

# Unit Objectives

1. Describe the disaster and post-disaster emotional environment.
2. Describe the steps that rescuers can take to relieve their own stress and those of disaster survivors.





# Vicarious Trauma

The process of changes in the rescuer resulting from empathic engagement with survivors



# Possible Psychological Symptoms

- ◆ Irritability, anger
- ◆ Self-blame, blaming others
- ◆ Isolation, withdrawal
- ◆ Fear of recurrence
- ◆ Feeling stunned, numb, or overwhelmed
- ◆ Feeling helpless
- ◆ Mood swings
- ◆ Sadness, depression, grief
- ◆ Denial
- ◆ Concentration, memory problems
- ◆ Relationship conflicts/marital discord

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# Possible Physiological Symptoms

- ◆ Loss of appetite
- ◆ Headaches, chest pain
- ◆ Diarrhea, stomach pain, nausea
- ◆ Hyperactivity
- ◆ Increase in alcohol or drug consumption
- ◆ Nightmares
- ◆ Inability to sleep
- ◆ Fatigue, low energy



# Team Well-Being

CERT team leaders should:

- ◆ Provide pre-disaster stress management training.
- ◆ Brief personnel before response.
- ◆ Emphasize teamwork.
- ◆ Encourage breaks.
- ◆ Provide for proper nutrition.
- ◆ Rotate.
- ◆ Phase out workers gradually.
- ◆ Conduct a brief discussion.
- ◆ Arrange for a post-event debriefing.

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# Reducing Stress

- ◆ Get enough sleep.
- ◆ Exercise.
- ◆ Eat a balanced diet.
- ◆ Balance work, play, and rest.
- ◆ Allow yourself to receive as well as give.  
Remember that your identity is broader than that of a helper.
- ◆ Connect with others.
- ◆ Use spiritual resources.



# Critical Incident Stress Debriefing

Six phases:

- ◆ Introduction and a description
- ◆ Review of the factual material
- ◆ Sharing of initial thoughts/feelings
- ◆ Sharing of emotional reactions to the incident
- ◆ Instruction about normal stress reactions
- ◆ Review of the symptoms
- ◆ Closing and further needs assessment

# Phases of a Crisis

- ◆ Impact
- ◆ Inventory
- ◆ Rescue
- ◆ Recovery



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# Traumatic Crisis

An event in which people experience or witness:

- ◆ Actual or potential death or injury to self or others.
- ◆ Serious injury.
- ◆ Destruction of homes, neighborhood, or valued possessions.
- ◆ Loss of contact with family/close relationships.

# Traumatic Stress

Traumatic stress may affect:

- ◆ Cognitive functioning.
- ◆ Physical health.
- ◆ Interpersonal reactions.



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# Mediating Factors

- ◆ Prior experience with a similar event
- ◆ The intensity of the disruption in the survivors' lives
- ◆ Individual feelings that there is no escape, which sets the stage for panic
- ◆ The emotional strength of the individual
- ◆ The length of time that has elapsed between the event occurrence and the present

# Stabilizing Individual

- ◆ Assess the survivors for injury and shock.
- ◆ Get uninjured people involved in helping.
- ◆ Provide support by:
  - Listening.
  - Empathizing.
- ◆ Help survivors connect with natural support systems.



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## Avoid Saying . . .

- ◆ “I understand.”
- ◆ “Don’t feel bad.”
- ◆ “You’re strong/You’ll get through this.”
- ◆ “Don’t cry.”
- ◆ “It’s God’s will.”
- ◆ “It could be worse” or “At least you still have . . .”

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# Managing the Death Scene

- ◆ Cover the body; treat it with respect.
- ◆ Have one family member look at the body and decide if the rest of the family should see it.
- ◆ Allow family members to hold or spend time with the deceased.
- ◆ Let the family grieve.



# Informing Family of a Death

- ◆ Separate the family members from others in a quiet, private place.
- ◆ Have the person(s) sit down, if possible.
- ◆ Make eye contact and use a calm, kind voice.
- ◆ Use the following words to tell the family members about the death: “I’m sorry, but your family member has died. I am so sorry.”