Mental Health Aspects of an Emergency Response

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The findings and conclusions in this presentation are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
Mental Health is Part of Every Emergency Response

- Anyone can face challenges to their own mental health.
- Everyone can play a role in promoting mental health.
What is Mental Health?

“...a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”

- WHO, 2001

Stress – Distress – Mental Disorder

**Stress**
How the brain and body respond to any demand

**Distress**
Stress response that overwhelms a person’s ability to take care of themselves and family

**Mental Disorder**
Characterized by some combination of abnormal thoughts, emotions, behavior and relationships with others
Community-Level Factors Influencing Mental Health Needs During an Emergency Response

- Stressfulness of the incident
- Community resilience
- Stigma
- Isolation and quarantine
Stressfulness of the Event
Community Resilience

“...the ability of community members to take deliberate, purposeful, and collective action to alleviate the detrimental effects of adverse events.”*

Community members working together:
- Draw on community strengths
- Empower members to support each other
- Incorporate cultural and community values

https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/leaders.asp
Stigma

Stigma involves stereotyping and discriminating against an identifiable group of people, a product, an animal, a place, or a nation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stigma causes</th>
<th>Fear, mistrust, discrimination</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stigma stops</td>
<td>People getting the help they need</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stigma splits apart</td>
<td>Families and friends</td>
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Stigma During Emergency Response

Stigma Related to:
- Cultural differences
- Mental Health
- Fear of illness and death
Isolation and Quarantine Increase Stress

- Additional fear or anxiety about:
  - Personal health
  - Financial implications
  - Uncertainty
- Loneliness
- Challenges to self-care
- Risk for depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Photo from NorthJersey.com

https://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content//SMA14-4894/SMA14-4894.pdf
Anyone Can Face Challenges to Their Own Mental Health

CDC Call Center Mental Health Protocol
Responding to Callers Expressing Stress, Fear or Anxiety (1/2)

1. Identify caller needs & acknowledge their concerns
   - Respond sensitively: All concerns & fears are real, even if not supported by facts
Populations with Increased Risk

- Children
- Pregnant women
- People with chronic conditions or disabilities
- People with mental or substance use disorders
- Responders
“Children...are among those most at risk for psychological trauma and behavioral difficulties after a disaster.”*

- Children are not small adults.
- Children depend on adults.
- Children need to feel safe.
  - Parents and caregivers
  - Environment
- Development can be impacted.

Supporting Children’s Mental Health

- Partner with parents, schools, and healthcare providers
- Share age-appropriate information
- Encourage children to ask questions
- Limit media exposure
- Return to a routine

*Family reunification is paramount*

https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/index.html
Pregnant Women and Individuals with Chronic Conditions

- Pregnancy stress associated with poor outcomes
- Chronic conditions or disabilities may increase stress
- Pre-existing mental disorders may increase vulnerability
Responders

- Stress
  - Signs of stress
  - Burnout
  - Secondary traumatic stress
- Stigma
- Returning home
Supporting Responders

- Self-care techniques
- Buddy system
- Family support
- Monitoring responder mental health
- Psychological first aid

https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/responders.asp
https://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content//NMH05-0210/NMH05-0210.pdf
Everyone Can Play a Role in Promoting Mental Health During a Response
Crisis Emergency Risk Communication

- Build trust and credibility
- Acknowledge uncertainty
- Acknowledge fear
- Give people things to do
- Ask more of people

https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/manual/index.asp
Communicators can...

- Use simple messages
- Ensure messages are delivered by credible sources
- Use consistent messages
- Release accurate messages as soon as possible
Partnerships are Key

- Responders
- Individuals & families
- Healthcare providers
- Schools
- State and local government
Mental Health in an Emergency Response

- Part of every response
- Anyone can be affected
- Everyone can play a role
Resources

**CDC**
Coping with a disaster: [https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/index.asp](https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/index.asp)
Addressing stigma: [https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/cerccorner/article_123016.asp](https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/cerccorner/article_123016.asp)

**SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Hotline**
1-800-985-5990 (TTY for deaf/hearing impaired: 1-800-846-8517); Text TalkWithUs to 66746
[https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline)


**Psychological First Aid (WHO)**
[http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/44615/1/9789241548205_eng.pdf](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/44615/1/9789241548205_eng.pdf)

**Antares Guidelines for Managing Stress in Humanitarian Workers**
[https://www.antaressfoundation.org/guidelines#.WZ2ul01lK71](https://www.antaressfoundation.org/guidelines#.WZ2ul01lK71)