Disaster Distress Helpline: Referral Guidelines / Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

- **What is the Disaster Distress Helpline (DDH)?**
  The DDH is a program of the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The DDH provides **24/7/365 crisis counseling & emotional support** for anyone in the U.S./territories struggling with distress or other mental health concerns throughout any phase of a natural or human-caused disaster.

- **What specific services does the DDH provide?**
  - Toll-free, multilingual, 24/7/365 crisis **hotline** 1-800-985-5990 available across U.S./territories.
    - For 24/7 ‘live’ counseling in **Spanish**, hotline callers can simply press “2”
    - Support in **100+ additional languages** available via third-party interpretation services.
  - 24/7 support via **SMS** (English: text ‘TalkWithUs’ to 66746 and Spanish: text ‘Hablamos’).
    - From Puerto Rico, text ‘TalkWithUs’ or ‘Hablamos’ to 1-787-339-2663
  - Individuals who are **Deaf, hard of hearing, or who have other speech/hearing disabilities** can utilize the texting option, connect with a DDH counselor via TTY (1-800-846-8517), or dial 7-1-1 or another preferred telephone relay service to connect with the hotline.

- **When should I refer someone to the DDH?** Referrals to the DDH are appropriate when an individual:
  - Expresses **symptoms of emotional distress or other mental health concerns related to a disaster**: For examples of common warnings signs & risk factors for disaster distress, visit [https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline/warning-signs-risk-factors](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline/warning-signs-risk-factors)
  - Has expressed a past, recent, or present **threat to themselves or others**, i.e. suicidal/homicidal ideation or intent, when the caller is **not** in imminent danger to themselves/others*
  - When the individual expresses normal, common **grief reactions** over losses experienced as a result of the disaster, e.g. loss of loved ones (including pets), property, community institutions, etc.
  - When the individual or someone in their care has or may have a **mental illness or other mental health concerns affected in some way by the disaster event**, e.g. pre-existing symptoms may be aggravated and their access to medications or other forms of care being disrupted, etc.
  - Any other symptom expressed by the individual that is or may be emotional/psychological in nature for which you feel your service cannot adequately support.

- **For what services should I not refer someone to the DDH?** DDH crisis counselors do not specialize in:
  - Disaster case management
  - Healthcare advice or treatment recommendations
  - Financial support or assistance (refer to 211 [http://211.org/](http://211.org/) or 311 if available in caller’s area)
  - Information on specific, local disaster volunteerism or donations opportunities (refer to 211/311).

- **Warm transfers to the DDH 1-800-985-5990 hotline:**
  - If providing a warm transfer to the DDH, please inform the caller first (before transferring) while sensitively & gently educating the caller about what the DDH is (see first bullet point), to prevent confusion & additional distress which may occur if an abrupt transfer is made between services.

**Note regarding caller threats to self/others & referring to the DDH:**

*When encountering an individual (or a third party reaching out on behalf of another) who indicates a possible **imminent** threat to self/others, disaster hotline call agents/operators should utilize their standard protocols for managing such crises before referring to the DDH, including involving emergency responders/9-1-1 if necessary.