

LESSON 1—“WHY AM I FEELING THIS WAY?”

For leaders—The most important concepts to remember from Lesson 1 are the three “Reactions to Trauma.” They are:

- Reliving the experience
- Avoiding things that remind you of the event/crisis
- Always being on alert

Opening—Prayer and song

Leading the lesson

- Ask different members to take turns reading through Lesson 1 and the Scripture verses. As you read, stop and ask for members to share their personal feelings and experiences.
- As you read through each of the three “Reactions to Trauma,” ask members to share examples of how people might react in these three ways.
- Discuss the “For Reflection” questions.

“What Helps Children?” Although this section is short, it is very important. Children have different needs than adults. Take time to chat with parents about how their children are reacting to the crisis.

Ask parents to:

- Share behaviors and feelings their children have expressed.
- Share things they have done to encourage them.
- Share ideas about things they have done or can do with the children as a family.



- Encourage children to talk about how they are feeling. They can do this by drawing pictures about what happened, or they may reenact their experiences in their play. Be attentive. Talk about their drawing or play: what happened? How did they feel?

Important—Children are very intuitive and hear a lot more than parents often realize. Please encourage parents to talk about sensitive or fearful issues away from the children. The most important thing parents can do to help their children is to be well themselves!

Individual assignment—Draw a picture that expresses how you have been feeling during the current situation. Go to a quiet place and take time to pray and reflect about how you have been feeling. Your drawing can be something specific or symbolic. If you are comfortable doing so, at our next meeting you can share your drawing with the group. Encourage your children to do this activity as well.

Closing—Prayer and song

1. Why am I feeling this way?

REACTIONS TO DISASTER

If you have gone through a traumatic experience, you may feel like you were knocked off your feet emotionally and spiritually. This is normal. The writer of Psalm 42 tells God it feels like “chaos roars at me like a flood” (Psalm 42:7). Sometimes people try to seem strong on the outside and hide the chaos they feel on the inside. This can slow your progress. It’s healthy to be honest about how you are feeling about yourself, about others, and about God.

1. When things go wrong, **you may look for someone to blame**—yourself or someone else. This is a way of making sense of what happened, but it isn’t helpful. Accepting what happened will help you to heal.

2. **You may feel guilty** that you survived the disaster while others did not, or that you suffered less than others. This is a common response. What happened was not your decision. God has a purpose for the remainder of the days given to you, and he cares for you.

*When my bones were being formed,
carefully put together in my mother’s womb,
when I was growing there in secret,
you knew that I was there—
you saw me before I was born.*

*The days allotted to me
had all been recorded in your book,
before any of them ever began.*

PSALM 139:15–16

this one thing:

The LORD's unfailing love and mercy still continue,

Fresh as the morning, as sure as the sunrise.

The LORD is all I have,

and so in him I put my hope.

LAMENTATIONS 3:19–24

3. You may feel ashamed about the way you are reacting to the disaster. And you may feel embarrassed that you must accept help from others for basic needs like clothing, food, and water. This often happens when you are used to taking care of your own needs or if you were usually the one helping others. Remember that it is not your fault you are in this situation. Others likely do not think less of you for having difficulty. And God is not ashamed of you. Allowing others to help you can strengthen your relationships and even help you make new ones. You may also find yourself beginning to rely more on God than before.

In you, LORD, I have taken refuge;

let me never be put to shame.

PSALM 71:1 NIV

REACTIONS TO TRAUMA

Besides the feelings already mentioned, it is common for people to be traumatized by the experience of a disaster. People typically react to trauma in three main ways:

1. You may relive the experience, either in nightmares or in flashbacks during the day. When this happens, accept the feelings and remind yourself of the truth: you

are not in the traumatic situation again. You are here, now.

2. You may find yourself avoiding things that remind you of the event. These may be places, smells, people, media, or topics of conversation. Avoiding can make your world very small. To avoid feeling the painful emotions, you may stop feeling at all and become numb inside. Or you may use drugs or alcohol, or work all the time, or eat too much or too little. The writer of this psalm wanted to avoid his terrifying emotions: he wished he had wings like a dove to fly away and find rest.

I am terrified,

and the terrors of death crush me.

I am gripped by fear and trembling;

I am overcome with horror.

I wish I had wings like a dove.

I would fly away and find rest.

PSALM 55:4–6

Notice how you are feeling. When you want to avoid something—a place, smell, person, topic, or feeling—try to use some of the calming activities described in Section 2 of this booklet. Little by little, when you are calm, you can begin to face some of the things that are so difficult for you.

3. You may be on alert all the time, because you are more aware that bad things can happen suddenly. You may feel tense and overreact to things. At times, your heart may beat very fast. You may have trouble sleeping. You may be startled by loud noises. If you are on alert all the time, you will wear out your body. You may

have physical effects like stomachaches, headaches, or other illnesses. Be patient and do your best to care for yourself to help your body heal.

If you feel a wave of panic washing over you, try to concentrate on something peaceful and slow your breathing. Count your breaths or focus on objects around you that are not connected with your fears, such as floor tiles or the branches of a tree. This can help you stay present and calm.

After a disaster, you may be more emotional than usual or act in ways that are simply not like you. And with all this going on inside, you may find it difficult to concentrate. You are not going crazy. These are normal reactions to trauma. However, if your reactions are so strong they keep you from carrying out your responsibilities, find someone who can help you, like a pastor, a counselor, or a doctor.

For Reflection

How has the disaster changed your life?

Which of the typical reactions to disaster and trauma are you experiencing?

If you have children, in what ways have they changed since the disaster?

WHAT HELPS CHILDREN?

Children are affected by trauma as much as adults are, but **they may show it differently**. Small children may not have words to describe how they feel, and they may think they are responsible, even though this is illogical. They may go back to behaviors they grew out of long ago, like bed-wetting or thumb-sucking. They may be fearful and clingy. They need to be comforted. Help them to recognize that these behaviors are normal and temporary responses to trauma.

Children also react to the adults around them. Their recovery from trauma will be more difficult if caregivers are overwhelmed by their own pain.

Caregivers may misunderstand children's needs after a disaster. They may think children need to be disciplined more or may punish them out of frustration. They may think that children should be seen and not heard or that children will bounce back without help. Such responses make things worse. Children need to be reassured and listened to. They need to express their emotions, in words, in art, or in play.

In this Bible story, Jesus shows how much he values children and that they deserve special care and attention.

Some people brought children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples scolded the people. When Jesus noticed this, he was angry and said to his disciples, "Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I assure you that whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it." Then he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on each of them, and blessed them.

MARK 10:13–16