

OVS Disaster Mental Health Preparedness Trainings

Course Catalog 2026-2027



Office of
Victim Services



About OVS Disaster Mental Health Preparedness Trainings

To help address the underlying needs of mass violence victims, the New York State Office of Victim Services (OVS), Global Center for AI in Mental Health at the University at Albany, and Institute for Disaster Mental Health at SUNY New Paltz (IDMH) have partnered to offer the Disaster Mental Health Preparedness Training Program (DMHPTP) to victim service professionals from OVS-funded organizations.

The DMHPTP was developed to build capacity among victim service professionals and related responders to support individuals and communities impacted by mass violence and disaster-related trauma. Participants will gain knowledge and practical skills related to trauma-informed care, psychological first aid, mass violence response, and personal resilience. Course topics will also focus on adapting to the needs of different victim populations and providing culturally competent care that takes into consideration the worldviews and lived experiences of those being served.

Trainings will be highly interactive and include lectures, group discussion, case studies, and experiential exercises designed to help participants apply skills in realistic mass violence response scenarios.

Target Audience

The DMHPTP offers trainings for a range of professional roles, including crime victim service providers, supervisors, mental health practitioners, and related professionals.

Training Schedule

Trainings will begin in Spring 2026 and will be offered periodically across New York State to support victim service professionals working with individuals and communities impacted by mass violence and other traumatic events.

Basic Disaster Mental Health Preparedness Training

Length: 2 days

Advanced Disaster Mental Health Preparedness Training

Length: 1.5 days

Refresher Training

Length: 1 day

Scenario-Based Experiential Training

Length: 1 day

Training dates and locations will be announced prior to each training cycle.

Basic Disaster Mental Health Preparedness Training Course

This training course is designed to provide advocates and other victim services professionals with skills and efficacy to support the mental health needs of victims in their work, while also managing their own stress reactions and maintaining their own psychological resilience. Participants will learn about common trauma reactions, approaches for supporting survivors following mass violence and other traumatic events, and strategies for maintaining their own wellbeing while working in this field.

At the end of this training, participants will be able to:

1. Identify and describe common reactions to stress and trauma, including the impact of acute stress, traumatic stress, and mass violence events.
2. Apply principles of Psychological First Aid and trauma-informed care to support the psychosocial needs of survivors.
3. Recognize the occupational hazards associated with victim service work, including burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary traumatic stress.
4. Identify strategies for building and maintaining psychological resilience, including behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social support strategies.
5. Consider cultural and contextual factors that influence how survivors experience trauma and engage with services.

Disaster Mental Health Preparedness Training Refresher Course

This course is designed for professionals who have completed the Basic Disaster Mental Health Preparedness Training course. It will involve a review of key concepts from the Basic course, provide opportunities for discussion of mass violence case studies, and allow participants to practice skills related to supporting survivors of mass violence and other traumatic events.

At the end of this training, participants will be able to:

1. Review and discuss trauma reactions, including reactions observed during disaster or mass violence response experiences participants may have had since completing the Basic training course.
2. Review the elements of Psychological First Aid and trauma-informed care.
3. Discuss mass violence case studies developed specifically for this course.
4. Participate in a role play exercise simulating a mass violence response.
5. Develop and discuss strategies for maintaining resilience when working with survivors of trauma.

Advanced Disaster Mental Health Preparedness Training Course

This course is designed for victim services supervisors, licensed mental health professionals, and others in leadership positions within victim services organizations. The training focuses on trauma-informed leadership and supervision as well as specialty topics related to the psychosocial support of survivors following mass violence incidents. In-depth case studies will allow participants to consider course concepts and how they apply to real-world response scenarios.

At the end of this training, participants will be able to:

1. Identify and describe the psychological impact of mass violence on victims, responders, and communities.
2. Recognize common trauma reactions and understand how they influence survivor needs and service delivery.
3. Learn and practice principles of trauma-informed leadership and supervision in response to mass violence and related traumatic events.
4. Identify strategies for managing secondary traumatic stress and maintaining personal and organizational resilience when responding to traumatic events.
5. Discuss case studies of mass violence incidents and consider implications for victim service organizations and professionals.

Scenario-Based Experiential Training Exercise

This training will involve participation in a large-scale, scenario-based exercise designed to simulate a mass violence response. Participants will work together in a realistic setting while interacting with trained role players to practice skills related to supporting victims and survivors of traumatic events. The exercise provides an opportunity for participants to apply concepts from the Disaster Mental Health Preparedness Training Program in a hands-on environment and to practice coordinating with other professionals involved in response efforts. Exercises will take place at the New York State Preparedness and Training Center.

At the end of this training, participants will be able to:

1. Practice response skills in a realistic, scenario-based training environment.
2. Apply principles of trauma-informed care and Psychological First Aid in simulated mass violence response situations.
3. Work collaboratively with other responders to support victims and survivors during a simulated response.
4. Reflect on the challenges and lessons learned during the exercise and consider how these experiences may inform future response efforts.

Course Instructors



Amy Nitza, Ph.D.

Dr. Amy Nitza is the Director of the Global Center for AI in Mental Health at the University at Albany. Trained as a counseling psychologist, she specializes in the development and dissemination of best practices in trauma and disaster mental health. As a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Botswana, Dr. Nitza trained mental health and school counselors in the use of group interventions in HIV/AIDS prevention. She also collaborated with UNICEF USA to develop and implement a program of mental health support for children and teachers impacted by the recent disasters in Puerto Rico. She has directed numerous grant-funded projects including from the New York State Office of Mental Health, Office of Victim Services and Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services. She is a co-author of the recent First Responder Mental Health Needs Assessment, a survey of the mental health challenges and needs of responders across New York State. Dr. Nitza has provided training at the federal level to the Executive Office of the President, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Smithsonian Institution. She has provided direct service to survivors of numerous disasters including Hurricanes Sally, Dorian, Harvey, and Maria, the Creek Fire in California, and the earthquakes in Haiti and Puerto Rico. She is a Fellow of the Association for Specialists in Group Work and Past President of the Society for Group Psychology and Group Psychotherapy (Division 49) of the American Psychological Association. She is the author of numerous publications, including the book *Disaster Mental Health Case Studies: Lessons Learned from Counseling in Chaos*. Prior to joining the University at Albany, Dr. Nitza served as the Executive Director of the Institute for Disaster Mental Health at SUNY New Paltz, where she also directed the Advanced Certificate in Trauma and Disaster Mental Health.



Andrew O'Meara, M.S.

Andrew O'Meara, M.S., is the Program Manager for the Institute for Disaster Mental Health (IDMH). He holds a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from the State University of New York at Potsdam and a Master's Degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from the State University of New York at New Paltz. Andrew has worked extensively with IDMH since 2019 advising students in the Disaster Studies Minor, planning the Annual IDMH Conference and assisting in programmatic development in

response to acute and chronic disasters, including during the COVID-19 pandemic. Andrew has assisted in developing and delivering content to victim service providers, mental health clinicians and first responders, among others. Currently, Andrew is engaged in a 5-year grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to support the mental health needs of children in Puerto Rico, and is collaborating locally with the NYS Office of Mental Health and NYS Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services to help develop a state-wide team of disaster mental health responders. Additionally, Andrew is the current instructor for the Practicum in Disaster Studies course at SUNY New Paltz, where he supervises up to 20 students per year conducting field work with local government and non-profit disaster response agencies. The Institute for Disaster Mental Health also focuses on international response capabilities, with Andrew serving as a consultant to the non-profit organization The UkrHelp Foundation to help support the mental health needs of children impacted by the current conflict in Ukraine.



Amy O'Neill Gregorian, DHSc, LPC

Dr. Amy O'Neill is a licensed professional counselor with over 30 years of experience in mental health, with a specialization in trauma, mass violence response, and victim services. She holds a Doctorate in Health Sciences with a concentration in Mental Health from Bay Path University and is Co-Founder of Aftermath Solutions.

Drawing on both her clinical expertise and her lived experience as a survivor of the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombing, Dr. O'Neill serves as an independent consultant for the OVC TTAC Mass Violence Response, Training and Technical Assistance, the former OVC VOCA Center, and the National Mass Violence Resource Center, where she also serves on the survivor/provider steering committee. She has deployed to communities following mass violence events across the country, including New Orleans (LA), Nashville (Tenn), Perry (Iowa), Allen (Texas), and Annunciation Church (Minn), providing needs assessments, community forums, trauma-informed training, and technical assistance to behavioral health teams, law enforcement, schools, and victim services organizations.

Dr. O'Neill has presented and testified at the international level, including at the United Nations First Global Congress on Rights of Victims of Terrorism and before the Interparliamentary Union in Rome. She contributed substantive testimony to inform the UN's Model Legislative Provisions for the Rights of Victims of Terrorism. She serves as a Subject Matter Expert for the European Union Centre for Expertise on Victims of

Terrorism and holds an elected position on the Steering Committee for North America through VOTAN/UNOCT.

She is a member of the Crisis Emotional Care Team for Vibrant Emotional Health, the Disaster Mental Health Team for the American Red Cross, and a Board member for the Survivors of Tragedy Outreach Program (STOP). She has provided peer support to survivors of the Las Vegas Route 91 shooting, Gilroy Garlic Festival, Virginia Beach, Oxford, Parkland, and Columbine, and serves on the program committee for the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative.

Dr. O'Neill has developed training in coordination with the Special Master of the 9/11 Victims' Compensation Fund, as well as trauma-informed victim services training and a trauma-informed victim correspondence framework. She maintains a private practice specializing in trauma and is an adjunct lecturer at the Institute for Disaster Mental Health at SUNY New Paltz. She also serves as an Adjunct Instructor in the Graduate Counseling Psychology Program at Chestnut Hill College, Philadelphia, PA.