

[Therapists learn about trauma and disaster response](#)

By [Andrea Ball](#) | Tuesday, May 25, 2010, 10:18 AM

*This is a bit of a different blog for Charity Chat, but I have a soft spot for mental health efforts.*

*The American Group Psychotherapy Association (AGPA) hosted in Austin on Saturday an educational session on trauma and disaster response. More than 80 Austin-area professionals learned how the organization applied group interventions after terrorist attacks, natural disasters, school mental health crises, and military combat.*

*According to the press release:*

AGPA members have lead groups and provided consultation to help thousands of trauma victims, their families, and first responders cope with terrorist attacks on 9/11 and in Mumbai, India, recent earthquakes in China, Italy, and Haiti, wildfires in California, a school mental health crisis in New Jersey, and wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“We are now intimately linked to a global community that faces war, terrorism, natural disasters, and atrocities with uncertain outcomes. We can no longer deny we all share an existential darkness and collective trauma,” said Dr. Suzanne Phillips, one of the presenters. “As mental health professionals, we are faced with the possibility of being both victims and caregivers.”

In addition to Adelphi University professor Phillips, AGPA President Dr. Jeffrey Kleinberg and Past-President Dr. Robert Klein described how AGPA protocols helped Chinese mental health professionals treat children traumatized by the destruction of schools in the 2008 earthquake, as well as victims of last January’s earthquake in Haiti.

A major theme of the event was that group changes lives. Group interventions of many kinds help heal trauma, improve individual, family, and workplace relationships, treat addictions, deal with grief and loss, and aid the military and their families in dealing with the psychological impact of war.

“Group is the basic unit in which we accomplish things. If you know how to get along in a group, you know how to succeed in life,” said Jeff Hudson, M.Ed., CGP, one of the local organizers of the event. Speakers highlighted AGPA’s website, which provides a practical guide for recognizing trauma, directions on how to find an appropriate caregiver, and outlines personal coping strategies. The website also provides mental health practitioners with protocols on using group psychotherapy for treating trauma, guidelines for working with first responders, and information on how caregivers can care for themselves.

AGPA publications and training curricula are also available, including Group Interventions for the Treatment of Psychological Trauma, and Public and Mental Health Service Delivery Protocols: Group Interventions for Disaster Preparedness and Response.

This event also highlighted the Group Psychotherapy Foundation (GPF), AGPA’s philanthropic arm, which supports group psychotherapy training, research, community service, and education about group interventions. The GPF has been instrumental in AGPA’s trauma and disaster response efforts.

Austin professionals have been especially supportive of the foundation’s education and scholarship fund. This fund provides financial assistance for students, new professions, and agency clinicians to receive expert training in group.