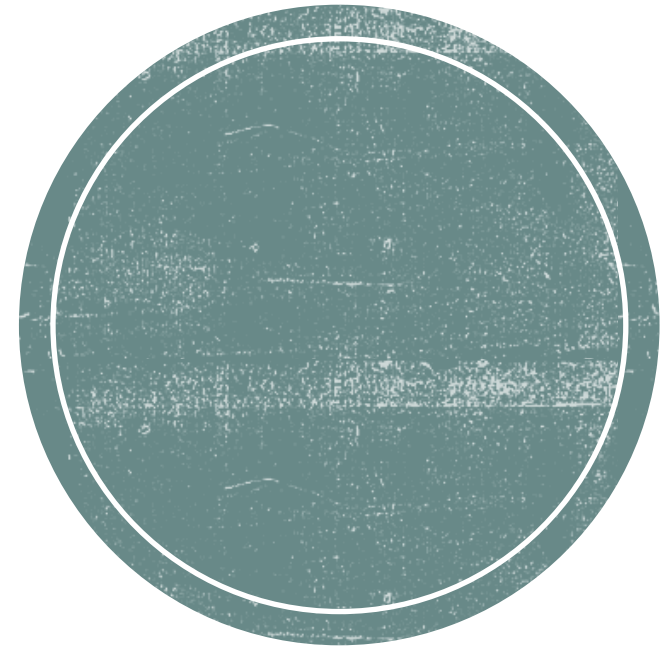
Relational stressors

Long, E., Patterson, S., Maxwell, K., Blake, C., Boso Perez, R., Lewis, R, McCann, M., Riddell, J., Skivington, K., Wilson-Lowe, R., & Mitchell, KR (2021). Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on social relationships and health. *J. of Epidemiology & Community Health, vol 76(2).*

- Isolation is the biggest threat
- Relationships
 - Social Networks
 - Social Support
 - Social Interaction
 - Intimacy



COVID-19 SITUATION



COVID REQUIRED Behavior Change



We changed how we interacted

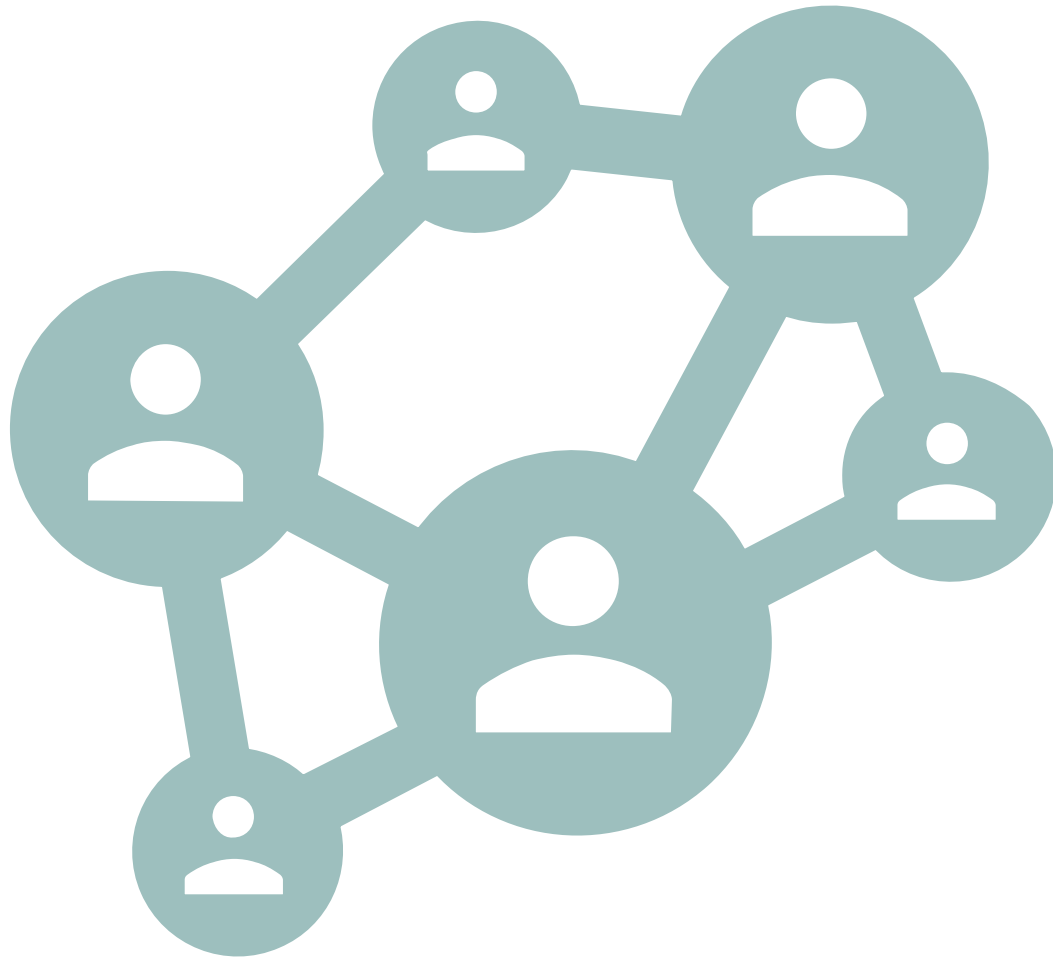
- Isolation
- Social distancing
- Reduced physical contact
- Reduced frequency & duration of contact
- Increased contact and intensity with immediate roommates/family members



We started perceiving others as a potential health risk and threat.



**IT IS NOT GOOD
TO BE ALONE
GEN 2:18**



Social Networks

- MINUTE DISCUSSION
with your neighbor
- Who was in your social network prior to COVID?
- Who was in your social bubble?
- When did you pop that bubble?



Social Networks

- Tend to be people similar to self
 - Close friends
 - Family
 - Church
- COVID restrictions reduced the contact within social networks
- Led to isolation, increasing homogeneity in views, worsening of relationships with young adults (with friends and family)
- Improved 'community spirit' in localized networks (neighborhoods)
- Social networks/relationships with tension or minor fractures, soon tended to develop large fissures





Social Support

- This is one of the most important resilience factors for stressful events
- COVID and restrictions directly disrupted this process.
 - Loss of spontaneous interactions, in-direct support
 - Support from others for family relationships lost, couples conflict increases
 - Unclear if and how virtual support was experienced
 - Research highlights face-to-face (in-person & virtual) reduced depression
 - More extraverted = more distress with restrictions
- Spiritual/political beliefs impacted social networks and supports. Strong reactions to restrictions increased stress and distress in relationships.

Social & Interactional Norms

- Relationship norms and expectations build trust, belonging, and identity.
 - Handshake
 - Passing the peace
 - Affection: hugs, kisses, physical contact
- Frequent changes of the norms
- Previous interactions now re-examined and assessed
 - Other vulnerability – Christian charity
 - Tolerance of risk – individual freedom and agency
- The instability of norms led to cognitive dissonance, awkwardness, uncertainty, strain, and difficulty to encode/decode interactions.



Norms

Loss around rituals

- Church events, weddings, baptisms, communion
- Graduations
- Gatherings, concerts, sporting events

Weaken sense of togetherness

- Disengage from church
- Work
- Lack sense of belonging



Spiritual issues

- Stressors
 - Social norm issues
 - Sense of community v. individualism
 - Lost trust in God and others
- Resilient factors
 - Community support
 - Use of technology for connection
 - Spiritual practices in close network
 - Examples of Lament
 - Remembering God's faithfulness

Jer 16: 1-9

Called to isolation

Not attending rituals

Impacts his relationship with
God in the short term – Lament
Accuses God

Recalls past relationship

God's promises

God's character

Hope on the other side of messy
complexity



Intimacy

- Closeness and emotional connection fulfills vital human needs
 - **Zephaniah 3:17**
The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.
- Vital for mental health and well-being
- Initially intimacy thrived in first lock-down, but as patterns shifted and numerous lockdowns ... intimacy frayed.
 - **Philippians 3:10**
That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.
- Discovered couple's intimacy was mediated through time separate.
 - If couples had intimacy issues, being away at work allowed for space for an adequate, intimate balance.
 - Spending all the time together enhanced existing intimacy, communication, connection challenges.
 - **Psalm 46:10**
"Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"



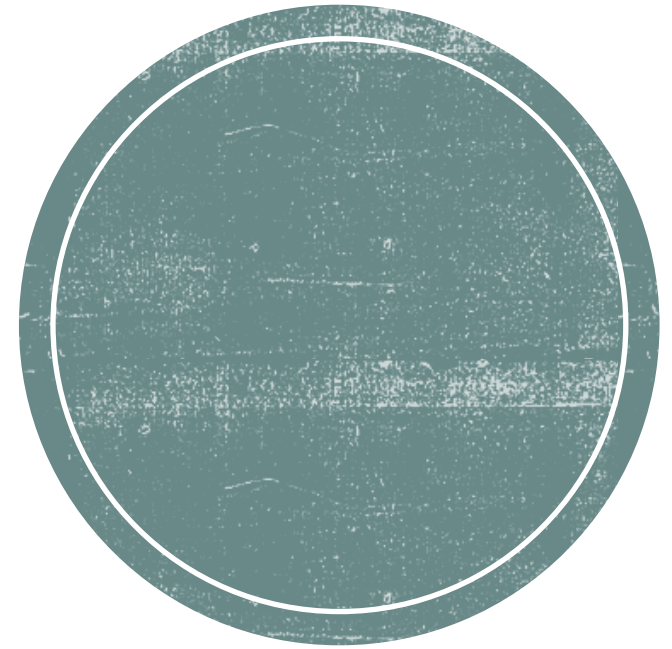
Divorce Rates: BBC's The Life Project

- Divorce rates in and out of the church have risen (in UK 122% increase; and 76% of initiating divorce are women)
- US – 34% increase in divorce from 2019
- China – Divorce rates have double since 2019 outbreak
- Sweden – Steep increase in applications for divorce which is inverse trend from before 2019

- Increase time together; existing problems not previously addressed; reduced outside social support and network; stress from partners mental health issues; changes in rhythms and routines



WAR
&
TRAUMA



Then we add ...

War stress and
trauma

Vicarious Trauma

Displacement

New people added
to country of origin,
strain on
government and
financial systems

Historical tensions
and violations





AND Daily Living



Stress & Resources

Both can be CUMULATIVE





Questions

Relationally: What can we do?

Spiritually: What can we do?



Spiritual First Aid

Aten, J., Shannonhouse, L, Davis, D., Davis, E., Hook, J., Van Tongeren, D., Hwang, J., McElroy-Heltzel, S., Schrubba, A., & Annan, K. (2020). *Spiritual first aid*. Wheaton, IL: Humanitarian Disaster Institute

Observation

Action

- **B**elonging – Relationship – provide social & spiritual support
- **L**ivelihood – Losses – Connect to faith-based & community resources
- **E**motional – Distress – Listen & Lament, refer to therapy
- **S**piritual – Indicators of faith – Explore existential questions & meaning
- **S**afety – red flags –refer and report, advanced level of care needed



Belonging – Safe and Social

- Balint groups – focuses on the relationship and well being of care-givers
- Stephen's ministry – resource for the distressed
- Church small groups – provides social network and support
- Regular meeting – mentoring, collegiality, together



Listening

The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists of listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for others is learning to listen to them...listening can be greater service than speaking...there is a kind of listening...an impatient, inattentive listening, that is only waiting for a chance to speak and thus get rid of the other person.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Life Together"



How do we see and relate to others?

We are broken people. We do harm. We struggle. We hurt those closest to us.

What do we deserve?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer refused to judge his jailors. He knew that they were broken people in the midst of their own suffering. This freed him to respond differently, instead of returning pain with pain.

Think about your spouse this way:

We must learn to regard [insert spouses name] less in light of what they do or omit to do, and more in the light of what they suffer.

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer



LISTEN

Spend some time Listening
to each other's stories of
stress, trauma, loss,
struggle, &/or COVID



Emotional

- Our bodies speak, and often are emotional speakers.
- Listen to our bodies
 - Breathing
 - Embodied attention
 - De-escalation (moderate heart rate)
 - Emotional regulation
 - Ways to process – walk, journal, crying together, etc.



Spiritual

- What spiritual disciplines are you practicing?
 - Daily
 - Weekly
 - Annually
- Are they a resilient factor or a stress factor?



Safety

- Know your limits as a friend, spouse, pastor, Christian sister/brother
- Know when to refer to higher level of care



Other Spiritual Resources

- Harding, S. (2007). Spiritual care and mental health for disaster response and recovery. New York: New York Disaster Interfaith Services.
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network. (2006). Psychological first-aid: Field operations guide for community religious professionals. Los Angeles, CA.
- National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters. (2009). Disaster spiritual care: Points of Consensus. Arlington, VA.
- National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters. Light our way: A guide for spiritual care in times of disasters. Arlington, VA.
- Roberts, S., & Ashley, W. (2008). Disaster spiritual care: Practical clergy responses to community, regional, and national tragedy. Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing.



Relational First Aid

Talk about it with others, sharing feelings, physical sensations, spiritual struggles

Self-care

- Rest, sleep, exercise, avoid excess alcohol (and other drug use), nutrition

Limit information

- Avoid DOOM scrolling on social media platforms, news
- Ask how will I use this information? Do I need it for decisions?

Service with and for others, doing something proactive and positive

Ask for help from pastors, physicians, and therapists.



Discuss in Small Groups

- Given the discussion and information on stressors, resilience, coping, and relationships ... What are some ideas of practices?
- Church
- Professional counseling
- Each of us individually (body, mind, spirit, relational)

