

Healing Young Hearts

A Handbook of Practical Teaching
Material for Disaster Recovery

Part Four: Healing for Teachers and Volunteers



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Healing Young Hearts

A Handbook of Practical Teaching Material for Disaster Recovery

Healing Young Hearts was produced by a volunteer multinational team of foreign and Chinese educators, writers and psycho-social experts, who joined together in a cooperative effort to assist children and teachers in China after the devastating Sichuan earthquake in 2008. The book was approved for use in school by the China National Ministry of Education, and was used by the International Red Cross, as well as UNICEF's Child-friendly spaces projects within the quake zone.

It is our goal to provide "Healing Young Hearts: A Handbook of Practical Teaching Material for Disaster Recovery" to any school, NGO or government agency working with children affected by the disaster. This is possible because the authors of the handbook are accepting no profit from the printing of the material. We are devoted to providing teachers with the tools and training needed to help children along the difficult long-term road to recovery in the years following the earthquake.

Make Your Classroom a Haven of Healing

The Healing Young Hearts Handbook provides examples of activities and lesson plans that will aid the emotional healing of children traumatized by the earthquake. The material for different age groups may be incorporated into teaching curriculums during the ongoing recovery phase, or used by teachers and volunteers as a guide to create their own lesson plans tailored to the children's current emotional needs. The collection of activity worksheets, coloring pages, finger puppets, and character building stories for children can be used in classrooms or therapeutic recreational activities.

The practical teaching tools found in the handbook will equip teachers with material that can accelerate the children's recovery, and guide them along the path to a brighter, happier future. It is not a form of psychotherapy, but rather draws on the principles of positive psychology as children engage in uplifting activities and opportunities for emotional expression. It is possible for traumatized children to experience deep emotional healing, and we are convinced that teachers, and those working directly with the children, are in an excellent position to facilitate the process. The love and care they show each child will be the magic that brings about the miracle of recovery.

An Overview of the Healing Young Hearts Handbook

Part One: Healing Young Hearts Through Communication ***Puppets, Character Building Stories, Drawing and Discussion***

Children need to be able to discuss and express their fears, worries, hopes and dreams. Teachers can use the materials and activity suggestions in this handbook to facilitate active classroom communication. Children are magically drawn to puppets, and will often relate and interact with them more easily than with adults. They also love stories, and during a time when their world has been turned upside down, their young minds desperately need to hear tales that engender hope, love and personal triumph. Puppets and storytelling can be used to reach out to children who have been affected by disaster, both to comfort them as well as to encourage them to communicate.

Drawing is a nonverbal means of communication that allows children to express their feelings and work through conflict. This section provides lesson plan ideas, worksheets, stories, and tips for guiding children through activities that promote healthy communication skills

A section for teenagers has been included detailing ways to use discussion circles in classroom settings to help teenagers recognize the positive and negative coping skills they employ in their reactions to stress. Examples of discussion circle topics, dialogues, and activities to use when leading group discussion is provided. Additionally, get-to-know-you style "icebreaker" questions, and worksheet activities designed to help young people identify and express emotions, are included.

Part Two: Healing Young Hearts Through Music ***Chasing Away the Shadows of Trauma with Music***

Music is a medicine for broken hearts, a magic that heals wounded spirits. Therapeutic musical activities provide a healing emotional release for children haunted by the shadows of disaster. Untreated trauma can develop into problems that affect the way children interact and relate with others, affecting their performance in school, as well as their physical and mental health. Creative outlets involving musical activities can lift the effects of trauma. Often children and adults have no words to describe their pain, but the pure emotional release of participating in a creative art can aid in healing.

This section explains the principles of musical therapy, and guides teachers in conducting activities such as making simple musical instruments, using music to express emotion, ideas for musical games, combining story-telling and puppet activities with music, and teaching children self-soothing techniques.

Part Three: Healing Young Hearts Through Play

Games for Children in Disaster Recovery

Games can teach and heal. Learning to play again after a disaster is a vital part of recovery for young people, and it is one of the easiest therapies in the world to implement. Games provide an outlet for emotions in a playful way, in a safe environment. Unhappy individuals often lack the ability to identify and express emotion. Failure to successfully communicate emotional needs and interact with others in meaningful ways is often a root cause of depression.

This section provides detailed instructions for indoor and outdoor games for both large and small groups. Examples of guided discussions for use in games can help children work through issues such as overcoming fear, self control and anger management, hope for the future, bonding and making new friends, perseverance, and team-working.

Part Four: Healing For Teachers and Volunteers

The Effects of Stress and the Need for Self-care

This section is dedicated to helping teachers and volunteers understand their own needs after a disaster in both the initial and long-term recovery phases. It briefly outlines reactions to traumatic stress, and the importance of emotional and physical self-care for those working in disaster areas.

As you provide the children with opportunities to participate in comforting, uplifting activities, you will create a haven in your classroom and the healing process will begin.

Please contact us at: healingyounghearts@gmail.com

Part 4 - Healing For Teachers and Volunteers:

UNDERSTANDING YOUR OWN NEEDS AFTER A DISASTER

Educating and training children is a specialized job that can't be filled by just anyone. It takes a special person to fill that role. You, who care for the children of today, are caring for the future of tomorrow and a great responsibility rests in your hands.

In order to do your vital and important job, you must make sure that you not only care for others, but that you take the time to care for yourself as well. If you have experienced a disaster event, or are caring for those who have, you must not ignore your own needs. You may find yourself tired, drained, exhausted, confused or deeply saddened by the events that have taken place, all of which are normal emotions. You will need time to recover, and time to understand and resolve the difficulties you have experienced.

Love, care and emotional healing is not just for children, but a need for you as well. Just as your students have a vital need to express their emotions, and partake of uplifting and encouraging literature, music and activities, so do you. With time your life will begin to come back into focus.

Over the long term, the difficulties you are now experiencing can strengthen you. It has been said that the strongest wood grows on the sides of mountains that endure the fiercest winds. Centuries ago, violin makers discovered this and climbed to desolate peaks to collect this treasured wood because with it they were able to make instruments with hauntingly beautiful sound and resonance. Nothing else could compare to this fine quality timber that had endured such difficult circumstances.

The same can be true of your life. It can become the instrument on which beautiful and moving music is played, enhanced by the difficult circumstances you have suffered. Make time for your own healing, so that you can find such significance in the midst of sadness. Take time to seek out caring individuals who can provide you with the emotional support you need during this troubled and difficult time in your life. Let your grief become a catalyst in your life so that you can comfort and strengthen others through what you learn. If you recognize your own needs, and refill the empty cup of your heart, you will find that you have much to give.

The following italicized text was adapted and compiled from material and resources made available by the School Mental Health Project/Center for Mental Health in Schools Resources, UCLA Dept. of Psychology Website and the University of Illinois Extension Disaster Resources Website

WHAT YOU MAY BE EXPERIENCING:

The material presented here is meant to help you understand what you may be feeling during and after a disaster. It briefly outlines suggestions to help guide you along the road to emotional recovery. It is by no means a complete guide to so vast a topic, but it will be of help to you in recognizing the things you are experiencing.

The impact of a disaster or traumatic event goes far beyond the immediate devastation caused by the initial destruction. Just as it takes time to reconstruct damaged buildings, it takes time to grieve and rebuild our lives. Life may not return to normal for months, or even years, following a disaster or traumatic event. There may be changes in living conditions that cause changes in day-to-day activities, leading to strains in relationships, changes in expectations, and shifts in responsibilities. These disruptions in relationships, roles, and routines can make life unfamiliar or unpredictable.

A disaster or traumatic event can have far-reaching effects in several major areas of our lives, making rebuilding our emotional lives extremely difficult. However, sometimes just knowing what to expect can help ease the transition back to a normal life. As you and your family begin to rebuild your lives, you may face any or all of the situations described below:

Personal Uncertainties

- *Feeling mentally drained and physically exhausted is normal and common.*
- *The loss of a home, business, or income may result in a loss of self-esteem.*
- *Unresolved emotional issues or pre-existing problems and previous losses may resurface.*
- *Anniversaries of the disaster or traumatic event remind us of our losses. This reaction may be triggered by the event date each month and may be especially strong on the 1-year anniversary.*

Family Relationship Changes

- *Relationships may become stressed when everyone's emotions are closer to the surface, and conflicts with spouses and other family members may increase.*
- *When homes are destroyed or damaged, families may have to live in temporary housing or with relatives and friends, leading to overcrowding and added tension.*
- *Family members or friends may be forced to move out of the area, disrupting relationships and usual support systems.*
- *Parents may be physically or emotionally unavailable to their children following a disaster or traumatic event, because they are busy cleaning up or are preoccupied, distracted, or distressed by difficulties related to the event.*
- *Parents may become overprotective of their children and their children's safety.*
- *Children may be expected to take on more adult roles, such as watching siblings or helping with cleanup efforts, leaving less time to spend with friends or participate in routine activities, such as summer camp or field trips.*

Work Disruptions

- *Fatigue and increased stress from preoccupation with personal issues can lead to poor work performance.*
- *Conflicts with co-workers may increase, due to the added stress.*
- *Businesses may be forced to lay off employees, or company work hours and wages may be cut.*

- *Reduced income may require taking a second job.*
- *Daily travel and commute patterns are disrupted, due to the loss of a car or road reconstruction.*

Financial Worries

- *Those who experience work disruptions may be unable to regain their previous standard of living, leading to financial concerns and unpaid bills.*
- *Seeking financial assistance to rebuild and repair damages adds to the already high levels of stress caused by the disaster or traumatic event, and the hassles of dealing with bureaucracy can add to the frustration.*

REACTIONS TO TRAUMATIC STRESS IN A DISASTER

If you have survived a disaster or are working with students who have, it is helpful to understand the different phases of stress, and how they are manifest during an initial disaster period as well as during the recovery and reconstruction. If you are aware of what you may face, it will help you use positive coping strategies to face the challenges.

Phases and Steps of Progress to Recovery

Many posttraumatic stress symptoms are normal responses to overwhelming stressors. Exposure to these overwhelming stressors may change our assumptions about life and create distress, but the intensity of this distress will subside with time. Experts agree that the amount of time it takes people to recover depends both on what happened to them and on what meaning they give to those events.

Impact phase

Most people respond appropriately during the impact of a disaster and react to protect their own lives and the lives of others. This is a natural and basic reaction. A range of such behaviors can occur, and these may also need to be dealt with and understood in the post-disaster period. After the fact, people may judge their actions during the disaster as not having fulfilled their own or others' expectations of themselves.

During the impact phase, some people respond in a way that is disorganized and stunned, and they may not be able to respond appropriately to protect themselves. Such disorganized or apathetic behavior may be transient or may extend into the post-disaster period, so that people may be found wandering helpless in the devastation afterwards.

Several stressors may occur during impact, which may subsequently have consequences for the person:

- *Threat to life and encounter with death*
- *Feelings of helplessness and powerlessness*
- *Loss (e.g., loved ones, home, possessions)*
- *Dislocation (i.e., separation from loved ones, home, familiar settings, neighborhood, community)*
- *Feeling responsible (e.g., feeling as though could have done more)*
- *Inescapable horror (e.g., being trapped)*
- *Human malevolence (It is particularly difficult to cope with a disaster if it is seen as the result of deliberate human actions.)*

Immediate post-disaster phase: recoil and rescue

This is the phase where there is recoil from the impact and the initial rescue activities commence. Initial mental-health effects may appear (e.g., people show confusion, are stunned, or demonstrate high anxiety levels). Emotional reactions will be variable and depend on the individual's perceptions and experience of the different stressor elements noted earlier. Necessary activities of the rescue phase may delay these reactions, and they may appear more as the recovery processes get under way. Reactions may include:

- *Numbness*
- *Denial or shock*
- *Flashbacks and nightmares*
- *Grief reactions to loss*
- *Anger*
- *Despair*
- *Sadness*
- *Hopelessness*

Conversely, relief and survival may lead to feelings of elation, which may be difficult to accept in the face of the destruction the disaster has wrought.

Recovery phase

The recovery phase is the prolonged period of adjustment or return to equilibrium that the community and individuals must go through. It commences as rescue is completed and individuals and communities face the task of bringing their lives and activities back to normal. Much will depend on the extent of devastation and destruction that has occurred as well as injuries and lives lost (Raphael, 1993).

This period may be associated with a honeymoon phase deriving from the altruistic and therapeutic community response immediately following the disaster. A disillusionment phase may soon follow when the disaster is no longer on the front pages of newspapers, organized support starts to be withdrawn, and the realities of losses, bureaucratic constraints, and the changes wrought by the disaster must be faced and resolved (Raphael, 1986).

During the stage of acute danger the priority for all is basic safety and survival. Once this is relatively secured, other needs emerge that are both existential and psychological. And once manifest, these needs are typically left frustrated and unfulfilled for a prolonged period of time.

It is particularly important to remember that emotional needs may be very significant, especially for those who have been severely affected. They may only start to appear during this phase. People may also be hesitant to express distress, concern, or dissatisfaction, feeling they should be grateful for the aid given or because they have suffered less than others have. It should be noted that sometimes emotional reactions may present as physical health symptoms, such as sleep disturbance, indigestion, and fatigue, or they may present as social effects such as relationship or work difficulties.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD:

STEPS ON THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

In the aftermath of disaster, you are likely to face a plethora of emotions, questions and difficulties. Overcoming the dramatic effects and changes that have taken place will likely be an ongoing event. Just as full recovery from a serious illness is a gradual process, likewise the healing of hearts and minds wounded from trauma faced in disaster will take time.

Regardless of individual circumstances the journey to recovery involves several key steps

- *Accept the reality of the loss.*
- *Allow yourself and other family members to feel sadness and grief over what has happened.*
- *Adjust to a new environment. Acknowledge that the person or possessions lost are gone forever.*
- *Put closure to the situation and move on. Do not continue to let the loss take its physical, emotional, or spiritual toll.*
- *Have faith in better times to come.*

Try to remember that there are cycles of life. Just as the seasons of nature nourish and stimulate the earth, so likewise do the circumstances and events we experience bring forth inner change and growth. Difficult changes can be frightening, or at the least unsettling, but when viewed through eyes of hope, we can be empowered through these experiences.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CARE

In the days, months and even years following a disaster, you, as a teacher or volunteer, will face many demands. If you personally are dealing with loss and disaster related difficulties, you may not recognize the importance of self-care.

The tragedies you are witnessing, the long hours you are working, and the stress of dealing with others' needs along with your own frustrations and personal losses will be physically, mentally and emotionally exhausting. You can expect to experience many strong emotions including anger, despair, guilt, powerlessness and cynicism. These feelings are normal and are not signs of weakness. You are human and need to take care of yourself before you can summon energy to take care of others.

Here are some strategies to help you manage:

- *Take stock of how you are feeling. Realize that the feelings of distress or anger in yourself and other workers are legitimate and not the signs of professional weakness or lack of professionalism.*
- *Make sure you take a break from the action. If possible, get away from the area where you are working, either outside the relief site or in a room at the back of the shelter.*
- *Take care of your body. As best as you can, pay attention to eating properly and getting some rest. Taking time away from your assignment to eat, drink, clean up or rest may seem like a waste of your time, but it will help you work at peak efficiency and do a better job with fewer errors.*
- *Avoid using alcohol or drugs or engaging in other risky behaviors to deal with the stress and pressure. If you feel these are the only ways you can manage the pain, anxiety, rage, fear or other emotions you are experiencing, ask for help.*
- *Talk to other co-workers or volunteers about your experiences and reactions. You need to share your stories, too. Make sure that you get support from others, not only to deal with the symptoms of stress, but to identify and deal with the sources of the stress.*

- *Exercise. After a day of teaching, you owe it to your body to shake off the dust. It will revive you. The best cardiovascular activities include walking, swimming, and jogging.*
- *Get plenty of sleep. If you are well rested, problems do not always seem so large.*
- *Find a friend. Enlist a trusted listener. Talking a problem out won't make it go away, but it will relieve some of the stress associated with the problem.*
- *Don't feel that you must do everything. You can't and you won't.*
- *Recognize and accept your limitations. Most of us set unreasonable and perfectionist goals for ourselves. But, we can never be perfect, so we can come to feel a sense of failure or inadequacy no matter how well we perform.*
- *Learn to tolerate and forgive. Intolerance and judging others often lead to frustration and anger. Try to really understand the other person's concerns and fears.*
- *Learn to plan. Disorganization breeds stress. Having too many projects going at the same time leads to confusion, forgetfulness and a sense of uncompleted tasks. Plan ahead. Develop your own method of getting things done in an orderly manner.*
- *Learn to play. You need to escape from the pressures of life and have fun regularly. Find pastimes or hobbies regardless of your level of ability.*
- *Learn to relax: Relaxation exercises can be very helpful in reducing stress, worry and fear.*

The following italicized text is adapted and compiled from the School Mental Health Project/Center for Mental Health in Schools Resources, UCLA Dept. of Psychology Website articles, "Relaxation Resource Guide", Trauma Center (MOVA)

RELAXATION

Stress Reducing Techniques

Relaxation and meditation is a healing agent for both the body and the spirit. By definition it is the act of emptying your mind of any worrisome thoughts in order to reach a point of total relaxation and rest of spirit.

Tips for relaxation

- *Find a quiet space where you won't be interrupted for at least 30 minutes. Turn the lights down if you like.*
- *It's helpful to wear loose, comfortable clothing. If there is unavoidable noise, it may help to put on some background music or a tape of natural sounds. Turn off the phone and give yourself permission to devote some time to self-care.*
- *You may sit or lie down for relaxation. If you sit in a chair, it's preferable to have your spine straight and supported by the chair back. If you lie down, you may want your back flat, and legs straight. It's preferable to have your legs uncrossed, extended, so you can feel the flow of energy. These are all just suggestions, however; the most important thing is that you feel comfortable and free to position yourself as you need.*
- *Research shows that relaxing the body will relax the mind, and vice versa. If you struggle with racing, obsessive or intrusive thoughts, it might help to focus on the body. If you have a lot of physical tension or pain, it may be better to work on relaxing the mind.*

Relaxation Scenario For Finding Peace of Mind

Sometimes listening to descriptions of beautiful scenes from nature can help your mind to relax and unwind. The following scenario may be used as a relaxation exercise by adults or children, in either individual or group settings. As you slowly read them, or listen to them being read aloud, imagine the beautiful images in your mind and feel the tension drain from your body.

Scenario: The Garden of the Heart **By J. Riether**

Meditating on scenes of nature in your mind as a symbol and reflection of peace and beauty can give you rest. That's why tucking yourself away in a quiet, secluded place in a natural environment almost immediately puts you in a position of rest and quiet. Whether or not you can find such a spot, you can picture that place of peace and beauty in your mind, and partake of thoughts of peace and comfort. Inhale deeply, and exhale slowly. Imagine all the tension exiting your body as you exhale. Imagine all your worries and concerns leaving your body, leaving only calm, peace and rest. Read the following scenario silently or aloud, pausing after each sentence to visualize the scene in your mind.

Picture yourself walking along a shady tree-lined path on a picturesque day. The bright blue sky is dotted with fleecy white clouds that drift along on a gentle breeze. You feel the soft earth beneath your feet as you walk, and you inhale the scent of fresh grass and wild flowers.

Following the winding path at a leisurely pace, you find yourself at the entrance of a scenic garden. You drink in the charming view: carefully tended blossoms, lush foliage – all perfectly and tenderly landscaped. You choose to enter and walk along a pebble-lined trail lined with pink and white lilies. Their spicy perfume sweetens the air and you reach down to touch and admire the softness of the petals.

As you continue along the path, the birds overhead begin to chirp excitedly as you approach a beautiful tree that stands in the midst of the garden. Picture the long flowing branches and the delicate green leaves that rustle softly in the breeze. The tree beckons its branches before you invitingly.

You gaze up admiringly at the branches and notice they are laden with ripe delicious fruit that is warmed by the sun. The scent is heavy in the air.

Imagine that each piece of fruit symbolizes a gift of emotional healing: peace, love, joy, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, hope. All are there for the taking, each one a free gift for you. You choose to reach out your hand and pluck a piece of fruit, holding it momentarily beneath your nose, inhaling the fragrance. Its scent invites you to bite into it, and you do so, feeling the refreshing sweet taste upon your tongue. It fills you with warmth and infuses you with power.

Picture yourself smiling happily as you eat the healing fruit you chose. It makes you strong. It fills your heart with hope for the future. It makes you want to live, knowing that you have much to give others. It fills your mind and heart with the strength to carry on.

Now you stand up, and shake the soft grass from your clothes. You take a last look at the peaceful scene before you, and smile, knowing you will carry the gift of the healing fruit inside you. You walk back along the winding path, back to the tasks before you, but carry the peace of the garden in your mind and heart

Credits, Bibliography and References

Credits:

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