



EMERGENCY RESPONDER SELF-CARE PLAN

Behavioral Health PPE

HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

Being a resilient responder starts with a commitment to taking care of yourself. This can be increasingly difficult during a pandemic, where responders experience additional stressors related to home and personal circumstances as well as those brought on by challenging mission demands. There are important steps you can take to keep yourself healthy and fit for duty as you take care of others. Complete this self-care plan before each mission/event and keep it with you so that you are ready to apply coping strategies when things get tough.

NAME OF MISSION/EVENT:

DATES:

PREDICT PROBLEMS

As an emergency responder, you and your team are at risk of experiencing a traumatic incident—an incident that may involve exposure to catastrophic events and emotionally or physically challenging situations like those listed below. Check all exposure elements you predict might be associated with your current/upcoming deployment:

- Short notice/limited time to prepare
- Intense workloads/long hours
- Lack of time off for personal time
- Austere living conditions
- Changes in roles/responsibilities
- Limited resources
- PPE-related challenges
- Risk of exposing self or others to COVID-19
- Encountering unfamiliar cultures/populations
- Working with difficult supervisors/colleagues
- Separation from loved ones/social support
- Hostile environment/risk of personal harm
- Hearing survivors' distressing stories
- Witnessing mass destruction
- Witnessing human suffering: violence/injury/death
- Witnessing dead bodies or body parts

- Life-and-death decision making
- Limited communications
- Loss of colleagues
- Managing conflicting messaging or changing guidance

Everyone reacts differently to stressful exposures, particularly when an event reminds them of a past event or when the stress is prolonged. List a few things that are traumatic reminders or emotional “triggers” for you personally? Examples...sights/sounds, places, smells, people, times of day/situations, feelings.

PRESCRIBE PROTECTION

Given the problems you have predicted, consider what you can do, think, and avoid to help you stay fit for duty. Review, adapt, and practice this “prescription for protection” during and after your deployment or any particularly traumatic work shift.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What do you do for yourself when you are upset?
- What has helped you during previous deployments?
- What do you like to do when you’re in a good mood or to help you relax?
- Where do you have control to make things better?
- What positive things can you say to yourself when things are tough?
- What/whom should you avoid?

STRESS MANAGEMENT TIPS

- Limit work to no longer than 12-hour shifts in teams
- Limit news/media exposure
- Talk to family, friends, and teammates about your feelings
- Maintain a healthy diet, get adequate sleep, and exercise
- Remember it is ok to say “no”
- Remind yourself it is not selfish to take breaks...and take them
- Name 5 non-distressing objects around you
- Pace yourself
- Watch out for each other
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Recognize what you can change and accept what you cannot
- Use structured meditation or breathing techniques to relax
- Practice yoga or Progressive Muscle relaxation techniques
- Listen to music you enjoy
- Avoid excessive alcohol/caffeine/sugar/negative people
- Use “positive” self-talk and avoid self-criticism
- Explore digital apps (e.g., COVID COACH)

ENGAGE YOUR PLAN

Recognize your personal signs of stress and monitor them throughout deployment so you know when to engage your protection plan. Prolonged exposure to stress can cause new symptoms, which can be more difficult to recognize. Common symptoms of stress include:

- Sadness, depression, apathy
- Easily frustrated
- Blaming others, irritability
- Lacking feelings, indifference
- Isolation or disconnection
- Poor self-care
- Tired, exhausted or overwhelmed
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling like a failure, nothing you do will help, not doing job well, need alcohol/drugs to cope
- Excessive worry or fear about something bad happening
- Easily startled or “on guard” all the time
- Physical signs of stress (e.g. racing heart, chest pain, difficulty breathing)*seek medical care
- Nightmares or recurrent thoughts of traumatic event
- Feeling other’s trauma is yours

REMEMBER: STRONG EMOTIONS ARE NORMAL REACTIONS TO AN ABNORMAL SITUATION

Create a team culture and buddy system to provide peer support. Remember you may be able to see the signs of stress better in your team- mates than in yourself. In a buddy system, two responders partner together to support each other and monitor each other’s stress, workload, safety.

BUDDY’S NAME:

CONTACT NUMBER:

OTHER PEOPLE I CAN CONTACT IF I NEED SUPPORT:

MY ORGANIZATION’S EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE CONTACT INFORMATION:

PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID

LOOK

- » LOOK for safety issues.
- » LOOK for people with obvious urgent basic needs. LOOK for serious distress reactions.
 - Is anyone extremely upset, immobile, not responding to others, or in shock?
 - Where and who are the most distressed people?

LISTEN

- » Approach people who may need support
 - Introduce yourself by name and organization; ask about immediate needs
 - If possible, find a quiet & safe place to talk; respect privacy
- » LISTEN to find out about people's needs and concerns
 - Ask about any obvious needs & concerns
 - Find out what is most important to them; help them prioritize
- » LISTENING will help people feel calm
 - Remain calm, quiet, and available
 - Do not pressure a person to talk; offer to listen and standby

LINK

- » LINK people to services and help address basic needs
 - Provide water, food, shelter, etc. and link people to available services for needs
 - Follow up with people if you promise to do so
- » Help people cope with problems
 - Help people identify their most urgent practical needs and prioritize them
 - Ask how they coped with past difficulties and affirm their ability to cope now
- » LINK people to information
 - Only say what you know
 - Provide people with contact details or direct referral to at least one other person they can go to once your assistance has ended.
 - Do not leave people who are seriously distressed or who cannot take care of themselves alone.

RESOURCES

SAMHSA DISASTER DISTRESS HELPLINE

Having Trouble Coping After a Disaster? Talk With Us.

Toll-Free: 1-800-985-5990

TTY: 1-800-846-8517

Text: "talkWithUs" to 66746

Website: <http://disasterdistress.samhsa.gov>

SAMHSA BEHAVIORAL HEALTH DISASTER RESPONSE MOBILE APP

Offers first responders immediate access to field resources for aiding disaster survivors. Has the ability to search for and map behavioral health service providers in the impacted area, review emergency preparedness materials, and send resources to colleagues.

Website: <http://store.samhsa.gov/product/PEP13-DKAPP-1>

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE

Toll-Free 1-800-272-TALK (8255)

TTY: 1-8007994TTY (4889)

SOURCES

[CDC Traumatic Incident Stress: Information for Emergency Response Workers](#)

[CDC Coping with a Disaster or Traumatic Event](#)

[CHAMP 5 ways to power your performance with optimism](#)

SAMHSA. (2014). [Tips for Disaster Responders: Preventing and Managing Stress](#). HHS Publication No. SMA-14-4873

Ommeren, M. (2011). [A 1-day orientation in psychological first aid \(PFA\) for first responders](#). World Health Organization

