

Group's

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

handbook

for WOMEN'S MINISTRY



Loveland, Colorado

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Group resources actually work!

This Group resource helps you focus on "The 1 Thing"—a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ. "The 1 Thing" incorporates our **R.E.A.L.** approach to ministry. It reinforces a growing friendship with Jesus, encourages long-term learning, and results in life transformation, because it's:

Relational

Learner-to-learner interaction enhances learning and builds Christian friendships.

Experiential

What learners experience through discussion and action sticks with them up to 9 times longer than what they simply hear or read.

Applicable

The aim of Christian education is to equip learners to be both hearers and doers of God's Word.

Learner-based

Learners understand and retain more when the learning process takes into consideration how they learn best.

Group's Emergency Response Handbook for Women's Ministry

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Introduction

It's not easy going through divorce. Or dealing with depression. Or facing breast cancer. It's hard and painful and brutal.

But it doesn't have to be lonely.

Christians should never have to face trials on their own. Those around them—their Christian brothers and sisters—should rise up and support them.

“Share each other’s burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).

Although it isn’t easy going through trials, it’s also tough being on the outside and trying to help those who are suffering. You don’t know what to do. You’re worried about hurting their feelings or stepping on their toes or saying the exact *wrong* thing. Of course you care—you love them! It isn’t that you don’t want to help—it’s just that you don’t know how.

Group’s Emergency Response Handbook for Women’s Ministry will help you come alongside those in your ministry who are facing tough times. From care and counseling tips to practical ideas for what to say and what not to say, this book offers insight after insight into how to care for the hurting.

Naturally, it would be great if you never had to pick up this book! But the reality is that everyone faces tough times—including the women in your church. And they need your help.

So when a woman you love is going through infertility, dealing with an eating disorder, or has just been diagnosed with breast cancer...it’s time to pick up this guide. Use the table of contents to find the specific hurt for which you’re caring, and then flip to that section.

Once there, you’ll find a **real-life narrative**—a story from someone who’s been there. Sometimes it’s inspiring, and you’ll read how support and love sustained someone through a hard time. Other times it’s disappointing and tells of people left alone during tragedy or rejected during trial. Either way, the story will move you, and show you the importance of devoted friends.

Each section also includes **care and counseling tips** that will give you practical ideas for reaching out in love. From baking dinner, to helping with rides to appointments, to intentional listening, these ideas will help you effectively support the hurting people in your women's ministry.

Next, you'll find **group tips**, so you can include other women in your ministry in reaching out to your hurting friend. These practical ideas will help support and love the woman through her pain.

And, finally, you'll find an invaluable section on **what to say and what not to say** to your friend. The words we use can help or hurt a friend more than we know. This section will help you avoid the hurtful comments and use the helpful ones.

You'll also find useful boxes in each section that offer Scripture help, guidelines for referring your friend to a professional counselor, and additional resources, such as books and Web sites, that you can use as you support your hurting friend.

Our prayer for this book is that it will help you help a friend during a difficult time.

“He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us” (2 Corinthians 1:4).

The names and identifying information of the women who have shared their stories have been changed.

The information in this book is meant to be a guide for you to handle emergencies that women and families in your ministry face. It is not meant to replace advice you receive from licensed counselors or psychologists, and should not be considered legal advice.

Breast Cancer

Supporting Women on the
Road to Recovery

with counseling insights from MAGGIE H. ROBBINS, M.A.
+ ministry tips from HEATHER DUNN

Sonia is the first to admit that she's great at denial. She admitted that she had breast cancer, but only to a few. She didn't really talk about it much at the time but now admits that sharing helps.

Emergency Response Handbook: *How did you feel when you first found out you had breast cancer?*

Sonia: Numb. I was totally numb. I couldn't move. I didn't even know what questions to ask. The nurses were used to this daily occurrence and they were quite patient. Fortunately, my kids were at camp, so I didn't have to face them right away. My husband was with me. He was just as stunned. What saved me was my friend Fran. I must have called her, though I don't remember. All I remember is that she said, "This is a survivor's cancer and you're not going to go through this alone. I'll be over in an hour and I'm bringing dinner." That saved my life.

ERH: *What impact did your breast cancer have on your family?*

Sonia: It turned out to be a good thing that I had a little time before my kids came home. It gave me time to think about what to tell them. Basically, I didn't want them worrying, so I kept the information to a minimum. None of us talked about it very much. Honestly, I didn't want to talk

about it, so the others didn't either.

ERH: *What impact did your breast cancer have on your work?*

Sonia: I didn't really let anyone know the magnitude of my inner feelings. People knew that I had breast cancer, but I didn't really let them know what all was going on. I was gone a week for my surgery and then was back—I just wanted to get everything over with as soon as possible. I work for a Christian organization and I didn't even put it on the prayer chain or weekly updates with my co-workers. Since I work primarily with men, I tried to be mostly factual and get to work. So I stuffed my feelings and went about things as usual.

ERH: *What treatment did you have?*

Sonia: I had one breast completely removed right away. After the surgery, the doctors said they thought they had gotten it all, so I didn't do chemo or radiation or anything else. Everything was over in a week. I know some women have lots more to deal with than I did.

ERH: *What impact did your breast cancer have on your health?*

Sonia: I do self-exams and have a check up with my doctor every six months. There's always this cloud that the cancer could come back at any time. There's never a guarantee that it's gone, so I'm pretty careful to keep my appointments.

I also have new priorities. God gives us opportunities to grow through trials. I took up running and now run marathons. I started with a 39-mile walk for breast cancer research. Now I run several mornings a week. I follow a regimen that prevents injury and is good for my body. I love it and wouldn't trade it for anything.

ERH: *What's the greatest lesson you've learned from breast cancer?*

Sonia: There's support and compassion—you just have to reach for it. My friends, those that I told, were extremely supportive. My husband was wonderful, too.

ERH: *What impact did your breast cancer have on your relationship with your husband?*

Sonia: He was wonderful throughout the process, very supportive. I have found that it's harder for me to be intimate. Missing one breast makes you feel very different in this regard. I opted not to have reconstructive surgery—it didn't feel right for me. Fortunately, my relationship with my

husband is Christ-focused and has never been based on our sexual pleasures. If it had been, we'd both be having lots more trouble. I've been working on learning how to love again, in a different way. It's a tough thing to work through.

ERH: *What's the most helpful thing someone did for you?*

Sonia: There were two, actually. I already mentioned my friend who told me I would survive and brought dinner the first night. The other was a friend who took me to lunch within a couple of days. She gave me some great resources with lots of information about breast cancer. That was really helpful.

ERH: *What was the most difficult thing someone said or did?*

Sonia: Some comments, though they were well-intentioned, felt harsh at the time. One comment I remember was, "If I had breast cancer, my husband would divorce me!" Where I didn't have doubts about my husband's support before, now I wondered what I'd done to him and how he was really feeling. I remember I called him right after the conversation just to hear that extra reassurance that all was OK.

ERH: *Where was God?*

Sonia: This was surprising to me. My experience wasn't a huge spiritual high. My big question for God was, "Do you really care?" I told God, "Now I'm really going to put you to the test." I wondered if God was too big and too busy to care about me personally. It was a real test of my faith. I realized that I was trying to define God in human terms, make him too human. Looking back, I can see how much God did care.

I had to evaluate how I define myself, too, and God helped me do that. Breast cancer takes away your dignity and your sex appeal is under attack. You wonder if you're attractive and worth loving. God gives the unconditional "yes." I wonder how people go through this experience without God. It's hard enough with him!

ERH: *What would you do differently if you could?*

Sonia: I'd talk more with my family and friends. I'd get more help. I'm surprised as I look back at how much I stuffed it. Looking back, I get pretty emotional. I'm not sure I'd tell my kids much more, and I still wouldn't wear my emotions on my sleeve for all to see, but I would share more with my husband and friends. There are great Web sites now for women

with breast cancer. You can share what you're going through and talk with others: www.mylifeline.org and www.caringbridge.com are two that I'm aware of.

I'd keep better track of things, too. A friend wisely advised me to get a notebook and keep a journal of dates, medicines, and treatments. I didn't do that as thoroughly as I should have, and now I wish I had. It would help me when I need to remember what happened when I go to current doctor's appointments. I can't believe how hard it is to remember things that I thought I would never forget. I could use the notebook now to help others, too.

ERH: *How do you feel when you hear someone talking about breast cancer today?*

Sonia: Guilty. I know others who had a much more difficult time and I feel guilty that mine went so well. My heart goes out to them, too, because I know what they're going through. I also worry that they may have a harder time.

ERH: *Is there any advice you'd give to someone facing breast cancer?*

Sonia: Take a friend to all your appointments. My husband came to some of the appointments, but he was as numb as I was. Take someone who's less emotionally attached. There's no way you can remember everything your doctor says, and when you're numb you really can't remember much of anything. Your friend can take notes, remember the questions you had on your way over in the car, and help you debrief later.



Care and Counseling Tips

THE BASICS

A breast cancer diagnosis is devastating and life-altering. Treatment has come a long way making survival more likely—however, for many a patient, a cancer diagnosis seems like a death sentence. The shocking news can affect mind, body, and spirit.

+ Mind

How one reacts to the news after the initial shock has worn off can determine her relationship to their illness and the likelihood of survival. Many women are determined to fight and take an active role in their treatment and recovery. Others succumb to their cancer and end up feeling overwhelmed by their lack of power in the situation.

+ Body

Women with breast cancer lose their health and energy. They often struggle with a negative body image. They can lose their breasts, which can affect their sexual identity. Hair loss is a common side effect from treatment and can cause embarrassment and draw attention to her battle with cancer. Eventually, she may lose her life as her body betrays her.

+ Spirit

For most women, the initial reaction is denial or disbelief. Grief is an inevitable emotion, as there is loss after loss during their fight with cancer. Any illness causes a role shift, as the woman has to learn to be taken care of instead of being the caretaker. She may lose her career and her social network. Ultimately, she may lose her life and any plans for the future vanish. Losses compound to make living with cancer one of the most difficult challenges in a woman's life. A spiritual crisis is likely, as she has to face the meaning of life and death.