

Disaster Distress Helpline: Referral Guidelines / Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

- *What is the Disaster Distress Helpline (DDH)?*
 The DDH is a program of the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The DDH provides **24/7/365 crisis counseling & emotional support** for anyone in the U.S./territories struggling with distress or other mental health concerns throughout any phase of a natural or human-caused disaster.
- *What specific services does the DDH provide?*
 - Toll-free, multilingual, 24/7/365 crisis **hotline** 1-800-985-5990 available across U.S./territories.
 - For 24/7 'live' counseling in **Spanish**, hotline callers can simply press "2"
 - Support in **100+ additional languages** available via third-party interpretation services.
 - 24/7 support via **SMS** (English: text 'TalkWithUs' to 66746 and Spanish: text 'Hablanos').
 - From Puerto Rico, text 'TalkWithUs' or 'Hablanos' to 1-787-339-2663
 - Individuals who are **Deaf, hard of hearing, or who have other speech/hearing disabilities** can utilize the texting option, connect with a DDH counselor via TTY (1-800-846-8517), or dial 7-1-1 or another preferred telephone relay service to connect with the hotline.
- *When should I refer someone to the DDH?* Referrals to the DDH are appropriate when an individual:
 - Expresses **symptoms of emotional distress or other mental health concerns related to a disaster**:
 - For examples of common warnings signs & risk factors for disaster distress, visit <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline/warning-signs-risk-factors>
 - Has expressed a past, recent, or present **threat to themselves or others**, i.e. suicidal/homicidal ideation or intent, when the caller is *not* in imminent danger to themselves/others*
 - When the individual expresses normal, common **grief reactions** over losses experienced as a result of the disaster, e.g. loss of loved ones (including pets), property, community institutions, etc.
 - When the individual or someone in their care **has or may have a mental illness or other mental health concerns affected in some way by the disaster event**, e.g. pre-existing symptoms may be aggravated and their access to medications or other forms of care being disrupted, etc.
 - **Any other symptom expressed by the individual that is or may be emotional/psychological in nature** for which you feel your service cannot adequately support.
- *For what services should I **not** refer someone to the DDH?* DDH crisis counselors do not specialize in...
 - Disaster case management
 - Healthcare advice or treatment recommendations
 - Financial support or assistance (refer to 211 <http://211.org/> or 311 if available in caller's area)
 - Information on specific, local disaster volunteerism or donations opportunities (refer to 211/311).
- *Warm transfers to the DDH 1-800-985-5990 hotline:*
 - If providing a warm transfer to the DDH, please inform the caller first (before transferring) while sensitively & gently educating the caller about what the DDH is (see first bullet point), to prevent confusion & additional distress which may occur if an abrupt transfer is made between services.

Note regarding caller threats to self/others & referring to the DDH:

*When encountering an individual (or a third party reaching out on behalf of another) who indicates a possible *imminent* threat to self/others, disaster hotline call agents/operators should utilize their standard protocols for managing such crises before referring to the DDH, including involving emergency responders/9-1-1 if necessary.