A Toolkit
for Faith Leaders
Facing Crisis
and Division

BEYOND CONFLICT

Center for the
Science of
Moral
Understanding

ONE AMERICA MOVEMENT

The ALRM Framework

The ALRM Framework offers practical guidance for faith leaders navigating crises and divisions within their congregations. Centered around four key steps—Assess, Listen, Respond, and Maintain—this toolkit equips leaders with trauma-informed strategies to address and mitigate conflict effectively. It emphasizes understanding trauma as an external issue and a personal and communal experience that profoundly shapes reactions and interactions during crises.

Using the ALRM Framework, leaders can foster environments where members feel heard and supported, countering the tendencies toward polarization that often exacerbate crises. This approach encourages active engagement across divides, challenging leaders to build bridges even when withdrawing feels easier. Importantly, the framework helps leaders recognize how competing perceptions of harm and morality drive divisions, providing tools to navigate these perceptions thoughtfully.

Faith leaders can apply tailored actions from the framework to promote healing, facilitate open dialogue, and maintain ongoing support, enhancing community resilience in facing adversities.

Acknowledgments

About *the* Partners

BEYOND CONFLICT combines over 30 years of experience in conflict prevention, resolution, and reconciliation with the latest cognitive and behavioral science. Our team addresses the urgent need to understand better how humans think through the application of first-hand experience, rigorous science, and the needs and input of local communities. Beyond Conflict integrates brain and behavioral science research into their Shared Experience Model of conflict resolution and reconciliation.
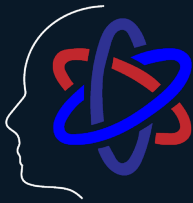
THE CENTER FOR THE SCIENCE OF MORAL UNDERSTANDING at the University of North Carolina brings together scholars with diverse perspectives, experiences, and ideas. Our Center connects moral and social psychology with related disciplines of neuroscience, political science, sociology, history, philosophy, economics, and legal studies. We are producing an original research program regarding what drives moral conflict and intolerance and how to overcome our divisions.

THE ONE AMERICA MOVEMENT partners with faith communities and leaders to confront toxic polarization and division in their congregations and communities. We believe the toxic polarization plaguing our country represents a spiritual crisis, and the faith community has a critical role in addressing it. As a result of our work, we aim to see local faith leaders around the nation working together across divides to reduce toxic polarization, repair and lead healthy institutions, and model the possibilities of resilience and strength for the rest of our divided country.

Section 1: Introduction

We live in a polarized society. When a crisis hits, polarization is inflamed. Whether it is an act of violence in the community, a natural disaster, or a public health crisis, polarization can exacerbate the challenges that tear our communities apart. This toolkit is designed to help you mitigate the impacts of polarization amid a crisis. As faith leaders, you are pivotal in guiding communities through these adversities. Compassionate leadership and upholding your faith's values will help you maintain community cohesion and strengthen society.

This toolkit is tailored specifically for faith leaders like you who often face crises that significantly affect the well-being of your congregation and community cohesion. Recognizing the complex range of crises, from environmental disasters to targeted vandalism to police shootings and other violent events, the toolkit aims to lessen and mitigate the impact of these incidents.

About the Toolkit

As a faith leader, this toolkit will equip you with practical guidance and resources to navigate crises. It provides actionable tools, evidence-based strategies, and practical insights designed to empower you to respond effectively to crises, enhance social cohesion, and foster resilience in challenging circumstances.

The toolkit includes five sections, the core of which is the **ALRM (Assess, Listen, Respond, Maintain) Framework**. Grounded in research on trauma, the ALRM Framework offers a comprehensive and structured response system for addressing the impacts of crises on communities amidst increasing political polarization and trauma levels.

SECTION 1—INTRODUCTION: This section lays out the toolkit's guiding principles and key concepts to provide a working understanding of how a trauma-informed approach can contribute to social cohesion and resilience. It also introduces the Hometown Scenario, which appears throughout the toolkit so that you can apply concepts.

SECTION 2—UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA DURING CRISES: This section delves into the nature of trauma to cultivate a shared understanding of personal and communal healing. It challenges the view of trauma as merely external, highlighting its prevalence in families and communities, particularly during polarized times. This section establishes a trauma-informed lens for the ALRM Framework, ensuring a compassionate and effective response to crises.

SECTION 3 - THE ALRM FRAMEWORK: TRAUMA-INFORMED CRISIS RESPONSE ACTIONS: This section offers a structured approach and actionable steps for a crisis response. The Framework integrates trauma and social psychology insights for effective crisis response actions. It acknowledges the diverse impact of crises on communities and its role in exacerbating polarization, ensuring that you can adeptly navigate the complexities of crises and guide your communities toward resilience. The Framework includes four main steps:

> **Step 1: Assess** the physical security, safety, and mental well-being of those most impacted.
>
> **Step 2: Listen** to the most impacted.
>
> **Step 3: Respond** with the most appropriate actions to maintain community cohesion and build resilience.
>
> **Step 4**: **Maintain** select actions beyond the initial crisis.

SECTION 4 - INSIGHTS INTO TRAUMA-INFORMED CRISIS RESPONSE FROM SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND NEUROSCIENCE: This section shares social psychology and neuroscience insights to enrich your understanding of the ALRM Framework's application in crisis contexts. Integrating trauma-informed practices into polarization analysis strengthens the ALRM Framework and guides strategies for compassionate crisis responses.

SECTION 5 - SOCIAL COHESION AND RESILIENCE IN CRISIS RESPONSE: Examines the indicators of a cohesive community and the risks that erode it, especially during crises. In this section, you will have the chance to evaluate your community's cohesion and find ways to enhance bonds and resilience.

How Do I Use This Toolkit

LEARNING STRATEGIES:

Throughout the toolkit, you will see the following learning strategies to reinforce key concepts:

SCENARIO
The Hometown Scenario provides a backdrop against which you can apply concepts.

PAUSE & REFLECT
These reflection opportunities appear in boxes and offer questions to deepen your thinking about the concepts presented.

PERSPECTIVE TAKING
Brief exercises ask you to assume another perspective to develop empathy and trauma sensitivity.

VIGNETTES
Short examples illustrate concepts in action.

REFLECTION TOOL
A personal reflection questionnaire on social cohesion allows you to situate yourself in relation to concepts.

Depending on your current circumstances, you can use this toolkit to respond actively to a crisis or bolster your readiness for future crises. If you are dealing with an ongoing situation, the toolkit becomes a real-time guide for making swift and well-informed decisions to effectively tackle and mitigate immediate crisis impacts. Turn to relevant toolkit sections like the ALRM Framework for immediate, efficient application of its strategies.

However, the toolkit's primary goal is to elevate your preparedness to manage crises adeptly. To aid your understanding and application of the ALRM Framework, the toolkit includes a scenario resembling a potential crisis you might face. The scenario unfolds in a neighboring community rather than your congregation and assumes someone may call you to respond to incidents outside your direct sphere.

As you progress through the toolkit, keep the following scenario in mind. We will prompt you to incorporate concepts as you develop your responses. By staying mindful of this scenario, you will be equipped to anticipate challenges, craft strategic responses, and nurture resilience within your community.

HOMETOWN SCENARIO

Last week, a congregation in your community posted a sign that conveys a particular political belief. In response, a group with opposing views protested outside that congregation during their worship service. Two days later, the same congregation was vandalized, and part of the building was set on fire. No one was injured in the fire, and though the fire was small and was extinguished quickly, there was enough damage for the congregation to close for repairs.

Your congregation has expressed worry and fear for the safety of those belonging to the affected congregation and for their safety. They are particularly triggered because the targeted congregation belongs to the same faith tradition and denomination as yours, amplifying feelings of distress. As news and rumors spread and emotions run high, some influential members of your congregation have started using hateful and dehumanizing language to condemn not just the group assumed to be responsible for the violence but the broader community the group may come from.

The situation is made more complex by your involvement in a multi-faith group. You have met with leaders from diverse backgrounds, and your congregants have worked together on various projects. This crisis arose just before a scheduled group meeting, sparking a heated debate among members. Some advocate canceling the meeting, citing heightened tensions and the need for internal discussions. Others push to proceed, seeing it as a chance to address the crisis collectively and reinforce unity. This internal conflict highlights differing views on handling the situation and emphasizes the difficulty of maintaining cohesion amid division. As someone committed to fostering understanding across faiths, this presents a significant emotional and strategic challenge for you.

Toolkit Principles

The toolkit is built around four core principles. Remember these principles as you read the content and apply them in your context.

DO NO HARM
The Do No Harm principle emphasizes minimizing further distress or harm to individuals and communities already experiencing trauma. This principle is more critical in crises as you navigate situations where emotions are high and vulnerabilities are exposed.

HUMAN RIGHTS
Upholding human rights in times of crisis is crucial as the risks of dehumanization and discrimination increase. You must ensure adequate and fair responses by integrating principles like dignity, non-discrimination, and safety to foster lasting recovery in affected communities.

TRAUMA-INFORMED
Trauma-informed approaches recognize the impact of trauma on people's lives. Responses to crises emphasize safety, empathy, and respect to avoid re-traumatizing individuals. It is not a specific technique but rather a set of principles that guide how you interact with those who have experienced trauma, including understanding trauma and its effects, creating a safe and supportive environment, building trust and rapport, and supporting resilience.

CONTEXTUALIZATION
It is essential to recognize the uniqueness of each crisis by analyzing the circumstances and tailoring responses. Rooting your actions in the values and practices of your faith provides a foundation for your response, ensuring that you are aligned with the core teachings of your religious tradition. This approach enables you to offer compassionate, meaningful, and practical assistance that resonates with the beliefs and identities of those you serve.

PRIORITIZING SELF-CARE IS AN ASSET, NOT A LUXURY. PRACTICE DO NO HARM ON YOURSELF.

While recognizing your crucial role in responding to a crisis, it is vital to acknowledge your humanity and that the human brain has one goal: to keep yourself alive. To support your community, you must protect your peace and ensure your oxygen mask is secured before helping others. Lean into your spiritual practices, including prayer, gatherings, and meditation. Pay close attention and be curious about your behaviors, reactions, and triggers. Self-awareness is crucial to exemplify the importance of mental well-being during times of suffering, uncertainty, and fear and to increase your effectiveness in responding to your community's nuanced and diverse realities and needs.

Key Concepts

The toolkit defines a crisis as an event that disrupts a community's mental and psychosocial well-being. However, this definition extends beyond mere isolated incidents of harm or disruptions. It encompasses events that not only affect individual well-being but also penetrate the very fabric of a community, undermining its social cohesion. This broader perspective acknowledges that crises can have far-reaching impacts, not just in terms of immediate harm but also in weakening the bonds and relationships that hold a community together.

The impact of a crisis manifests at various levels:

The targeted community or identity group experiences a **DIRECT IMPACT.** For example, an act of violence against a religious congregation or a racially motivated attack can cause profound distress and trauma within the affected community, disrupting their sense of safety and security.

A neighboring community or identity group experiences **PROXIMATE IMPACT**. Even if your specific community is not directly targeted, people may still experience the ripple effects of a nearby crisis. For instance, witnessing or hearing about an attack on a neighboring community can instill fear, anxiety, and a sense of vulnerability among individuals who share similar identities or affiliations.

SOCIETAL IMPACT is when a crisis or series of crises creates a pervasive sense of insecurity and vulnerability. When a community experiences a pattern of discrimination or violence over time, it can erode trust in social institutions, exacerbate intergroup tensions, and foster a climate of fear and suspicion. This societal impact can have far-reaching consequences, affecting individuals beyond the immediate targets of the crisis and contributing to a collective sense of distress and unrest.

Here are some additional concepts that will be reviewed more in-depth throughout the toolkit:

Community Resilience refers to the ability of a community to withstand, adapt to, and recover from various crises, including natural disasters, economic hardships, or social conflicts. Resilient communities leverage their resources, networks, and collective strengths to bounce back stronger in the face of adversity.

Polarization, sometimes called affective or toxic polarization, refers to the intense animosity and hostility between different social or political groups, often fueled by emotional reactions rather than rational discourse. Toxic polarization exacerbates societal divisions, hindering constructive communication and cooperation.

Social Cohesion denotes the degree of connectedness, trust, and solidarity within a community or society. Strong social cohesion fosters cooperation, resilience, and a sense of belonging among individuals, contributing to overall well-being and stability.

Trauma encompasses experiences or events that overwhelm an individual's ability to cope, resulting in profound psychological distress and disruption. Traumatic events can range from natural disasters and violence to personal loss or abuse, leaving lasting emotional scars and impacting mental health. Trauma manifests in various forms, with personal trauma encompassing both physical and psychological dimensions and collective trauma affecting entire groups or communities.[1]

Individual trauma can result from physical harm or emotional responses to shocking events, potentially leading to conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Collective trauma disrupts community bonds and perceptions of safety and meaning, often stemming from events that impact entire societies. While these events may not always have clear beginnings or endings, they profoundly affect the interconnectedness and well-being of communities.

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1   Dr. Stacey M. Boyer, Dr. Kathryn M. Godfrey, and Dr. Vanessa L. Downing, "Collective Trauma: Respond Effectively as an Organization." American Medical Association. 2022.

Section 2:
Understanding Trauma During Crises

Trauma is among the most fundamental experiences of being human. This section explores trauma, aiming to build a shared, faith-informed understanding to foster healing, repair, and renewal. This understanding is crucial for effectively implementing the ALRM Framework, ensuring trauma-informed practices are applied, and actions align with the Do No Harm principle.

When in a leadership position, it can be easy to think of trauma as something that is "out there" — that other people need help, not necessarily us. Yet most of us carry trauma and have witnessed its impact within our families and communities.[2] In this hyper-polarized moment where our religious identities are regularly interconnected with international and domestic crises, we must understand what trauma is, what it is not, and how we can integrate trauma-informed practices into our work in faith leadership.

As you read through this toolkit, we encourage you to participate in the conversation as a role model and a learner of trauma-informed approaches. We need to understand trauma within our community and also within ourselves.

2   Benjet, C., Bromet, E., Karam, E. G., Kessler, R. C., McLaughlin, K. A., Ruscio, A. M., … Koenen, K. C. (2016). The epidemiology of traumatic event exposure worldwide: results from the World Mental Health Survey Consortium. Psychological Medicine, 46(2), 327–343. doi: 10.1017/S0033291715001981. PMCID: PMC4869975. NIHMSID: NIHMS783910. PMID: 26511595. Published online 2015 Oct 29.

Take a moment to review the reflection questions in the box "Pause and Reflect: Navigating My Role As Learner and Leader." You may choose to come back to these reflection questions throughout this section.

PAUSE AND REFLECT: NAVIGATING MY ROLE AS LEARNER AND LEADER

How can my dual role as a learner and leader enhance my approach to trauma-informed practices?

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In what ways can I deepen my understanding of trauma as it manifests within myself and my faith community?

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How can I use insights from my journey with trauma to better support and guide my faith community?

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What is Trauma?

Individual and collective trauma shapes our worldviews, perceptions, and understanding of ourselves and others. The impacts of trauma over time can play an outsized role in how we collectively and individually respond in a crisis.[3]

Trauma is an often invisible, deep wound caused by an individual or series of events that overwhelm the body's ability to cope.[4] Because the brain's sole purpose is to keep us alive when we experience a trauma, our brain and body coordinate to do everything it takes to keep us safe. While in the immediacy of a crisis, these responses may be constructive, when left unaddressed over time, trauma can have unwanted consequences that impact our psyches, our well-being, our relationships with others, and ultimately, our communities and social systems.[5]

It's important to note that no two people experience trauma the same. Two people could experience the same event, and one person could have trauma while the other may not.[6] As faith leaders, it is essential that we avoid making assumptions or diagnoses and focus more on understanding trauma responses individually and collectively and intentionally incorporate trauma-informed practices into our efforts, particularly where emotions and concerns for safety are elevated.[7]

What Can Individual or Collective Trauma Feel Like?

The most understood and researched form of trauma is at the individual level. In the aftermath of trauma, the brain and body have a more challenging time regulating emotions and behavior because the event(s) become fragmented outside of our conscious awareness so that we can continue to function.[8] This can cause us to feel out of balance or out of control as we move between high and low (hyper-arousal and hypo-arousal) responses to the world around us.

Unaddressed trauma leads to adaptations at various nested levels, starting with individual biology and psychology. When unhealed or overlooked, trauma has the potential to permeate entire social ecosystems, contributing to social instability that, in turn, sustains individual and collective experiences of trauma.[8] Trauma adaptations exist at various levels, from personal experiences to community dynamics and cultural influences. However, there is a current separation between research and practical applications in this field. Faith leaders play a crucial role as a connecting link, as they can adopt a comprehensive perspective that includes biopsychosocial and spiritual dimensions of trauma across these levels.[9] Embracing this integrated understanding allows for a more holistic approach to addressing the impacts of trauma.

3   Atallah, D. G. (2017). A community-based qualitative study of intergenerational resilience with Palestinian refugee families facing structural violence and historical trauma. Transcultural Psychiatry, 0(0), 1–27. doi: 10.1177/1363461517706287. Retrieved from https://journals.sagepub.com/home/tps

4   Beyond Conflict. (2019). The Field Guide to Barefoot Psychology.

5   Njaka, I., & Peacock, D. (2021). Addressing Trauma as a Pathway to Social Change. Stanford Social Innovation Review. https://doi.org/10.48558/PAH0-0871

6   Olweean, S. S. (2019). Whole Person Approaches in Individual and Communal Healing of Trauma. In I. Serlin, S. Krippner, K. Rockefeller (Eds.), Integrated Care of the Traumatized: A Whole-Person Approach. Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group.

7   World Health Organization WHO (2014). *Mental health: a state of well-being*. Retrieved from: https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response

8   Ungar M. (2013) *Resilience, trauma, context, and culture*. Trauma Violence Abuse. 2013 Jul;14(3):255-66. doi: 10.1177/1524838013487805 Epub 2013 May 3. PMID: 23645297.

9   Kirmayer, L. J. and Bhugra, D. (2009) 'Culture and Mental Illness: Social Context and Explanatory Models', in Psychiatric Diagnosis: Patterns and Prospects. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, pp. 29–40. doi: 10.1002/9780470743485.ch3.

Individual Trauma

Some people consistently operate with elevated or *hyper-arousal* responses, experiencing hypervigilance and high threat sensitivity, and may constantly feel on edge, ready to act in the form of fight-or-flight responses. In this state, people may feel anxious, angry, overwhelmed, high energy, disconnected and chaotic.[10] Some also may experience a surge of energy to heighten focus and enhance their performance - be it as a student, leader, or other identity that requires dedicating all energy to the task at hand. However, this intense focus on the task can become all-consuming, potentially leading to burnout or neglecting other important aspects of life. Others may feel consistently low or *hypo-arousal* responses in the brain, body, and behavior, including a sense of numbness and feeling frozen as the brain has adapted by shutting down various processes to keep you safe. People may feel lethargic, depressed, detached, and disinterested. Some people may rapidly and wildly fluctuate between the two yet rarely operate in the middle, more stress-resilient zone.

Ideally, people can operate in between these zones. In this "optimal" zone, a person can confront stressful situations and is open to taking risks without seeking constant comfort or control. The body can respond effectively and efficiently to this zone's stress and the outside world. This zone is not entirely free of stress or discomfort, but in this zone, an individual can deal with stressful situations without getting overwhelmed.

Collective Trauma

Biomedical research is limited in collective and intergenerational trauma, and our understanding remains emergent.[11]

Interdisciplinary research has defined collective trauma as experiences that extend beyond individual suffering, affecting entire communities, cultures, and societies, resulting from events or conditions that shape the shared narratives, norms, and histories of a collective identity.[12] Collective trauma can shape parts of our identities, worldviews, and often influence our systems of governance and more. It can result from catastrophic events or chronic conditions that shape the shared narratives, norms, histories, and identities of a collective group. Examples of collective trauma include war, genocide, systemic oppression, natural disasters, and generational injustices.

The impacts of collective trauma can be pervasive and enduring, manifesting in myriad ways within affected groups. Some potential symptoms and consequences include:

» Erosion of social trust, cohesion, and sense of safety

» Increased polarization, prejudices, and intergroup tensions

» Disruption or devaluation of cultural practices, traditions, and wisdom

» Collective grief, anger, hopelessness, or meaninglessness

» Normalization of violence, trauma responses, and coping mechanisms

» Impaired community functioning, resilience, and post-traumatic growth

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10   Fisher, S., (2014) *Neurofeedback in the Treatment of Developmental Trauma: Calming the Fear-driven Brain*, W.W. & Norton, USA

11   Maxwell, K. (2014). Historicizing historical trauma theory: Troubling the trans-generational transmission paradigm. Transcultural Psychiatry, 51(3), 407–435. doi: 10.1177/1363461514531317

12   Comas-Díaz, L., Hall, G. N., & Neville, H. A. (2019). Racial Trauma: Theory, Research, and Healing: Introduction to the Special Issue. American Psychologist, 74(1), 1–5. doi: 10.1037/amp0000442

Or, as author Resmaa Menakem writes, "Trauma decontextualized in a person looks like personality. Trauma decontextualized in a family looks like family traits. Trauma decontextualized in people looks like culture."[13]

Critically, collective trauma can perpetuate intergenerational cycles of harm, as traumatized groups may inadvertently pass on maladaptive beliefs, behaviors, or trauma responses to future generations through social learning, cultural transmission, and biological effects.

Recognizing and understanding the widespread, reverberating effects of collective trauma is crucial for fostering societal healing, resilience, and post-traumatic growth. By acknowledging shared wounds and their varied manifestations in the broader social context, we can develop more empathetic, innovative, and restorative approaches to crisis response and conflict transformation.

Recognizing and addressing our individual and collective trauma creates space for innovative, empathetic approaches to finding a way forward. Take a few minutes to complete the exercise based on the Hometown Scenario in the box "Perspective Taking: Fostering Empathy in Crisis Response."

Recognizing the profound impact of past trauma on individuals and communities in crisis is crucial. This understanding will help you use the ALRM Framework, designed to address both immediate crises and the re-emergence of old traumas in polarized environments. By staying vigilant and informed about the signs of past trauma, you can more effectively support your communities in managing their experiences and reactions. In addition, the issue of polarization can deepen existing wounds and complicate the perception and management of trauma, often transforming potential spaces for understanding into battlegrounds of conflicting ideologies. Recognizing the interplay between trauma and polarization is crucial for any leader, as it shapes the dynamics of community interactions and personal well-being.

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13   Menakem, R. (2017). My grandmother's hands: Racialized trauma and the pathway to mending our hearts and bodies. Central Recovery Press.

PERSPECTIVE TAKING: *Fostering Empathy in Crisis Response*

Directions: This exercise can deepen your understanding of how your faith influences your response. Reflect on your faith traditions, values, and personal reactions as you visualize two perspectives in the Hometown Scenario. This reflective practice encourages viewing each scenario through the lens of pastoral care, emphasizing a faith-driven approach. Read each perspective and reflect on the prompts.

Scenario Recap: A congregation in your community was vandalized. A sign expressing a particular political stance provoked a group from within the town with differing beliefs to protest and then vandalize the place of worship, including setting fire to a portion of it. The situation worsens as the targeted congregation shares the same faith and denomination as yours, causing fear and division. The spread of rumors and hateful language from influential community members exacerbates the conflict and hampers efforts for understanding and cooperation.

Perspective 1: Empathy Towards the Vandalized Congregation

Put yourself in the shoes of the vandalized congregation. Close your eyes and envision the aftermath of the attack on the congregation. Picture the damage done to the building, the emotions of the community, and the sense of fear and vulnerability.

How does your faith tradition guide your understanding of compassion here? How can its teachings shape your response to the suffering of others, including those with differing beliefs?

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Consider your role as a faith leader. How can you provide spiritual and emotional support to help your congregation cope with the aftermath of this event?

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How do your faith's principles align with reducing harm and supporting others in a crisis? Reflect on ways to embody these values in your interactions with the affected community.

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What might you look for in the reactions of congregants experiencing trauma as a result of the incidents? Consider both emotional responses and physical behaviors that might indicate trauma.

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Perspective 2: Accountability Within the Perpetrating Faith Community

Now, let's flip the script and imagine that those responsible for the attack were from your faith community. Visualize the group's actions as they vandalize the neighboring congregation. Consider the motivations behind their actions and the consequences of their behavior.

How does your faith address justice and righteousness, and how do these concepts relate to the group's actions? Do your teachings challenge or contradict their behavior?

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How do your faith values shape your response to your community members' actions? Consider ways to uphold these principles while addressing the harm caused.

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Consider strategies to promote accountability and reconciliation in your faith community. How can you balance healing and care with the need to hold groups accountable?

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What might you look for in the reactions of your faith community members who may be experiencing trauma, guilt, or confusion as a result of their actions or the actions of their peers?

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Section 3:
The ALRM Framework: Trauma-Informed Crisis Response

The ALRM Framework draws on insights gained through research on conflict, social cohesion, trauma, and crisis management. It is primarily designed for individual use, with complementary, group-based practices and resources in the annex. The Framework recognizes the nuanced ways crises affect communities, acknowledging that faith leaders are pivotal in shaping the community's response.

The ALRM Framework introduces actions that directly address behaviors that feed polarization. Polarization often drives communities and individuals to retreat into their respective corners, fostering environments of mistrust and resistance against collaboration. Many of the actions in the ALRM Framework challenge you to actively counteract these tendencies. The actions laid out challenge you to reach across divides, even when it seems easier not to.

My Community is Experiencing a Crisis; Now What?

Turn to the four-step ALRM Framework to guide and inform your actions.

Here is how to use the ALRM Framework:

» Each step—Assess, Listen, Respond, Maintain—has a chart to fill out organized by focus area. Each focus area has a set of potential actions, and next to each action is a column with guiding questions to help you reflect on it.

» In the empty column, write down your observations and the next steps related to the action. Together, your responses will form your crisis-response strategy.

The actions on each chart are not listed in any order of importance or chronologically, nor are they intended to be exhaustive; instead, they are meant to give y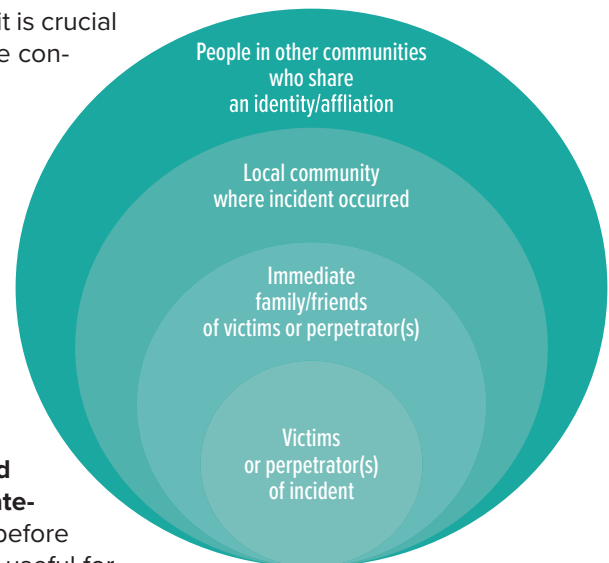ou a range of ideas to guide you. You also do not need to use every action item; only apply the most appropriate for your situation.

How Do I Communicate with Those Affected by Trauma - The Ring Theory

Before progressing through the steps of the ALRM Framework, it is crucial to strategically tailor your actions to those most impacted by the conflict. To facilitate this, let's apply The Ring Theory.[14]

This tool assesses how you view your proximity to the conflict and its impact, determining whether you are at the center or an outer ring of the crisis. Such clarity allows you to effectively customize your actions within the ALRM Framework to meet the specific needs of different community layers. The Ring Theory ensures that your responses are impactful and appropriately sensitive, promoting empathy, understanding, and effective communication. Keeping those most affected at the center encourages supportive and mindful actions during challenging times.

This toolkit component is designed for <u>individual use</u> to aid in personal reflection on boundaries and communication strategies. It is intended to help you explore these aspects privately before integrating insights into group interactions, which is particularly useful for those dealing with boundary issues and communication challenges. However, <u>it is not suitable for use in group settings during crises,</u> as it may unintentionally deepen polarization and intensify feelings of othering as, in the context of deep divisions, some affected groups may feel alienated by their positioning. Please use this tool for personal development first and cautiously introduce the learnings into group discussions once personal insights have been fully processed.

People in other communities
who share
an identity/affliation

Local community
where incident occurred

Immediate
family/friends
of victims or perpetrator(s)

Victims
or perpetrator(s)
of incident

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14   Susan Silk and Barry Goldman, "Ring Theory: How not to say the wrong thing," LA Times. April, 7, 2013.

THERE ARE TWO ESSENTIAL STEPS TO THE RING THEORY:

Step 1: Identify the Center of the Crisis. In this center ring, place the name of the person or community at the core of the current trauma.

Step 2: Create Larger Circles around the Center. In this first ring around the center, put the name of the person or community next closest to the trauma. Repeat the process, adding more rings for individuals progressively less closely related to the crisis.

APPLYING THE RING THEORY

To help understand how to apply the Ring Theory, let's apply the theory using our Hometown Scenario from the beginning of the toolkit:

Step 1: Identify the Center of the Crisis:

» **Center Ring**: The congregation directly affected by the violent attack.

Step 2: Create Larger, Intermediate Circles:

» **First Outer Ring**: Your congregation, which shares the same faith tradition and denomination, is emotionally impacted.

» **Second Outer Ring**: The broader community, including other congregations, faith leaders, and the general public, are indirectly affected or concerned by the incident.

You will then follow the respective actions outlined under that particular level. This method allows you to navigate through these three distinct levels of impact by identifying the center of the crisis and using concentric circles to help tailor responses with meaningful impact, relevance, and compassion.

» **Center Circle**: Directly address the needs and concerns of the individual or community at the core of the crisis. Provide immediate and personalized support tailored to the specific challenges faced.

» **Intermediate Circle**: Extend compassionate, external, and material support to those physically closest to the crisis. Offer assistance and understanding while respecting the rules of communication within the Ring Theory.

» **Outer Circles**: Acknowledge the broader societal impact and engage in actions that contribute positively to the collective healing process. Communicate responsibly and empathetically, considering the guidelines for speaking to smaller rings.

COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES FOR THE RING THEORY:

» **Rules of Communication:** Individuals in the center ring (directly impacted) can express their thoughts or feelings to anyone, anywhere. Those in outer rings (less directly affected) can also express themselves, but only to people in larger rings.

» **Speaking to Smaller Rings:** When communicating with individuals in smaller rings, closer to the center of the crisis, prioritize compassion and offer support or assistance. Actively listen to their experiences and needs; avoid giving advice and refrain from sharing personal experiences or complaints. Focus on providing tangible support and comforting responses to help alleviate their distress and navigate their challenges.

» **Comfort "IN," Dump "OUT":** Share your emotions, complaints, or concerns with someone in a larger ring. Avoid directing complaints or emotional expressions toward individuals dealing more directly with the crisis.

» **Avoid Dumping into Smaller Rings:** Refrain from complaining or expressing personal difficulties to someone in a smaller ring, as it may not be helpful. Focus on supporting the community in the center ring rather than centering your issues.

Now that you've situated yourself and others concerning the Ring Theory, let's move to the first step in the ALRM Framework.

 HOMETOWN SCENARIO: THE ALRM FRAMEWORK IN ACTION

Here is an example that illustrates the outcomes of employing the ALRM Framework within the context of the Hometown Scenario.

Immediately after the incident, you used the ALRM Framework and discovered that your security measures were outdated, prompting immediate enhancements to your safety protocols, which you communicated to your congregation (e.g., upgrading security systems and training staff in emergency response). Now, recognizing the effects of trauma, you also organized trauma-sensitive listening circles with the assistance of mental health professionals. This act provided a space for members to voice their concerns and fears. At the same time, a faith leader in your community from a different religious and political background also utilized the ALRM Framework. This leader contacted you and the vandalized congregation right after the incident to express their sympathies and offer assistance, including using their place of worship for gatherings and prayer services. This leader also used sermons and public platforms to speak out against dehumanizing language and caution against black-and-white thinking. Together, you initiated multi-faith listening circles with other faith leaders in the community. Over time, these circles evolved into a robust network, enhancing resilience and fostering solidarity across the community.

WHAT IF THE PERPETRATORS WERE FROM 'MY GROUP?' DO THEY FIT IN THE RING THEORY?

In the Ring Theory, which is primarily designed to organize support and communication during crises, the perpetrators of an incident generally do not have a designated ring. This model focuses on supporting victims and managing how individuals connected to the central crisis provide and receive support rather than addressing the perpetrators or their roles.

However, when applying the Ring Theory in situations where the perpetrators are from your community, handling your response with sensitivity and a strategic focus is critical. Recognize the complex emotions and the potential for internal conflict this might cause within your community layers.

Here's a guided approach to manage such a scenario:

Acknowledgment and Responsibility: Acknowledge the involvement of community members as perpetrators without undermining the experiences of those directly affected. It's essential to approach this honestly while fostering an environment conducive to accountability and reconciliation. Remind people that while this person(s) claims to have done this in the name of our faith or 'our group,' this is not how our faith calls us to act and engage our neighbors, no matter how different we may be.

Community Reflection: Use this as an opportunity for collective reflection within your community to understand the underlying issues that led to the conflict. This collective reflection can be facilitated through structured dialogue sessions, educational programs, and community meetings to heal and prevent future incidents.

External Engagement: Be transparent with external stakeholders and the broader public about how your community addresses the issue. This transparency builds trust and ensures a supportive network outside your immediate community, which can be crucial for comprehensive healing and integration.

Focused Support for the Center: Ensure that the primary support and resources are directed towards those at the center of the crisis, even if it means addressing uncomfortable truths about your community's involvement.

Sensitive Communication: When discussing the incident within larger circles, emphasize understanding and empathy towards all affected parties. Avoid language that could be seen as defensive or dismissive of the severity of the actions committed by members of your community.

Step 1: ASSESS Physical Security, Safety, and Mental Well-being

Step 1 involves evaluating the physical security, safety, and mental well-being of those most affected by the crisis. It's crucial to have a robust system that directs people to the necessary resources and support services, considering the various types of assistance that may be required. This assessment should be conducted as part of a trauma-informed approach that acknowledges and understands the visible and invisible but felt pain and suffering experienced by individuals within and beyond your congregation. Active and transparent communication is essential to keep everyone informed, involving the congregation, community leaders/groups, and potentially the media.

Now, it's time to fill out the chart for Step 1.

ASSESS Step 1: Assess the physical security, safety, and mental well-being of those most impacted.			
Focus Area	**Action**	**Guiding Questions**	**My Observations and Next Steps**
Safety and Security	Assess safety and security planning procedures in your place of worship. Remind and share plans with the congregation.	Are current security measures sufficient? What improvements are needed?	

ASSESS			
Step 1: Assess the physical security, safety, and mental well-being of those most impacted.			
Focus Area	**Action**	**Guiding Questions**	**My Observations and Next Steps**
Individual and Collective Trauma	Recognize that some community members may be experiencing a level of trauma and heightened stress or fear, causing an increase in black-and-white thinking, hypervigilance, numbness, profound exhaustion, and increased confirmation bias.	What signs of trauma are most prevalent? (e.g., moral outrage or widespread anger; social withdrawal or isolation; expressions of helplessness or hopelessness)	
	Assess the potential for secondary trauma (trauma that can occur from listening to the traumatic experiences of others): prioritize self and community care.	How am I supporting those exposed to trauma stories?	
	Identify triggers within your congregation: are there words, sounds, smells, or other things that could re-traumatize individuals?	What triggers have been identified? How can I minimize their impact?	
	Affirm and publicly name the pain that is transpiring in your congregation.	How can I effectively validate and support those in pain?	

ASSESS			
Step 1: Assess the physical security, safety, and mental well-being of those most impacted.			
Focus Area	**Action**	**Guiding Questions**	**My Observations and Next Steps**
Threat Perception	Assess perceived threats and fears of the 'other' within the community. Help the congregation distinguish between fear and danger.	What specific fears or threats are perceived towards outsiders or differing opinions?	
	Evaluate skepticism or rigidity in expectations for shared opinions within the congregation.	How rigid are the expectations for uniformity in opinions? Are there open discussions, or is dissent discouraged?	
	Identify signs of dangerous misperceptions such as dehumanization and othering.	What are the most common misperceptions? How do they manifest in community interactions?	
	Notice increased exclusion or alienation of individuals outside the faith community.	Who is being excluded or alienated? What mechanisms are causing this?	
	Monitor for excuses or condonations of violence and other harmful actions.	Are there instances of violence or harmful actions being called for or justified?	
	Consider how threat perceptions affect people and communities emotionally <u>and</u> behaviorally. Compare how serious these threats appear in your local community versus at the national or international level.	How are these impacts manifesting in behaviors? How can I respond effectively?	

Step 2: LISTEN to the Most Impacted

Step 2 involves prioritizing listening to and understanding the experiences and perceptions of those at the center of the crisis, those peripheral to it, and what the media climate is saying (and how this influences the perceptions and experiences of those at the center). Use the Ring Theory to guide how you respond to those affected by the event.

Now it's time to fill out the chart for Step 2.

LISTEN Step 2: Listen to those most impacted.			
Focus Area	**Action**	**Guiding Questions**	**My Observations and Next Steps**
Support Systems	Utilize the "Ring Theory" and remember the golden rule: listening is often more helpful than talking. Consider whether what you are about to say is likely to provide comfort and support and avoid giving advice; offer expressions of empathy and tangible support.	Am I effectively applying the "Ring Theory" to guide communication?	
	Offer crisis counseling, mental health support, and general check-ins. This support can include faith-based support and trained mental health and psychosocial service practitioners.	What community mental health resources are available? Who do I need to contact? *See the annex for a contact list template.*	
	Set up dedicated office hours (in-person or virtually) to meet with congregants. Make it clear that these are dedicated and safe-guarded hours for them to share what they are experiencing.	Do I need to evaluate and possibly extend office hours? Are the office hours well-received and sufficient to meet community needs?	
	Notice yourself. Pay close attention and be aware of your behaviors, reactions, and triggers. Seek opportunities to be heard and your mental well-being supported. Practice 'Do No Harm' on yourself.	How am I feeling at this moment? What am I doing to take care of myself? Who have I identified in an outer ring that I can talk to?	

	LISTEN — Step 2: Listen to those most impacted.		
Focus Area	**Action**	**Guiding Questions**	**My Observations and Next Steps**
Bridging Divides	Attend or create opportunities for you and your congregation to hear from those most impacted by the incident(s).	Who do I need to contact? What is the best way to provide these opportunities to my congregation?	
	If members of your congregation are experiencing defensiveness to the point that they cannot "hear the other side," begin by hearing them out: listen to understand and empathize with their emotions but avoid agreeing with stances that pit groups against one another. This approach should be scaffolded with both direct (invitations for cross-group engagements) and indirect (misperception correction via a "trusted messenger" such as - you!) actions to reduce threat sensitivity/stress responses and increase the capacity among members to both feel heard and to listen to others.	What have you noticed in conversations with congregants? Can you identify any changes in congregants when the "other side" is mentioned?	
	Host listening circles with multi-faith groups and establish clear expectations and boundaries to create a safer environment for sharing challenging experiences. You may consider inviting a neutral convener or facilitator to the event.	Who do I need to contact? What is the best way to provide these opportunities to my congregation?	
	Follow media coverage on all sides to hear a wide range of perspectives while centering the voices and realities of those experiencing harm. This step is a means to complicate the narrative and break through our media silos.	Where am I getting my information? Am I adequately considering diverse media perspectives? Is my congregation?	

Step 3: RESPOND with the Most Appropriate Actions

Step 3 involves deciding on the best actions to maintain community cohesion and enhance resilience to prevent future incidents. These actions can be immediate responses or longer-term strategies to strengthen cohesion and resilience further. Only some actions will be relevant or resonant depending on the specific situation.

Now it's time to fill out the chart for Step 3.

RESPOND Step 3: Respond with the most appropriate action to maintain community cohesion and build resilience.			
Focus Area	**Action**	**Guiding Questions**	**My Observations and Next Steps**
Rapid Communication	Quickly (internally and publicly) reinforce core values and openly acknowledge the grievances of those most impacted and those within your congregation. Denounce the harm caused and aim to validate emotions and initial reactions without judgment.	Is there a crisis communication plan in place? How can I better communicate our core values and empathy during crises?	
	Share accurate and factually verified information to mitigate the spread of misperceptions and misinformation.	How do I ensure the accuracy and timeliness of the information we provide? What factors may slow communication?	
	Prioritize rapid and transparent communication with congregation members to ensure their safety and well-being.	Related to security and safety protocols, what is the best way to communicate this?	

RESPOND
Step 3: Respond with the most appropriate action to maintain community cohesion and build resilience.

Focus Area	Action	Guiding Questions	My Observations and Next Steps
Bridging Divides	Reach out to impacted congregation(s) or close allies to offer immediate support and aid. Include members of your faith community in solidarity efforts.	Who do I need to contact? By what date do I want to contact them? How can I provide immediate and practical support to those most affected?	
	Build trust across identity groups in your community through social gatherings (shared meals, game nights, movie nights, etc.) and deliberations (collaborative problem-solving workshops or working groups).	What activities can I help organize to strengthen trust? Is now the right time? Who should I contact for support and participation?	
	Demonstrate respectful and inclusive behavior in your public and internal interactions to be a role model for constructive communication and engagement.	How can I demonstrate respectful and inclusive behavior more consistently?	
	Confront misperceptions and black/white narratives that dehumanize, other, or belittle an identity group honestly and with integrity. Refrain from using inflammatory language or labeling individuals, particularly language, based on their beliefs.	How can I effectively address and correct community misperceptions? How can we do that without alienating or causing people to retreat further?	
	Utilize scripture and religious texts or lessons to share stories of unity, reconciliation, accountability, and solidarity.	What religious teachings can be used to foster a deeper sense of community? How do I want to convey these teachings?	

Step 4: MAINTAIN Select Actions Beyond the Initial Crisis

You should consider taking some actions days, weeks, and months after a crisis. These actions contribute to long-term efforts to strengthen social cohesion and resilience by fostering supportive environments, nurturing positive relationships, and addressing underlying factors influencing community well-being.

You will complete Step 4 once you start implementing most or all of your actions from the previous steps. The chart is organized by focus areas addressed in the earlier steps.

Here's how you will fill it out:

» **Action Implemented**: Write the specific actions you used in earlier steps that you would like to revisit or continue regularly.

» **Impact Observed:** Describe the immediate and noticeable changes or benefits of the actions.

» **Adjustments Needed**: Identify areas for improvement or expansion based on the observed impacts and feedback.

» **Review Schedule**: Note how frequently each action should be reassessed to ensure it remains effective and relevant.

MAINTAIN Step 4: Maintain select actions beyond the initial crisis.				
Focus Area	**Actions Implemented**	**Impact Observed**	**Adjustments Needed**	**Review Schedule**
Safety and Security				
Individual and Collective Trauma				
Threat Perception				

MAINTAIN
Step 4: Maintain select actions beyond the initial crisis.

Focus Area	Actions Implemented	Impact Observed	Adjustments Needed	Review Schedule
Bridging Divides				
Support Systems				
Rapid Communication				
Safe Spaces and Healing Practices				

REVIEW YOUR ALRM FRAMEWORK

Now that you've completed your ALRM Framework, it is crucial to revisit your responses and ensure that you have considered several key factors.

>   Do your actions align with the principles of a trauma-informed approach, prioritizing empathy and support?

>   Have you incorporated the Ring Theory, which emphasizes providing comfort and support inwardly to those most affected by the crisis while seeking external guidance and resources?

>   Have you considered how the media's portrayal of the event may influence perceptions and experiences, shaping your communication strategies accordingly?

Consider the following ways to maintain and adapt your Framework to ensure its success:

>   **Long-term Security Measures**—Ensure that safety and security protocols are implemented, regularly reviewed, and updated in response to new insights or changes in the community's environment.

>   **Sustain Engagement**—Keep the community engaged through continuous dialogue and updates. Establish regular check-ins and community forums to gauge the effectiveness of the measures implemented and discuss ongoing concerns or new issues as they arise.

>   **Strengthen Support Systems**—Develop a robust support system that evolves to meet changing needs, ensuring that mental health resources, counseling, and community support mechanisms are accessible and adequately equipped to handle increased demand.

>   **Monitor and Adapt to Community Dynamics**—Monitor the community's dynamics and the effectiveness of your strategies to bridge divides, correct misperceptions, and foster unity. Be prepared to adapt strategies in response to feedback and changing circumstances to ensure they remain relevant and practical.

By monitoring the effectiveness of your actions and adapting them over time, you ensure the Framework supports long-term stability and cohesion within your community.

Section 4:
Neuroscience and Social Psychology in Crisis Response

This section synthesizes additional neuroscience and social psychology research to enrich the ALRM Framework's application in crisis contexts. By acknowledging the nuanced effects of individual and collective trauma, the Framework aims to construct a holistic approach that tackles immediate challenges and addresses the complexities of polarized environments by cultivating lasting cohesion and resilience within our communities.

Integrating trauma-informed practices into examining polarization underpins the ALRM Framework and shapes the strategies that promote compassionate crisis responses. **In times of heightened political polarization, understanding the roles of collective and individual trauma on our behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions can deepen our capacity for crisis responses to ensure that we are compassionate, empathetic, and steadfast.** Further, recognizing the nuanced impacts of trauma on both individuals and communities allows us to appreciate the complexities that underlie polarized environments. With this foundation, this section delves deeper into the roots of political polarization and its implications on our shared social fabric.

When Trauma and Political Polarization Collide

When trauma impacts our communities amid conflict and polarization, it takes on various forms. Fragmented, disconnected relationships emerge due to the absence of genuine and transparent connections, fostering black-and-white thinking and hindering collaboration and openness while heightening self-selective isolation. This lack of cohesion contributes to collective exhaustion, trapping individuals and groups in a physical and mental fatigue cycle that stifles creativity and collective problem-solving abilities.

Additionally, trauma in a profoundly polarized context can lead to exaggerated misperceptions (i.e., misunderstandings about others) and increased threat sensitivity (i.e., more robust emotional, cognitive, or behavioral responses to threats in our lives). Like an iceberg, much of trauma remains out of clear view but may be seen collectively through public misperceptions and problematic, often linear or dehumanizing assumptions about others, influencing our beliefs both about the "other" and what others may think of us.

Trauma frequently amplifies threat sensitivity as a protective measure, leading to exaggerated perceptions of danger in daily situations. For example, someone with trauma-related anxiety might interpret neutral actions as hostile, triggering a defensive response. These exaggerated perceptions can fuel biased or dehumanizing assumptions about others, distorting reality with stereotypes or negative attributions. This result affects how we see the "other" and shapes our beliefs about how others view us, intensifying fears of judgment or rejection.

Political Polarization

In the broadest sense, political polarization is the growing differences and divides between groups. However, social science research understands polarization as a complex phenomenon that includes several different forms of division. The first is ideological (or issue-based) polarization, which is defined as the movement toward more extreme (and opposing) political beliefs (e.g., Americans' increasingly more extreme beliefs on gun policy or abortion)[15]. The second form of polarization is affective polarization[16], which focuses on how much people dislike their opponents. Evidence suggests Democrats and Republicans increasingly feel the coldness and dislike towards the opposing political party.[17] Finally, there is perceived polarization.[18] This form focuses on people's perceptions of how polarized society is. Importantly, perceptions of polarization tend to be exaggerated and inaccurate,[19] with people believing opponents dislike them more than they do[20] and that opponents hold more extreme beliefs than they do,[21] which drives conflict.

15   Dalton, R. J. (1987). Generational change in elite political beliefs: The growth of ideological polarization," *The Journal of Politics 49*(4)*,* 976–997, https://doi.org/10.2307/2130780

16   Iyengar, S., Sood, G., & Lelkes, Y. (2012). Affect, Not Ideology: A social identity perspective on polarization, *Public Opinion Quarterly 76*(3), 405–431, https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfs038

17   Pew Research Center (2017). The partisan divide on political values grows even wider. https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2017/10/05/the-partisan-divide-on-political-values-grows-even-wider/

18   Enders, A. M., & Armaly, M. T. (2019). The differential effects of actual and perceived polarization, *Political Behavior 41*(3), 815–839, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-018-9476-2

19   Lees, J., & Cikara, M. (2021). Understanding and combating misperceived polarization," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences, 376*(1822), 20200143, https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2020.0143

20   Bruneau, E., Hameiri, B., Moore-Berg, S. L., & Kteily, N. (2021). Intergroup contact reduces dehumanization and meta-dehumanization: Cross-sectional, longitudinal, and quasi-experimental evidence from 16 samples in five countries. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *47*(6), 906-920. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167220949004

21   Levendusky, M., & Malhotra, N. (2016). (Mis)Perceptions of partisan polarization in the American public, *Public Opinion Quarterly 80*(1), 378–391, https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfv045

Evidence suggests that Americans are becoming increasingly polarized in both ideologically and effectively, and yet still perceive that polarization is worse than it is. Notably, political polarization has consequences. Scholars find that political polarization leads people to dehumanize political opponents,[22] and be less willing to cooperate with adversaries.[23] Polarization even drives support for partisan violence.[24] But what are the roots of this growing division in the United States? Research suggests that, at its heart, political polarization is driven by moral disagreement.

Our Moral Minds and Polarization

Understandings of morality are the fundamental drivers of political polarization. Emerging research emphasizes that our views of morality (i.e., how we understand what is morally right and wrong) are based on perceptions of harm[25] and these concerns about harm drive our political beliefs.[26] The more something seems harmful, the more immoral it feels. For example, suppose you see climate change as especially harmful. In that case, you also are likely to see it as a moral issue, and these beliefs drive your political attitudes (e.g., more supportive of climate policy initiatives). Ultimately, we are all motivated to reduce victimization and harm around us. These concerns of victimhood and harm drive our moral and political beliefs but also explain many of the most divisive conflicts we have with political opponents.[27]

The reason harm and victimhood are at the center of polarization and conflict is because concerns about them are based on a matter of perception.[28] People can see harm and victimization in different places.[34] This explains why issues like abortion are so contentious. Person A can look at the issue of abortion and see harm to a baby, thus seeing abortion as immoral. Person B can look at the same issue and see harm towards a woman who is forced to have a baby she does not want to have. This perception leads Person B to believe that banning abortions is immoral. People care about harm and victimhood on both sides, but they see suffering in different places, explaining their opposing moral and political beliefs.

This idea is exemplified by liberals' and conservatives' ideological differences in *assumptions of vulnerability.*[29] Research shows that liberals tend to view some groups (e.g., immigrants, the LGBTQIA+ community) as especially vulnerable to harm and victimization while seeing groups like the police as especially invulnerable to victimization. Contrarily, conservatives tend to view all these groups as similarly susceptible to victimization and harm.

22   Martherus, J. L., Martinez, A. G., Piff, P. K., & Theodoridis, A. G. (2021). Party animals? Extreme partisan polarization and dehumanization. *Political Behavior*, *43*, 517-540., https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-019-09559-4

23   Frimer, J. A., Skitka, L. J., & Motyl, M. (2017). Liberals and conservatives are similarly motivated to avoid exposure to one another's opinions. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *72*, 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2017.04.003

24   Kalmoe, N. P., & Mason, L. (2022). *Radical American partisanship: Mapping violent hostility, its causes, and the consequences for democracy*. University of Chicago Press. https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/R/bo163195227.html.

25   Schein, C., & Gray, K. (2018). The theory of dyadic morality: Reinventing moral judgment by redefining harm. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *22*(1), 32-70. https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868317698288

26   Schein, C., & Gray, K. (2015). The unifying moral dyad: Liberals and conservatives share the same harm-based moral template. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *41*(8), 1147-1163. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167215591501

27   Gray, K., & Kubin, E. (2024). Victimhood: The most powerful force in morality and politics. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/2n9m5

28   Gray, K., MacCormack, J. K., Henry, T., Banks, E., Schein, C., Armstrong-Carter, E., ... & Muscatell, K. A. (2022). The affective harm account (AHA) of moral judgment: Reconciling cognition and affect, dyadic morality and disgust, harm and purity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *123*(6), 1199–1222. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspa0000310.

29   Womick J., Goya-Tocchetto, D., Rebollar, C., Restrepo, N., Gray, K. (in prep). Assumptions of vulnerability.

These differing viewpoints explain many divisive disagreements we see in society. For example, consider the Black Lives Matter and All Lives Matter movements. Liberal supporters of the Black Lives Matter movement are likely to see minorities (especially Black men) as especially vulnerable to harm from the police. In contrast, conservative All Lives Matter supporters are more likely to emphasize that all of us are capable of experiencing harm and suffering. Differences in understanding who is most likely to be harmed or suffer can lead to conflicting views on many divisive issues, driving political polarization. But what are the downstream consequences of disagreement over harm and victimization?

How Different Understandings of Harm Drive Conflict

When people focus on different kinds of harm, they have difficulty recognizing the harm the other side is concerned about. Research shows that people misunderstand and disregard the types of harms and threats opponents care about-—an idea we call *harm denial*— and this misperception drives moral condemnation and dehumanization of political adversaries.[30] When we have different understandings of harm, it makes it challenging to understand opponents' points of view. This is because questions of harm and victimization are questions of fundamental moral rights and wrongs,[33] and moral judgments feel objectively true.[31] Thus, in moral and political conflicts, people who disagree or have different understandings of harm and victimhood are perceived as morally wrong, explaining why we strongly dislike them.

THE MEDIA EXACERBATES THESE EFFECTS

Notably, the media can exacerbate these misperceptions of (and conflict between) political opponents.[32] In the name of viewership, media platforms frequently report on news content that viewers care about to keep them watching the news program. This means partisan news media will often portray the groups their viewers as victims and the group's opponents care about as villains. Such storylines are often in line with our understanding of morality and victimization.[33,35] For example, liberals watching CNN may learn about families fleeing war and gang violence to seek asylum in the United States (victims) and about the Republicans trying to block them from doing so (villains).

On the other hand, conservatives watching Fox News may learn about people illegally crossing into the United States who are bringing drugs and crime and taking away hard-working Americans' jobs (villains) and the conservative communities facing job loss and increased crime as a result (victims). People see very different perspectives on who is the true victim and villain, and these different understandings of harm and victimhood are reinforced by many of the most popular partisan media platforms. Thus, the media is central in reinforcing moral disagreements and polarization.

Take a moment to review the reflection questions in the box "Pause and Reflect: My Moral Foundation and Polarization." You may choose to come back to these reflection questions throughout this section.

30   Kubin, E., Kachanoff, F. J., & Gray, K. (2022). Threat rejection fuels political dehumanization. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, *14*(5), 487-500. doi:10.1177/19485506211068922

31   Skitka, L., J. (2010). The psychology of moral conviction. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass 4*(4), 267–281, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2010.00254.x

32   Kubin, E., & von Sikorski, C. (2021). The role of (social) media in political polarization: A systematic review. *ANNALS of the International Communication Association, 45*(3), 188-206. doi:10.1080/23808985.2021.1976070

PAUSE AND REFLECT: MY MORAL FOUNDATION AND POLARIZATION

Directions: Respond to the following prompts using the information provided in Our Moral Minds and Polarization section.

Reflect on your feelings toward those with opposing political views. Have these feelings changed over time, and if so, how?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Consider an instance where dislike for "the other" affected your judgment or behavior. What was the out-come?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

How might differing moral perspectives on harm and victimization contribute to polarization on contentious issues?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Consider an issue where you and someone with an opposing view might see harm and victimhood different-ly. How do these different perspectives affect your relationship or discussions with them?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Solutions: Understanding the Harm Opponents Care About

So, how can we combat this conflict and polarization? How can we build bridges between opponents? One way is to build moral understanding between adversaries. Because polarization and conflict seem to be driven by our fundamental moral disagreements, we may be able to reduce them by understanding the harm and victimization our opponents see. Importantly, to minimize conflict, we do not necessarily need to make opponents agree with one another on divisive political issues, but rather, our goal should be to encourage opponents to understand *why* the other side holds their opposing views as a way to mitigate animosity. We can do this by

1. Validating the harms and victimization opponents care about and

2. Sharing our own stories of vulnerability.

STRATEGY 1: VALIDATING THE HARMS AND VICTIMIZATION OPPONENTS CARE ABOUT

Previous research suggests people may believe (at least when it comes to blatant harms (e.g., harm to people's lives and livelihoods)) that opponents disregard these harms. This belief is often inaccurate and fuels conflict (e.g., dehumanization).[38] However, this tendency can be combated by acknowledging the harm and victimization opponents care about. For example, in debates over environmental restrictions to combat climate change, one side may focus on environmental harm if no protections are implemented. In contrast, the other side will focus on job loss if such restrictions are established. This debate can lead both sides to believe those who disagree disregard the harms they are most concerned with (i.e., harm to the environment vs job loss), which fuels animosity and conflict. To combat this, acknowledgment from both sides regarding the harms the other side cares about (e.g., "As a person who supports more environmental protections, I can still see why you are concerned about job loss."). Such acknowledgments make people feel understood[33], which can reduce animosity.

Further, opponents can reframe their arguments in line with what opponents are concerned with. For example, people less supportive of climate change policies frequently cite their economic concerns about climate change policies (e.g., job loss and the expense of implementing such policies). In these cases, pro-climate policy advocates could reframe their arguments away from focusing on environmental harms and more on economic concerns (e.g., emphasizing the economic toll of natural disasters related to climate change, such as rebuilding after extreme weather events). In this example, pro-climate policy advocates re-frame their reasoning to align with similar harms and victimization their opponents care about—an idea supported by past research.[38, 34] This builds a common currency of understanding that can reduce animosity and conflict.

STRATEGY 2: SHARING OUR OWN STORIES OF VULNERABILITY

Another way we can reduce conflict is by emphasizing our own experiences of harm and victimization (e.g., "I am pro-gun because I needed to use a gun to protect my family from an intruder"). A growing body of literature suggests that emphasizing experiences of harm (e.g., supporting gun restrictions after being involved in a mass shooting or supporting abortion after seeing a friend make the gut-wrenching decision to have one) can help reduce conflict in communities. This reduction in conflict is because sharing such stories of harm or victimization can remind opponents of the harms you are concerned about and why you want to avoid such damage in the future (e.g., it feels reasonable to be anti-gun if you were involved in a mass shooting). An emerging body of research highlights many benefi-

33   Abeywickrama, R. S., Rhee, J. J., Crone, D. L., & Laham, S. M. (2020). Why moral advocacy leads to polarization and proselytization: The role of self-persuasion. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology, 8*(2), 473–503. https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v8i2.1346

34   Feinberg, M., & Willer, R. (2019). Moral reframing: A technique for effective and persuasive communication across political divides. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 13*(12), Article e12501. https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12501

cial downstream consequences for sharing experiences of victimization (e.g., increased respect and tolerance[35,36]), reduced willingness to censor[37], and reduced willingness to dehumanize opponents.[44] Sharing these experiences reminds opponents that we are capable of suffering–of being a victim–which promotes prosociality and empathy[35]. Importantly, when people say they disagree with opponents based on their harmful experiences (rather than based on data and statistics), their views are seen as more true[43]. Taken together, this suggests that sharing experiences of victimization is a compelling strategy for reducing animosity and healing divisions in some of the most divisive conflicts we face in polarized societies.

How to Share Experiences of Victimization. There is also emerging research exploring the boundary conditions for the benefits of sharing experiences of harm and victimization in moral and political conflicts. Below are recommendations for the best ways to share these experiences.

1. **Harm-based experiences are more effective than non-harmful experiences**. We find[43] that sharing harmful experiences (e.g., being anti-gun after being involved in a mass shooting) increases respect between opponents more effectively than non-harmful experiences (e.g., being anti-gun after taking a gun safety course). However, non-harmful experiences still reduce animosity better than facts and data.

2. **Experiences are on a spectrum.** While stories about your own experiences are most effective for reducing animosity between opponents, experiences from people you know can also be helpful (e.g., I am anti-gun after my family member/friend/neighbor, etc., was involved in a mass shooting). The closer you are to the harmful experience, the more effective that experience is in bridging divides.[43]

3. **Effective to present harm-based stories with facts and data.** While the research discussed previously finds that harm-based stories from our opponents are seen as more authentic than facts and data from them,[43] facts and data still matter for a healthy society. We have found that harm-based experiences (e.g., discussing how climate change has led to flooding in your community) can be paired with data and statistics about the adverse effects of climate change and still effectively bridge divides.[44] This suggests we can communicate the facts that matter about divisive topics while simultaneously bridging divides.

Important Considerations for Sharing Stories of Vulnerability. Practitioners, community leaders, and ordinary people need to ensure that people are willing and able to share their experiences of victimhood and harm without re-traumatizing them. It can be incredibly difficult to share these stories even in therapy, let alone in situations where people are discussing these experiences with others they vehemently disagree with.

Taken together, the research suggests that a key reason why we are polarized is due to different moral understandings. We focus on different questions of harm and victimhood, which drives our opposing political views and animosity. This polarization occurs because harm is perceived, and we can see harm and victims in different places. Importantly, people fail to recognize the harms and victimization opponents see, which causes misunderstandings and animosity. However, we can combat these processes by learning about opponents' concerns of harm (e.g., via re-framing techniques) and by reminding ourselves of their ability to suffer and be harmed (e.g., via sharing experiences of victimization). With this knowledge, we can take the first step in healing divisions within our polarized society.

Take a moment to review the reflection questions in the box "Pause and Reflect: Faith's Response to Political Polarization." You may choose to come back to these reflection questions throughout this section.

35   Kubin, E., Puryear, C., Schein, C., & Gray, K. (2021). Personal experiences bridge moral and political divides better than facts. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *118*(6), e2008389118. doi:10.1073/pnas.2008389118
36   Kubin, E., Gray, K., & von Sikorski, C. (2023). Reducing political dehumanization by pairing facts with personal experiences. *Political Psychology, 0*(0), 1-22. doi:10.1111/pops.12875
37   Kubin, E., von Sikorski, C., & Gray, K. (2024). Political censorship feels acceptable when ideas seem harmful and false. https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/ha8nv

PAUSE AND REFLECT: FAITH'S RESPONSE TO POLITICAL POLARIZATION

Directions: Respond to the prompts below using the information in the Understanding the Harm Opponents Care About section.

How can your faith community foster a moral understanding, acknowledging and validating the different harms and victimizations seen by political opponents?

_____
_____
_____
_____

How can you use reframing techniques to help congregants see the concerns of their political opponents in a new light?

_____
_____
_____
_____

In what ways can your faith community encourage the sharing of personal experiences to build empathy and reduce animosity between differing political groups?

_____
_____
_____
_____

How can the principles of compassion and empathy in your faith tradition guide discussing politically divisive issues?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Section 5:
The Role of Social Cohesion and Resilience in Crisis Response

This section explores the signs of a cohesive community and the risk factors contributing to its erosion, especially during crises. At the end of the section, you'll have the chance to assess your community's cohesion and identify where you can deepen and strengthen community bonds and resilience. These potential actions may align with the actions you selected in the ALRM Framework, especially those that you chose to maintain.

Social cohesion fosters trust, cooperation, and solidarity, while resilience enables communities to withstand adversity and adapt. However, erosion of these elements hinders crisis response, exacerbating vulnerabilities and deepening societal divisions. Understanding the intersection of trauma-informed crisis response and social cohesion/resilience is crucial for effective crisis management.

Trauma-informed practices recognize trauma's impact, emphasizing empathy and understanding in response efforts. They acknowledge how trauma can disrupt cohesion, erode resilience, and intensify vulnerabilities. Maintaining cohesion and resilience is paramount during crises and fostering trust and solidarity for better navigating challenges and support during recovery. Trauma-informed strategies build resilience, empowering communities to cope, adapt, and bounce back stronger, highlighting the holistic approach needed for crisis management.

What Are the Characteristics of a Socially Cohesive and Resilient Community?

Social cohesion and resilience are vital in preventing and responding to crises.

In tightly-knit communities, social cohesion fosters **trust** and **cooperation**, allowing for early detection of distress signals and rapid mobilization of resources to mitigate potential crises. Meanwhile, resilient communities invest in preparedness measures and response mechanisms, enabling swift and decisive action when faced with adversity. These elements create a foundation for proactive risk management and effective crisis response.

During crises, strong social ties can help to facilitate community-wide cooperation, accelerating the recovery process and fostering a sense of solidarity or closeness among affected individuals. **Resilient communities leverage past experiences to inform their recovery strategies, adapting to changing circumstances and rebuilding to enhance long-term resilience.**

By combining social cohesion with resilience-building efforts, communities can withstand crises and emerge stronger and better prepared to face future challenges.

A socially cohesive and resilient community exhibits various characteristics that enable it to effectively navigate challenges and crises:

» **Integrating Lessons Learned**: A resilient community recognizes the value of reflecting on past experiences and mistakes. It actively seeks to understand the root causes of previous challenges and uses this knowledge to inform its responses to current and similar crises. It also recognizes the potential for trauma and the diverse ways it may impact people. By integrating lessons learned, the community can develop trauma-informed approaches that acknowledge the unique needs and vulnerabilities of those affected. These include creating safer spaces for open dialogue, providing access to culturally competent mental health resources, and offering informed support systems.

» **Increased Adaptability and Acceptance of Uncertainty**: Resilient and socially cohesive communities embrace change and uncertainty as inevitable parts of life. They cultivate a mindset open to adaptation and innovation in the face of unforeseen circumstances. Embracing uncertainty within a trauma-informed framework involves acknowledging the unpredictability of crises and providing stability through consistent communication, clear information dissemination, and transparent decision-making processes. By fostering a culture of trust and understanding, the community can mitigate the secondary trauma often experienced during times of crisis.

» **Strength in Adversity**: When confronted with challenges, resilient communities come together to support one another and collectively address the crisis. This solidarity is evident through community members contributing their time, expertise, and resources toward meaningful responses. Supporting one another using trauma-informed principles involves promoting compassion, active listening, and validation of individual experiences. Through collaborative efforts and collective care, community members can feel empowered to seek help, share their stories, and rebuild social connections disrupted by the crisis.

» **Resourcefulness Despite Resource Availability**: Resilient communities utilize available assets efficiently and creatively, even when resources are limited. Demonstrating resourcefulness in a trauma-informed context means recognizing the potential impact of resource scarcity on individuals' ability to cope and recover. Resilient communities prioritize equitable resource distribution and identify alternative solutions for emerging needs. This action may involve collaborating with local organizations, leveraging existing community networks, and advocating for systemic changes that promote trauma-informed policies and practices.

Take a moment to review the reflection questions in the box "Pause and Reflect: What are some ways that my community has demonstrated resilience?" You may choose to come back to these reflection questions throughout this section.

PAUSE AND REFLECT: WHAT ARE SOME WAYS THAT MY COMMUNITY HAS DEMONSTRATED RESILIENCE?

Directions: Using the information provided in the section, "What are the characteristics of a socially cohesive and resilient community?" respond to the following prompts.

Communities can exhibit resilience in additional ways beyond those outlined above.
What does resilience look like in your community?

_____

_____

_____

_____

What are some indicators you look to when defining resilience in your community?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What Nurtures Social Cohesion and Resilience?

Tolerance for Disagreement and Encouragement of Healthy Debate: When disagreement is tolerated, and healthy debate is encouraged, it fosters an environment where diverse perspectives are respected and considered. This healthy environment helps prevent polarization and promotes a culture of open communication and understanding.

VIGNETTE: FOSTERING TOLERANCE FOR DISAGREEMENT AND DEBATE

In response to the troubling trend of mass shootings, pastors in Orange County, CA, who work with the One America Movement, organized a series of dinner discussions with community members who hold diverse and divergent viewpoints on the subject. Despite the complexity and emotional charge of the issue, people could effectively discuss their differences and bring their personal experiences to the conversation, allowing them to tackle a significant issue with greater effectiveness. This was partly because people witnessed trusted and respected faith leaders from their community modeling constructive and civil discourse on the topic and demonstrating its feasibility.

Inclusivity at All Community Levels: Inclusivity ensures that all community members feel valued, respected, and represented. This involves actively seeking out and including marginalized or underrepresented groups in decision-making processes, leadership roles, and community activities.

VIGNETTE: BUILDING INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS

The Youth Unity Project, a collaboration between Y-USA and the American Immigration Council, addresses the divisive discourse on immigration by connecting young immigrants with the local youth community. Through education, cross-cultural engagement, and civic involvement, the project empowers youth to bridge divides and promote inclusivity within their communities.[38]

Meeting Basic Needs of Community Members: Meeting the basic needs of community members, such as access to food, shelter, healthcare, and education, is essential for fostering social cohesion and resilience. When people's basic needs are met, they can better participate fully in their communities and contribute to collective well-being.

VIGNETTE: WORKING TOGETHER TO MEET BASIC NEEDS

In Danville, VA, a diverse group of clergy, supported by the One America Movement, have come together to foster trust and collaboration to address deep-rooted challenges. Together, they are tackling polarization and supporting vulnerable populations through initiatives like establishing day shelters for the unhoused, providing hygiene packs for youth, and starting a tutoring program at the local high school. Despite obstacles, as one faith leader expressed, the prospect of collaboration and progress fuels their optimism for the future.

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38   *Building Social Cohesion Among Diverse Youth During COVID-19: Insights from the Pilot Phase of the Youth Unity Project*. American Immigration Council. October 2022.

High Cross-Group Contact: Facilitating frequent interactions and collaborations between different social, cultural, and demographic groups within the community promotes understanding, empathy, and solidarity. Initiatives such as community events, interfaith dialogue, cultural exchange programs, and collaborative projects can achieve this.

VIGNETTE: PROMOTING HIGH CROSS-GROUP CONTACT

Interfaith America is a faith-based organization in the United States that promotes high cross-group contact among young people from diverse religious backgrounds. Through interfaith service projects, dialogue events, and leadership training programs, Interfaith America fosters understanding, cooperation, and solidarity among youth of different faith traditions.[39]

By prioritizing these factors, communities can build stronger social bonds, enhance resilience in the face of challenges, and create environments where individuals feel supported and empowered to thrive together.

Take a moment to review the reflection questions in the box "Pause and Reflect: How does my community nurture social cohesion?" You may choose to come back to these reflection questions throughout this section.

PAUSE AND REFLECT: HOW DOES MY COMMUNITY NURTURE SOCIAL COHESION?

Directions: Using the information provided in the section, "What nurtures social cohesion and resilience?" respond to the following prompt.

Communities can exhibit social cohesion in additional ways beyond those outlined above. What are other ways your community demonstrates social cohesion?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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_____

_____

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39   Interfaith America.

What Risk Factors Can Erode Social Cohesion and Resilience?

The absence or weakness of social cohesion and resilience can significantly impair a community's ability to prevent and respond to crises, leaving them more vulnerable and less capable of effectively managing and recovering from adversity. By gaining insight into these risk factors, communities can anticipate and mitigate their impacts, fostering greater preparedness. Ultimately, understanding these risks enables communities to work towards building more cohesive and resilient societies capable of weathering various challenges and crises.

Toxic Polarization: While some levels of polarization are healthy and can lead to positive societal growth when we become polarized along identity lines, it becomes a destructive symptom of more extensive, often systemic, issues. Toxic polarization thrives on exacerbating existing societal divisions, creating a vicious cycle of escalating conflict. Political rhetoric, media bias, and echo chambers on social media platforms intensify polarization by amplifying differences and fostering hostility. This cycle reinforces toxic attitudes and deep-seated mistrust between different groups, making communication and cooperation increasingly challenging.

Elite Factionalization: Elite factionalization weakens cohesion and exacerbates toxic polarization by prioritizing the interests of the elite over the common good. It widens the gap between socio-economic groups and fuels resentment and distrust toward those in power. This gap further exacerbates existing divisions and undermines trust in institutions, further intensifying polarization as marginalized communities feel increasingly disenfranchised and alienated.

Lack of Opportunities for Cross-Group Social Engagement: When there are limited opportunities for individuals from different backgrounds to interact and engage with one another in meaningful ways, it can reinforce stereotypes, prejudices, and misconceptions, further deepening social divisions. Without meaningful cross-group dialogue and cooperation, misunderstandings and mistrust between different groups deepen, fueling toxic polarization and making it increasingly difficult to bridge divides.

Critical Incidents that Foster "Othering": Critical incidents such as acts of violence, hate crimes, or instances of discrimination exacerbate toxic polarization by heightening tensions and deepening divisions within society. These incidents often serve to "other" certain groups, fostering an environment of fear, resentment, and hostility that further intensifies toxic polarization and makes reconciliation increasingly challenging.

Exclusive Over Inclusive: Societies prioritizing exclusivity over inclusivity risk marginalizing certain groups and perpetuating social inequalities. This marginalization can manifest in various forms, such as discriminatory policies, limited access to resources and opportunities, or the perpetuation of stereotypes and prejudices, and it exacerbates toxic polarization by reinforcing group divides and undermining efforts to foster dialogue and cooperation.

Take a few minutes to complete the exercise in the box "How Cohesive Is Your Community? A Social Cohesion Reflection Tool for Your Community."

HOW COHESIVE IS YOUR COMMUNITY? A SOCIAL COHESION REFLECTION TOOL FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

Nurturing and maintaining social cohesion is part of your community's daily work to build resilience and adapt when incidents arise. It is important to reflect critically on community efforts to maintain social cohesion, as your reflection can illuminate areas of strength and areas that may require more attention. This tool invites you to think about how your community supports social cohesion. Use the results to determine what steps your community might take to strengthen cohesion and resilience.

Directions: This Reflection Tool includes two parts. In Part 1, read each statement and respond using the scale from Never to Always. In Part 2, respond to the questions about what your community does well and what it could do better to nurture social cohesion.

Part 1: **Respond to each statement by circling the choice on the scale from Never to Always that most closely reflects your community's approach.**

MY COMMUNITY:

Engages with communities that are different from ours.

Never   **Occasionally**   **More Often than Not**   **Always**

Seeks to understand other communities' perspectives on social issues.

Never   **Occasionally**   **More Often than Not**   **Always**

Has values that promote the acceptance and affirmation of all groups.

Never   **Occasionally**   **More Often than Not**   **Always**

Is curious about other communities and tries to learn from them.

Never   **Occasionally**   **More Often than Not**   **Always**

Creates space to have positive interactions with other communities.

Never   **Occasionally**   **More Often than Not**   **Always**

Advocates for the equal treatment of all people.

Never   **Occasionally**   **More Often than Not**   **Always**

Holds interethnic and interreligious dialogues to strengthen relationships and deepen understanding.

Never   **Occasionally**   **More Often than Not**   **Always**

Addresses hate speech and discrimination when it directly affects our community.

Never   **Occasionally**   **More Often than Not**   **Always**

Addresses hate speech and discrimination when it affects communities around us.

Never   **Occasionally**   **More Often than Not**   **Always**

Addresses hate speech and discrimination when it does not affect our community or the communities near us but does affect society as a whole.

Never   **Occasionally**   **More Often than Not**   **Always**

Part 2: **With your community in mind, complete the following thoughts.**

Concerning social cohesion, my community does a great job of:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

My community could do a better job of:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Conclusion

This toolkit offers a streamlined yet comprehensive guide for faith leaders to navigate the complexities of crisis management effectively. It emphasizes the necessity of empathy, active involvement, and the continuous development of community resilience and cohesion. In challenging times, crises can intensify the instinct to retreat into familiar groups and ideologies, increasing polarization. This toolkit challenges faith leaders to confront these tendencies head-on, finding safe and effective ways to reach across divides and prevent the deepening of existing fractures.

Centered around the ALRM Framework, the toolkit provides a clear roadmap for responding to and supporting communities during crises. By integrating trauma-informed care with insights from social psychology and neuroscience, it highlights the intricate effects of trauma on individuals and communities alike. This approach addresses immediate crisis responses and fosters a broader understanding of trauma's pervasive influence.

The toolkit advocates for a proactive, compassionate, and well-informed response strategy. It calls upon faith leaders to stand as pillars of strength and empathy, leveraging foundational principles such as 'Do No Harm,' maintaining human rights, and contextual adaptation in their actions. This approach ensures that leaders are equipped to steer their communities through the stormy seas of crisis, promoting an atmosphere conducive to healing, resilience, and unity.

This conclusion signifies the beginning of an ongoing commitment to trauma-informed leadership. It serves as a call to action for faith leaders to step into their roles as beacons of hope and agents of transformative change. By utilizing the knowledge and tools provided in this toolkit, leaders can cultivate environments where every community member feels supported, understood, and valued.

In essence, this toolkit is not just a collection of strategies but a dynamic resource that inspires faith leaders to embrace their critical role in building stronger, more resilient communities. It encourages them to apply these lessons and strategies consistently, fostering a sustainable impact that transcends the immediate crisis and contributes to the long-term well-being and cohesion of their communities.

Annex:
Additional Resources

Crisis Preparedness Resources

EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLANNING

The toolkit offers faith leaders practical actions on how to respond in the aftermath of a crisis, whether it affects their congregation directly or extends beyond. While it does not provide detailed steps for preparing for a crisis, resources are available to help leaders draft an emergency preparedness plan.

- » Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Houses of Worship, FEMA, 2022.

- » Field Guide: Working with U.S. Faith Communities During Crisis, Disasters, and Public Health Emergencies. National Disaster Interfaiths Network and USC Dornsife Center For Religion and Civic Culture, 2014.

- » Community-Based Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative Implementation Checklist. Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2022.

TOOLS AND STRATEGIES FOR YOUR PREPAREDNESS TOOLBOX

If you are not currently in crisis, here are some additional preparatory steps to consider:

- » **Collaborate**: Invite senior leaders, such as other clergy members, board members, or executive staff, to participate in the initial planning of a response plan. Work with them to outline the plan's objectives and scope and assess the risks of specific actions.

- » **Network**: Map the network of other faith leaders and groups in the community that you might engage in joint actions. These might be leaders from your faith community or outside your faith community. Start to establish relationships and build lines of communication with other leaders.

- » **Learn Together**: Hold meetings or workshops to discuss the importance of responses that reflect trauma-informed principles and how they contribute to social cohesion and community resilience. This is a big part of building buy-in and support for these actions.

- » **Communicate**: Share possible actions to make people aware of what you, as the faith leader or the entire congregation, might do in response. You can do this by organizing congregational events to socialize potential response efforts, building buy-in from congregants, and fostering a sense of collective responsibility for action.

- » **Refine**: Foster a culture of two-way communication by encouraging congregants to provide feedback, ask questions, and share concerns.

TEMPLATE - Local Crisis Response Services

Use this template to record the contact details for crisis-response services. Preparing this document beforehand allows for a swift and structured response to a crisis, ensuring that essential contact information and resources are immediately available. It also helps coordinate various support services, such as emergency medical care and mental health support, streamlining the process of linking affected individuals with the needed aid.

Crisis Hotline Phone Number: _____

Mental Health Crisis Center Phone Number: _____

Mental Health Support:

    Service Provider Name: _____

    Address: _____

    Phone Number: _____

    Types of Support Offered: _____

Mental Health Support:

    Service Provider Name: _____

    Address: _____

    Phone Number: _____

    Types of Support Offered: _____

Trauma Counseling Centers:

    Center Name: _____

    Address: _____

    Phone Number: _____

    Specialties/Services Offered: _____

Trauma Counseling Centers:

    Center Name: _____

    Address: _____

    Phone Number: _____

    Specialties/Services Offered: _____

Trauma-Informed Resources and Information

CRISIS RESPONSE: TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES

The following encompasses a range of empirical and evidence-based best practices to address immediate challenges in the aftermath of a crisis and strengthen resilience within your community. These practices acknowledge trauma's impact and focus on timing, safety, trust-building, psychoeducation, social functioning, and de-escalation skills. Emphasizing cultural inclusivity, mindfulness, relational practices, and faith-based rituals enhances collective healing.

Timing and Safety:
- » Recognize when individuals may need to "lean into" or "lean out of" trauma discussions, prioritizing timing and safety.

- » Assess functional impairment over symptoms as a more accurate measure of well-being.

- » Establish clear boundaries and expectations to provide predictability in interactions.

- » Maintain confidentiality to create safe spaces for individuals to share their experiences (where safe to do so) without fear of judgment.

Trust and Relationships:
- » Cultivate cultural awareness to understand how trauma may be perceived within communities to ensure positive, respectful relationships as foundational for recovery.

- » Communicate intentions and expectations, aiding in people's visualization and understanding of various situations.

- » Focus on the underlying cause of behavior in frustrating interactions rather than the behavior itself.

- » Actively engage with the community to build trust and establish open communication channels.

- » Provide forums for collective healing, encouraging open dialogue about shared traumas.

- » Ensure that faith communities are spaces of trust where individuals feel supported on their healing journeys.

Continuous Psychoeducation and Harm Reduction:
- » Educate your communities about trauma, emphasizing its normalcy as a human experience while instilling hope

- » Normalize seeking help for trauma by incorporating faith-based teachings that reduce stigma.

- » Offer multiple strategies for managing symptoms to empower individuals.

- » Target the root causes of behaviors for harm reduction rather than merely addressing the behaviors.

- » Utilize stories, scriptures, metaphors, and narratives to approach painful memories as a pathway to create an alternate meaning and promote resilience.

Social Functioning and De-Escalation:

» Direct efforts towards enhancing social functioning as opposed to solely reducing symptoms.

» Acknowledge recovery as a non-linear, expanding circle rather than a linear process.

» Encourage connections with higher levels of care when necessary.

» Deliver sermons and teachings that are trauma-informed, acknowledging the impact of trauma on individuals and the community.

» Use faith narratives to inspire resilience, healing, and transformation.

De-Escalation Skills:

» Identify warning signs of overwhelm, emphasizing the importance of recognizing changes in behavior, physiology, attention, expression, and affect.

» Employ redirecting attention when someone is overwhelmed, providing a safe space and avoiding physical restraint.

Crisis Responsiveness:

» Be attuned to the unique needs of individuals during crises, recognizing the importance of timely and empathetic responses.

» Collaborate with mental health professionals and community resources to provide comprehensive support.

» Integrate prayer and rituals as tools for healing, offering spiritual practices that align with trauma recovery.

» Facilitate communal prayer and ritual spaces to foster a sense of collective support.

COLLECTIVE HEALING IN THE FACE OF CRISES

Collective healing, harnessing the power of relationships to heal together, is a crucial approach to polarization and conflict. It supports individuals and communities in addressing and mending harm, transforming trauma's destructive energy into compassion, and collaboratively seeking innovative ways forward by working together and individually to change behaviors that can have a ripple impact on an entire community.

However, expecting every community member to equally partake in collective healing is often impractical due to limited initial buy-in, logistical challenges, financial or access constraints, and space or other limitations. A more viable strategy involves creating intentional "pockets" or "pods" of collective healing within a community.

These smaller groups allow for deeper relationships and trust, enabling us to engage in healing processes that create more durable repair relationships, restore connectedness, and deepen our ability to relate to ourselves and others. These smaller pockets have the potential for impact within and beyond individual relationships, organizations, and our broader communities.

Key Collective Healing Practices:[40]

» **Cultural Inclusivity:** Honor and welcome the cultural traditions, identities, and languages of all participants.

» **Embodiment Practices:** Introduce dancing, singing, meditation, and somatic work to reconnect participants with their physicality and regulate their nervous systems.

» **Relational Practices:** Center horizontal, relational practices like healing circles to encourage empathic listening and reduce power imbalances.

» **Mindfulness Integration:** Include mindfulness practices to enhance awareness and the capacity to navigate activated states.

» **Nature Reconnection:** Emphasize reconnecting to nature and spending time outdoors as a foundational part of the healing process.

» **Storytelling Empowerment:** Encourage individuals to tell and own their stories, fostering a sense of collective witness.

» **Faith-Based Rituals:** Infuse the process with (inter)faith rituals, traditional offerings, spiritual readings, and acknowledgments of teachers within and outside of your faith.

Individual journeys vary; seeking professional guidance may be crucial for effective healing. Prioritizing and consistently incorporating these practices intentionally and skillfully can create the necessary conditions for transformative system change. Broader awareness and discourse around individual, intergenerational, collective, and historical trauma are essential for our social problem-solving efforts. To address trauma in our communities and societies, a collective effort is required to understand its impact, forge common language, build trust, relationships, and alliances, and advocate for integrating collective healing into systems change work. Society can unlock its full creative potential to tackle complex social and environmental issues by applying a trauma lens and adopting a healing-centered perspective.

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40   This list is adapted from the article: Calderon de la Barca, L., Milligan, K., & Kania, J. (2024). Healing Systems. Stanford Social Innovation Review. https://doi.org/10.48558/EZE7-CM71

Guidance for Asking Questions and Empathetic Listening

In a crisis, effective communication is crucial. These quick but effective guidance points are designed to help you prioritize listening to and understanding the experiences of those most impacted. It emphasizes the importance of empathic listening and thoughtful questioning.

CORE PRINCIPLES OF EMPATHIC LISTENING

Empathic listening fosters human connections and supports emotional well-being. It avoids invalidating someone's feelings and promotes caring, supportive, and problem-solving relationships. Skills include using non-verbal communication like nodding and maintaining eye contact, employing open-ended questions to allow the speaker to direct the conversation, paraphrasing to show understanding, validating feelings to reinforce the speaker's emotions, and offering options rather than direct advice to help the speaker find their solutions.

» **Respect and Validation**: Acknowledge the speaker's feelings and experiences without judgment. Show respect for their perspective, even if it differs from your own.

» **Patience and Openness**: Allow the speaker to express their thoughts and emotions in their own time and way. Be open to hearing about experiences that may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable to you.

» **Reflective Listening**: Paraphrase or summarize the speaker's words to ensure understanding. This practice validates their experience and shows that you are actively listening.

EFFECTIVE QUESTIONING

» **Open-Ended Questions**: Ask questions that require more than a yes or no answer to encourage detailed responses.

» **Probing Questions**: Delve deeper into specific areas to clarify and understand the full context.

» **Empathetic Probing:** Gently explore the emotions and feelings related to the crisis.

KEY QUESTION AREAS

» **Experiencing the Crisis**

    » Can you share what you've been going through?

    » What has been the hardest part of this experience for you?

» **Physical Safety**

    » Do you feel safe?

    » What do you need to feel safe?

» **Perceptions and Feelings**

» How has this situation affected your view of the community?

» What emotions have been most prevalent for you during this time?

» **Media Influence**

» How have media reports impacted your feelings or views about the crisis?

» Are there aspects of the media coverage that you find particularly helpful or harmful?

» **Support and Needs**

» What kind of support do you find most helpful right now?

» Are there resources or information that you need access to?

» **Looking Forward**

» What are your main concerns for the future?

» How can the community or individuals best support you and others affected?

For more information and tips on empathic listening and asking questions, check out "Positive Communication, The Art of Empathetic Conversation" by Dr. Jeremy Sutton.

Strategies to Increase Social Cohesion

Ensuring social cohesion in your community in the absence of crisis will increase resilience when challenging events occur. Below are a few suggestions to consider when seeking to strengthen cohesion within your community and across communities.

ENGAGE IN INTERGROUP DIALOGUE

Intergroup dialogue, distinct from discussion and debate, involves communicating across differences to strengthen relationships and build understanding. When in dialogue, the goal is to find common ground. The process includes sharing lived experiences, which can lead to increased empathy. Intergroup dialogue involves identifying similarities and differences among groups and appreciating those differences. When listening in dialogue, participants open themselves to the possibility of being changed by what they hear without giving up any part of who they are. Look to bring communities together to engage in dialogue on divisive issues from a perspective of building understanding.

BE CURIOUS ABOUT OTHERS

With the belief that there is much we can learn from others, a learning mindset allows you to ask questions of others from a place of curiosity rather than a place of proving yourself right and someone else wrong. Leading with curiosity can communicate sincerity and can build trust.

IDENTIFY SHARED VALUES

Shared values can unite people across divides by reminding them that they can disagree on issues and still see the humanity in one another. Identifying shared values with those in other communities can connect groups that may not otherwise see places of commonality.

INCREASE INCLUSION BY FOCUSING ON BELONGING

Inclusion is more than inviting someone in; it makes the person(s) you invite into your space feel like they belong. Humans are social beings, and belonging is a universal need that everyone shares. Increasing a sense of belonging among community members can strengthen the glue that holds societies together in the face of adversity.

A Toolkit for Faith Leaders Facing Crisis and Division

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