

Disaster Psychology

CERT Basic Training
Unit 7





Unit Objectives

- Describe disaster and post-disaster emotional environment for survivors and rescuers
- Describe steps rescuers can take to relieve their own stress and that of other survivors





Unit Topics

- Ma Hie
- Disaster Trauma
- Team Well-Being
- Working with Survivors' Trauma







Psychological Trauma

- Your own personal losses
- Working in your neighborhood
- Assisting neighbors, friends, coworkers who have also been injured
- Not feeling safe and secure





Psychological Symptoms of Trauma

- Irritability or anger
- Self-blame or blaming others
- Isolation and withdrawal
- Fear of recurrence
- Feeling stunned, numb, overwhelmed
- Feeling helpless

- Mood swings
- Sadness, depression, grief
- Denial
- Concentration and memory problems
- Relationship problems/marital discord





Physiological Symptoms of Trauma

- Loss of appetite
- Headaches or chest pain
- Diarrhea, stomach pain, or nausea
- Hyperactivity
- Increase in drug consumption
- Nightmares
- Insomnia
- Fatigue





Team Well-Being

- Actions can be taken before, during, and after an incident to help manage emotional impact of disaster response work
- Knowing possible psychological and physiological symptoms of disaster trauma helps manage impact
- Learn to manage stress
 - CERT members for themselves
 - CERT leaders during response





How You Reduce Stress

- Get enough sleep
- Exercise regularly
- Eat a balanced diet
- Balance work, play, and rest
- Allow yourself to receive as well as give
- Connect with others
- Use spiritual resources





Take Care of Yourself

- Be aware of trauma that can follow a disaster
- Explain to family members and friends what you need:
 - Listen when you want to talk
 - Don't force you to talk





How Team Leaders Reduce Stress

- Brief CERT personnel beforehand
- Remember CERT is a team
- Rest and regroup
- Take breaks away
- Eat properly, stay hydrated
- Arrange for debriefing
- Rotate teams and duties
- Phase out workers gradually





Critical Incident Stress Debriefing

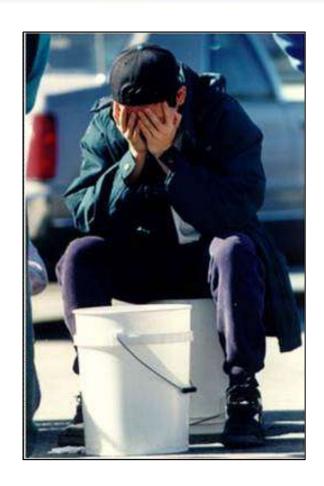
- 1. Introductions and description
- 2. Review of factual material
- 3. Sharing of initial thoughts and feelings
- 4. Sharing of emotional reactions to incident
- 5. Instruction about normal stress reactions
- 6. Review of symptoms
- 7. Closing and further needs assessment





Phases of a Crisis

- Impact
- Inventory
- Rescue
- Recovery







Traumatic Crisis

- Actual or potential death
- Serious injury
- Destruction
- Loss of contact with family or close friends





Effects of Traumatic Stress

- Cognitive functioning
- Physical health
- Interpersonal relationships





Mediating Factors

- Prior experience with a similar event
- Intensity of disruption
- Individual feelings about event
- Emotional strength of individual
- Length of time since event





Stabilizing Survivors

- Assess survivors for injury or shock
- Get uninjured people to help
- Provide support by:
 - Listening
 - Empathizing
- Help survivors connect with natural support systems





How to Be an Empathetic Listener

- Put yourself in the speaker's shoes
- Listen for meaning, not just words
- Pay attention to nonverbal communication
- Paraphrase the speaker





Avoid Saying...

- "I understand"
- "Don't feel bad"
- "You're strong" or "You'll get through this"
- "Don't cry"
- "It's God's will"
- "It could be worse"
- "At least you still have..."
- "Everything will be okay"





Managing the Death Scene

- Cover the body; treat it with respect
- Move the body to temporary morgue
- Follow local laws and protocols
- Talk with local authorities





Informing Family/Friends of a Death

- Separate the family member(s) or friend(s)
- Have the person(s) sit down
- Make eye contact
- "I'm sorry, but your family member has died. I am so sorry."
- Let the family and friends grieve





Unit Summary had Income

- Rescues may be unpleasant or uncomfortable
- Psychological and physiological symptoms of trauma
- Take steps to reduce stress
- CISD is one intervention
- Four emotional phases of a disaster
- Stress affects cognition, health, and interactions
- Stabilize individuals
- Be an empathetic listener





Homework Assignment

- 1. Read unit to be covered in next session
- 2. Bring necessary supplies to next session
- 3. Wear appropriate clothes to next session



