

UNDERSTANDING AND RECOGNIZING BURNOUT

AND SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS DURING A RESPONSE

Try to work in teams to reduce the amount of time you spend alone.

During a crisis, the responders are under stress. When stress levels rise, it may result in:

Burnout - refers to emotions of overwhelming tiredness.

Secondary traumatic stress - a term used to describe stress reactions and symptoms that occur when a person is exposed to the terrible experiences of another person rather than when they are exposed directly to a traumatic incident.

Burnout and secondary traumatic stress can be avoided and reduced through coping mechanisms including taking breaks, eating well, exercising, and using the buddy system. To ensure that people who require a break or assistance can meet these needs, be aware of the symptoms of these disorders in both you and other responders.

SIGNS OF BURNOUT:

- Apathy, sadness, or depression
- Easily annoyed
- Accusatory behavior and irritation
- Lacking emotion, uncaring
- Disconnection from others or isolation
- Poor self-care (hygiene)
- Drained, worn out, or overwhelmed
- Feeling as if:
 - You are a failure.
 - Nothing you do will be helpful.
 - The need for drugs/alcohol to cope.

SIGNS OF SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS:

- Excessive anxiety that something negative will occur
- Always "on guard" or easily startled
- Physical indications of stress, such as a racing heart
- Recurring nightmares or thoughts about the event
- The feeling that others' trauma is yours

TIPS FOR SUPERVISORS TO SUPPORT THEIR RESPONDERS

Scheduling employees so they have time to rest and recover in between shifts is one action you can take to lessen staff stress if you manage other employees and have a sufficient number of staff members. If at all possible, it can also be beneficial to organize employees' shifts such that they transition into less stressful roles after completing stressful roles, giving them time to recover in between shifts of more demanding work. Additionally, thanking employees for their efforts could help avoid compassion fatigue.

You can provide management assistance to workers and, to the greatest extent possible, build the workplace to support and permit case talks.



WHEN TO SEEK

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

An expected response to situations like disasters and other challenging circumstances is stress. Sometimes it can be hard to choose between physical sickness, stress, or a combination of the two as the cause of your symptoms. You might need further assistance. There are a number of things you can do if your stress levels are high or persistent. You may see if your employer offers an Employee Assistance Program. You might also decide to get in touch with your primary care doctor, who can help rule out a medical issue or make a recommendation for a qualified mental health specialist.

DISASTER RESPONDER GUIDE

PROTECTING THE SAFETY AND HEALTH OF DISASTER RESPONDERS



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RESPONDER SAFETY AND HEALTH

Disaster response is a rewarding and difficult job. Emergency responders may experience stress from seeing human suffering, personal danger, heavy workloads, making life-or-death decisions, and being alone away from their families. For responders to stay healthy and be able to continue helping in the situation, stress management and prevention are essential. Before, during, and after a disaster, responders should take some crucial actions. Responders must be feeling good and have clear thinking in order to care for others.

PREPARING FOR A RESPONSE

Learn as much as you can about the role you would play in a response. Explain to family and friends who may wish to contact you that you may be traveling or working long hours during a response. Create potential channels of communication with them. Take the pressure off yourself by keeping their expectations realistic.

Disaster response may be both gratifying and exhausting. You will be able to continue supporting people who are affected if you are aware of your own stress and can manage it while you respond.

SELF-CARE TECHNIQUES FOR RESPONDERS

- Limit working hours, if possible.
- Work in teams and don't spend too much time by yourself.
- Share your thoughts and experiences with your loved ones, close friends, coworkers, and supervisors. Use relaxation and breathing exercises.
- Keep up a balanced diet, get sufficient sleep and exercise.
- Recognize that setting boundaries and saying "no" are acceptable.
- Caffeine and alcohol should be avoided or used sparingly.

IT'S VITAL TO KEEP THESE THINGS IN MIND:

- Taking breaks is not selfish.
- The needs of survivors are not more crucial than your personal requirements and welfare.
- Working nonstop does not guarantee that your contribution will be at its finest.
- There are others who can contribute to the reaction.

RETURNING HOME

Everyone looks forward to reunions after catastrophic assignments away from home. They can occasionally be more challenging than we anticipate, but they can also be effectively controlled.

- Homecoming is a journey of reconnection for you and everyone close to you.
- Even while returning home signifies a return to protection, safety, and "normality," the routines of life there differ significantly from those in the disaster area.
- You and the other home members have probably taken on several jobs and responsibilities during your absence that may change are now required.
- To prevent upsetting people, encourage your family to refrain from inquiring about details of the disaster.

After only a brief period at home, responders can be assigned to another emergency. Anyone can find this difficult and frustrating. If you physically or emotionally isolate yourself in advance of leaving, try to ensure that your family understands.

RETURNING TO WORK

Responders to disasters are extremely beneficial to local communities all around the country. During a disaster response assignment, whether you serve on the front lines or behind the scenes, you assist individuals in need of crucial services. Disaster response work is demanding and satisfying, and it offers everyone engaged in a unique viewpoint. The stress brought on by this experience might occasionally make it difficult for disaster responders to adjust when they return to work. You may observe changes in yourself, your coworkers, or your workplace environment when you move from your disaster assignment to your usual responsibilities. The following list of probable issues is accompanied by advice on how to deal with them.

- Pace adjustment - Do your best to avoid criticizing, or assuming about the productivity of your coworkers.
- Unceasing tiredness - You could require more sleep than you think.
- Cynicism - Review the accomplishments and positive results from your assignment and make an effort to see the best in people and systems.
- Easily stirred up feelings - Until then, try to control your reactions, talk about your experiences with close friends, family, and trustworthy coworkers, and avoid saying things that could anger or injure other people.