



FAQ

What are the Disaster Distress Helpline's Online Peer Support Communities (OPSC)?

The Disaster Distress Helpline's (DDH) *Online Peer Support Communities* are a national, peer focused program that provides individuals who have experienced a natural or human-caused disaster opportunities to come together for mutual aid, to share trusted resources, and to help one another continue to heal from the effects of a traumatic event. The program is offered online via Facebook Groups, and is monitored 24/7/365 by a dedicated Crisis Center to provide support to members who may be experiencing emotional distress and need additional support.

Who are the Disaster Distress Helpline's Online Peer Support Communities for and how can someone join?

Each DDH OPSC Facebook Group is private and dedicated to a specific disaster-related community, with the first community being launched dedicated to healthcare workers impacted by COVID-19. Peers who fit the criteria for this and other communities that will eventually be offered will need to request membership through the DDH Online Peer Support Communities Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/DDHpeersupport>. In this main Facebook page you'll find the option to join a particular Facebook Group (DDH Online Peer Support Community); select the group you wish to join, and then choose the **member request** option. You will be asked 3 questions which all potential members must answer in order to join the community.

What happens once a peer is accepted into the group?

Members of a DDH OPSC Facebook Group will be able to connect with other peers who have similar backgrounds and experiences, and engage with DDH Peer Supporters who have received training and who will assist Vibrant in moderating the communities. DDH OPSC community members (and Peer Supporters) can initiate posts on topical discussions meant to support healing and recovery from disaster, comment on other community member posts, and share trusted resources. If a member is experiencing emotional distress or crisis and needs crisis support, DDH Crisis Counselors will be available 24/7/365 through Facebook Messenger.

What is the role of DDH Peer Supporters?

DDH OPSCs will include trained "Peer Supporters" employed by Vibrant Emotional Health and who will be *of* the community, available to engage with members who want to connect with others who have gone through similar disaster experiences and who have other identity characteristics in common. Peer Supporters are not problem solvers; they are compassionate allies that are available to offer encouragement, validation, and their own lived experience as a way to help others get through a difficult time. Peer supporters will also engage members in important topics trending for the population they serve, and provide relevant resources and information throughout the disaster cycle, including in the immediate aftermath of major disaster events and during long-term recovery.

How is a DDH Peer Supporter different than a DDH Crisis Counselor?

DDH Peer Supporters have experienced the same or similar disaster event as other members within a DDH OPSC and so can use their lived experience as a way to connect with peers, offering understanding, compassion, and hope because they have "been there." DDH Crisis Counselors provide crisis support for times when members are experiencing emotional intensity and/or distress and need *crisis* support. DDH Crisis Counselors use an intervention and evaluation approach, assisting community members to assess their level of emotional distress, and utilizing tools for de-escalation, collaborative problem solving and safety planning. DDH

Peer Supporters are staffed by Vibrant Emotional Health and will be available during limited days/hours, whereas DDH Crisis Counselors are available 24/7 and staffed by an independently-operated crisis center that is a part of the larger DDH and National Suicide Prevention Lifeline network.

Who funds and operates the Disaster Distress Helpline?

The DDH is funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA; a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) and is administered by the nonprofit Vibrant Emotional Health; Vibrant also administers the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-TALK) for SAMHSA, of which the DDH is a sub-network. Learn more about SAMHSA at <https://www.samhsa.gov/>; Vibrant at <https://www.vibrant.org/>; and the DDH at <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline>.

What if the DDH isn't offering an OPSC to which I identify, but I still need support related to a disaster?

The DDH OPSC will launch 3 communities starting in the Spring of 2021. The first community is dedicated to "Healthcare Workers impacted by Covid-19", followed by a community for "Parents and Caregivers of children and youth ages 18 years and younger, impacted by Covid-19", and a third community will be made available in the Summer, 2021 for "Survivors and Responders of mass shootings in the United States. Our greatest hope is that OPSCs become a mainstay for online peer support and that we will continue to offer new OPSCs for disaster specific groups moving forward. Stay connected to the DDH for program updates. For immediate assistance, DDH hotline 1-800-985-5990 is available 24/7 for general (not peer) crisis & emotional support.

What DDH Online Peer Support Facebook groups are available to join?

1. Healthcare Workers impacted by Covid-19
2. Parents and Caregivers of youth ages 18 years old or younger impacted by Covid-19
3. Survivors of Mass Shootings in the United States

To learn more about these groups or request to join a group visit:

<https://strengthafterdisaster.org/peer-support/>

For media inquiries about Disaster Distress Helpline Online Peer Support Communities, please contact Hannah Collins, Senior Marketing and Communications Manager, at hcollins@vibrant.org.