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## New UN guidebook aims to improve psychological support for disaster victims



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The United Nations health agency and its partners have launched a [guide](#) to help fieldworkers provide vital psychological support to people affected by humanitarian emergencies.

“In the last five years the psychological damage left in the wake of tsunamis, earthquakes, droughts and conflicts has proven as devastating as the physical damage,” said Bruce Aylward, Assistant Director-General for Polio, Emergencies and Country Collaboration at the UN World Health Organization ([WHO](#)).

“Recognizing that we can do more and do better for the mental health of disaster-affected populations, WHO and partners have developed this guide to ensure that standards and best practices are consistently applied in humanitarian settings,” added Dr. Aylward.

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The guide is being [released](#) to coincide with *World Humanitarian Day*, celebrated on 19 August, which recognizes the sacrifices and contributions of those who risk their lives to give others help and hope.

Produced jointly by WHO, the War Trauma Foundation and World Vision International, the guide reflects the emerging science and international consensus on how to provide basic support to people in the immediate aftermath of extremely stressful events.

“This guide gives simple, practical guidance for supporting people in ways that respect their dignity, culture and abilities,” the three organizations said in a joint news release.

It will enable humanitarian and emergency workers from all over the world to provide critical psychological support to people in acute distress, including helping distressed relief workers themselves, they added.

The guide instructs aid workers on how to provide basic psychological support, such as listening without pressing the person to talk and assessing a person’s needs and concerns. It also emphasizes support and protection to people who may need special attention such as separated children and people with disabilities.

The information contained in the guide can be taught to humanitarian workers within one day for immediate use, the organizations noted.

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