

Over 30 years of experience helping improve relationships, mood difficulties, and anxiety. We work with our clients to help them cope with challenging life issues.

Additional Resources for housing, financial support, and other information related to disaster support:

211 Ventura
Dial 211 or 1 (800) 339-9597

California Lutheran University
COMMUNITY COUNSELING SERVICES

Westlake Village
31416 Agoura Rd #115
Westlake Village, CA 91361
(805) 493-3390

Oxnard
2200 Outlet Center Drive #470
Oxnard, CA 93030
(805) 493-3059

clucounseling.org

California Lutheran University

Community Counseling Services

Mental Health Support
after Natural Disasters

In Collaboration with



American Red Cross

After A Natural Disaster

Following a natural disaster, individuals often experience feelings of displacement, financial stress, hardship due to home repair/reconstruction, loss of employment, and changed social services in their communities. Natural disasters are linked to higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other anxiety disorders, depression, and substance use disorders (*Forbes et al., 2015*).

First responders also experience a variety of symptoms related to stress. Fire service and EMS personnel are at high risk for depression, stress, PTSD, and substance abuse, as well as difficulties in their families. These symptoms can become worsened by the highly stressful and risky calls, such as the recent wildfires in California (*First Responders: Behavioral Health Concerns, Emergency Response, and Trauma by SAMHSA, 2018*).

What To Expect After A Crisis

- Feelings become intense and sometimes unpredictable; you may be more anxious, fearful, hopeless, numb, or irritable than usual
- Repeated thoughts and vivid memories of the event
- Feeling confused, have memory impairments, or difficulty making decisions
- Interpersonal relationships may become strained and conflicted, or you may be more withdrawn and avoid your usual activities
- Increased physical symptoms more than usual, e.g., fatigue, nausea, sweating (chills); any pre-existing conditions may become worse; sleep might be disturbed
- Recurring emotional reactions on reminders of the event

When To Seek Assistance

- It is never too early or too late to seek assistance. Research indicates that seeking help soon after stressful events helps lessen the severity of some reactions. There is no one standard response or pattern of responses to a crisis. People respond differently immediately after a crisis and over time.
- Some people do not feel the full emotional impact of trauma for weeks, months, and in rare instances, years after the event. Even normal immediate reactions to stress can later affect the ability to function in school, work, or in relationships.
- If you notice the symptoms described above in yourself or your loved ones, it can be helpful to reach out for support.

It Is Important To Remember

- Give yourself and others time to heal
- Ask for support from people who care about you
- Seek professional support and encourage others to receive this type of support as well. Counseling can be a safe space to talk about feelings at your own pace
- Seek group settings to connect with others and share what you're feeling
- Try to have a healthy diet and get plenty of rest; avoid drugs and alcohol
- Try to avoid making major decisions at this time; this just adds more stress

(Adapted from the American Psychological Association publication, "Managing Traumatic Stress.")

How Our Clinics Can Help

Through a grant from the American Red Cross, CCS is able to provide free therapy services for individuals who were impacted by the Thomas fires and mudslides. We recognize that the cost of treatment often leaves survivors or first responders unable to attain mental health services and we want to ensure that finances are not a barrier in getting the support you or your family may need (*Springgate, Wennerstrom & Carriere, 2001*).

If you would like to begin services at one of our clinics, please call the clinic that is nearest to you. If you are a survivor of the Thomas Fires/mudslides, please let us know during your call. If you have been impacted by a different difficulty, we also have low-fee services ranging from \$25-\$60/session.

During your initial phone call, we will talk with you about our services, gather some general information about why you or your family are seeking counseling, and schedule a first appointment. Our team will help assess the best fit for you moving forward. We offer bilingual (English/Spanish) services in the form of individual, couples, family, and group counseling at our clinics. You will work with your counselor in the first appointment to see if Community Counseling Services is the best fit for you.