

Box 14.5 (continued)

developed post-traumatic stress disorder and deal with the emotional aspects of the disaster every day.

In this case, our team would have to help this family secure a new home, furnishings, and clothes for the kids while addressing the psychological needs of the family. All this, on top of the work we had been doing to help the family deal with the divorce.

Fortunately, none of the kids in the fire were injured or required medical attention. However, they were already in a state of shock, trying to recover from the initial panic, danger, and trying to get out alive. However, they were soon told by a stranger that they would be staying somewhere new that night and that things would be alright. Samantha worried about her mom. Was she going to jail? Samantha also worried about her cat, her toys, and her clothes. And when could she go to school?

Three days later, we met with Samantha. I asked Samantha to tell me what had happened. She said that she had been in charge while her mom went to the store. After her mom left, a small fire started with the grease on the stove. Samantha said they tried to put it out, but it started to spread. She said her brother got her little sister while she got the cat and the dog out, and they all ran to the neighbor's house to call 911. She wanted to know when she could go home and if her stuff was still there. She kept apologizing about the fire. She felt a lot of guilt about what had happened.

In such complex cases, we can only imagine the trauma and feelings of loss and worry that these children experience. Samantha felt a tremendous amount of guilt

for the fire but also a great sense of loss for her favorite movies, photo album, and little. We too would feel immediate panic and fear when we're removed from our parents and placed in a strange environment. Samantha's father was really upset with her mother for letting this happen, and blamed her for the fire.

As social workers who work with victims of disasters, we have to act quickly but calmly and somehow manage not to have the situation affect us, which is nearly impossible for a human. We have to be prepared, supportive, and able to create a more calming and safe situation among the chaos. Even though my purpose for being at the home was to investigate the allegations of child neglect, I also had to consider the current situation and the effects on the children and family. Such an event can be devastating in all aspects of life, but it can also be an opportunity to change. In the Japanese language, the characters meaning crisis are "danger" and "opportunity." Many people who have experienced natural disasters use the act of rebuilding as a means of healing. A crisis situation has also been shown to bring families and communities closer together.

Samantha and her family were reunited after some help from a team of social workers, counselors, and family service agency staff. They received an insurance settlement and were able to move into a new home and replace some of the things lost in the fire. Michael and Tina divorced and are working to co-parent their children. I have learned that you cannot take anything for granted because you can lose it all in the blink of an eye.

situations following disasters. The skills needed for trauma on the micro level include immediate attention to fundamental needs such as safety, food and shelter, psychological first aid, and crisis intervention (Fronin & Jones, 2015). One skill that is important for social work practitioners is to develop extended networks of support and service in the communities in which they work that reflect their expertise in information and referral. Social workers are also uniquely trained to understand the culture-related strengths and needs of a community, and in times of crisis, culture can be an important factor to draw on for survivors.

These skills can help social workers reduce chaos in the aftermath by quickly identifying resources and helping create access to those resources, especially for vulnerable populations like children, older people, disabled people, and those living in poverty before the disaster. Social workers have been effective working with children after disasters and trauma by encouraging them to draw pictures of their experiences and support one another by telling their stories in a group, and by playing music that will help them discuss their feelings (Javadian, 2008).



EP 7c

Yueh (2003) identified the key social work functions after a disaster as providing emotional support to individuals and families, consoling them and offering grief counseling and debriefing services, and linking people with needed resources. Debriefing is one way that victims can describe their personal experience, express feelings of grief and loss, and create a narrative that in retelling can help prevent stress and PTSD. Consoling and debriefing in small groups can help victims gain support from one another. Once participants have had a chance to share their grief and tell their stories, they should be encouraged to identify their strengths, promote hopefulness among themselves, and mobilize to take action. This will help victims become survivors.



EP 2

Ehrenreich (2001) outlines a number of principles that should guide our practice in response to disasters. The first principle is that, first and foremost, both victims and relief workers must be assured of their safety and security. This prioritizes access to food, water, and shelter, as well as security from dangers such as assault, theft, or victimization. The second principle stresses the awareness that initial emotional responses that reflect trauma are expected and workers need to assure people that experiencing those symptoms is common. This can destigmatize people and leave them more receptive to mental health interventions. Additional principles to guide practice include taking into account people's culture, traditions, and spiritual beliefs as well as possible differences between men and women in response to trauma.

Young, Ford, and Watson (2007) suggest that there are a number of roles for mental health providers, including the following:

- Protection—helping preserve people's safety, privacy, health, and self-esteem
- Direction—getting people to where they belong
- Connection—helping people communicate with family, friends, and service providers
- Detection—screening for risk of deeper problems, identifying need, and providing crisis care

Micro-Level Interventions

Intervention following disasters includes micro and macro practices. On the micro level, social workers intervene with the individual, and on the macro level, social workers engage in rebuilding communities. These two tasks are interrelated, and although we discuss them separately, should be simultaneous in application. In the cases of large natural disasters, the immediacy of macro support, such as providing food, water, and shelter, may take precedence, but individual attention must also be addressed.

Disaster aid is not included in most social work curricula; however, crisis intervention, generalist social work knowledge, and skills can be easily applied to disaster situations. Social workers train for crisis and trauma on the micro level, dealing with cases of abuse and victims of violence. Because of that training, social workers are uniquely prepared to deal with the complex