

## Mental Health Monday: Missouri's Crisis Counseling Program

### **Bill Pollock**

Welcome back to Show Me Today, the Voice of Missouri. I'm Bill Pollock. It's time for our Mental Health Mondays segment. And joining us is Beckie Gierer, director of the Office of Disaster Services within the Department of Mental Health. Welcome and happy Monday, Beckie.

### **Beckie Gierer**

Thank you. Happy Monday to you too.

### **Bill Pollock**

If our listeners only knew what type of a disaster we had here, just trying to get this interview up and running on my end.

### **Beckie Gierer**

Right. Yeah, it's a Monday, that's for sure.

### **Bill Pollock**

Well, we've talked quite a bit here on the show about Show-Me Hope and, the crisis counseling program. Explain what the crisis counseling program is and how does Missouri get these programs?

### **Beckie Gierer**

Sure. So the crisis counseling program, or what we call for short, the CCP, it's a short term disaster relief grant that Missouri receives in response to a disaster. And so the most recent disaster being the Covid 19 pandemic, this is a crisis counseling grant that we have received in response to Missouri having a federally declared disaster. So any time, we get a federally declared disaster for individual assistance in the state of Missouri, the Department of Mental Health is able to apply for the Crisis Counseling Program grant, and that allows us to help people.

So we have, oftentimes, public assistance that gets declarations. And that's your roads and bridges. The individual assistance is important to us because that's the people. And we want to be able to help the people in their disaster recovery journey. So we've had several, in fact, since 2016. This is our fourth crisis counseling grant because we've had floods and strong storms and tornadoes in the past.

So now we've had a pandemic and luckily we're able to get this great program up and running and able to help the citizens of Missouri through it.

### **Bill Pollock**

What are some of the services that it offers and does it change, varying on the type of disaster?

### **Beckie Gierer**

Sure. Yeah. The goals really of the program are usually always the same. And that's to help the survivors of the disaster understand what the situation currently is. Now that definitely changes with a disaster, a flood, a tornado looks very different than maybe how this pandemic has looked. And so we want to help survivors understand what the situation is around the disaster, but also what reactions they may be experiencing.

And there's some common reactions that we can have. We also want to help people just reduce the overall stress that comes with disaster and help to, provide emotional support. We also want to just assist them in connecting to the resources that are out there. So we work a lot with the non-for-profit agencies, often what we call the voluntary agencies that are active in disaster or the Vo-ad, and we work hand in hand with them and make connections to the resources or individuals as they move through that disaster recovery.

So it's a very strength based program. We're helping people understand that they are resilient and build upon that resiliency, but also empower them in their journey. And then we keep it very anonymous. It's not something where we're going to do treatment. We're not labeling people. We're not diagnosing people. Instead, we are trying to help educate them through outreach, and we are trying to give them the skills necessary or even develop the skills that they already have there to move through that disaster recovery.

### **Bill Pollock**

Beckie Gierer is joining us, director of the Office of Disaster Services within the Department of Mental Health here in our Mental Health Monday segment on Show Me Today, you would, mentioned common reactions. Are there stages of coping that people go through?

### **Beckie Gierer**

Absolutely. So there's what we call the phases of recovery. And that what you might experience in those phases of recovery looks very different. If you had a picture of the phases of recovery in front of you, it looks very much like a roller coaster. So you have when a disaster happens, the impact of that you can have reactions. During that time, you might find yourself feeling very shocked. You might find yourself panicking, you may be very confused or even have disbelief that this just happened to you.

And then you kind of move up that roller coaster into this heroic phase of the recovery and reaction journey. And that's where you're kind of exhibiting some of that adrenaline behavior, where you might be doing things you wouldn't normally do, that are a little bit more risky. When I think about this, I always think about tornadoes and people coming out of their homes after the tornado and helping their neighbors.

Same thing with floods, helping neighbors out when maybe they have been trapped in their home or have lost things because of that. And then we move into what we call a honeymoon, which is kind of the peak of the roller coaster. And that is where we know disaster assistance is available and communities are coming together to help each other, and we find ourselves feeling very optimistic during that time that things are going to quickly return to normal.

And then we start going down the hill and the roller coaster into a disillusionment phase. And that's where we find ourselves really tired. We have stress, we have fatigue. It's taken a toll on our system. We have grief around the loss that we've had happen, and we may even feel like things are not as optimistic as we thought previously.

And then we eventually move into what we call reconstruction. And that's where you're starting to build that new normal, and you're starting to recognize that this is where things are in our rebuilding of our journey

through recovery. And so we may find ourselves at that point, really starting to cope well and moving forward in, in our, our disaster recovery.

### **Bill Pollock**

You know, Beckie, as you were explaining that, I was kind of thinking and, you know, we didn't have any life changing events because of Covid 19. But as you were kind of, you know, mentioning those steps, I was kind of, you know, there were times where I felt like I was on a roller coaster. And so I'm sure that the people that had extreme circumstances really felt that. But how do you know if you need, help with a crisis counseling program and you need those services, are there signs or how do you determine that as an individual?

### **Beckie Gierer**

Yeah, absolutely. And I really appreciate you saying that resonated with you even because I think a lot of us, when we think back to the last couple of years, and even if we've had prior experience with disaster, we have felt like we've been on a roller coaster for sure.

And so there are common reactions that we expect to see after any disaster. And they kind of fall into four categories. You have physical reactions, emotional reactions, cognitive reactions, and behavioral reactions. So things physically like you might find you're having headaches or problems sleeping. You might have weight change even because maybe you're eating more or eating less. Emotionally, we may be experiencing anxiety and fear and grief and depression. Cognitively, we may have trouble concentrating or making decisions and having nightmares. And then behaviorally, you might find yourself crying more easily. You might find yourself having trouble listening to individuals or even turning to substances to cope. And so we know when you find that you're having those common reactions and again, they're common, we expect to see them. They are going to last, you know, maybe a short term time about two weeks. But if you find that you're having those reactions and they're not going away and they're starting to impact how you get through your day, whether that's at school or work, at home, your relationships, when you start finding an impact because of those reactions and they're starting to just really overtake your life a little bit. That's when we know we need to reach out for help. If they don't go away after 2 to 4 weeks by doing some sort of self-care or stress management, then we know we've got to get help at that point. And there are services out there that we can call helplines, the Disaster Distress helpline, we can call a suicide lifeline, we can call our local community health centers, or we can reach out to friends and family for help as well.

### **Bill Pollock**

Beckie, I usually at the end of interviews will say, okay, give us, you know, information that people can find you and all that, but I think this is a good point to do that. Now, somebody's hearing all of this, and they want help. Where should they look?

### **Beckie Gierer**

Absolutely. So you can always call the disaster Distress Helpline. It's 1-800-985-5990. It's available 24 seven. It's completely confidential. They can help connect you to local resources in your area. You can call

the Suicide Lifeline, which is 1-800-273-8255. And you can also look up the Crisis Counseling program on [www.MOShowMeHope.org](http://www.MOShowMeHope.org) And that has different phone numbers for different counties in the state who you can directly contact in your area.

And so that's a really good resource. If you're thinking, you know, I'm in Cole County for example. So if I'm in Cole County and I want to know who to contact, I could look there and find that it's, a community health center and I know how to get ahold of them directly as well.

### **Bill Pollock**

Beckie Gierer, director of the Office of Disaster Services within the Department of Mental Health here on Show Me Today. Any tips for survivors of a disaster?

### **Beckie Gierer**

Absolutely. You know, there's things that we always talk about and we think about, but we forget about them after something traumatic has happened to us. We know we need to exercise. We know we need to eat right and drink enough water or get enough sleep, right. We all know that and we need to do that on a good day.

But there's things that we need to insert into our schedule that we enjoy. And that's hard to remember to do after you've been through something traumatic. And you may just not feel like doing that. And it can be as simple as going for a walk, taking a 15 minute break, and going for a walk. It can be reading a book, calling a friend to check in and just talk, seeing a movie, going on a hike out in nature, or playing a board game or even doing yoga or meditation.

It's got to be something that you enjoy and that can recharge you, and that can help mitigate some of this stress. We know just for getting out and exercising 30 minutes a day, that can really help alleviate some of the stressors that are out there in our lives. So really important. But I also always think it's important to tell people to remember that it's okay to not be okay. It's okay to know that we need support from time to time, and it's okay to ask for that support, so don't hesitate if those tips don't help you to reach out further.

### **Bill Pollock**

Beckie, how long does the crisis Counseling program stay in effect as we go through this pandemic?

### **Beckie Gierer**

That's a great question because it is a short term program. Typically, we only go about a year, year and a half, but because this pandemic has been ongoing and it's just so historical, we have been operating since April of 2020. So definitely beyond a year and a half. Currently, we are set, to, to end in the middle of June of 2022. But that is very dependent upon what this pandemic does. If we still see a need out there, we may request an extension from our federal partners. Yeah.

### **Bill Pollock**

Show me hope that org is the website. Beckie Gierer, director of the Office of Disaster Services within the Department of Mental Health. Thanks for joining us here on our Mental Health Monday segment. Appreciate it.

**Beckie Gierer**

Thanks for having me.

**Bill Pollock**

This is Show Me Today the voice of this era.