

THE EFFECTS OF DISASTER RESPONSE

Following major traumatic events, disaster responders have found themselves reacting in many of the same ways as the primary survivors. Some of the subsequent problems they have experienced include increased alcohol and drug use, increased sick time, changes in profession, burn out or increased domestic violence.



Most disaster responders have many protective factors in their lives, including strong social supports, training and active life-styles. Sometimes primary issues around disaster response can be forgotten and avoidance and denial of difficulties can arise.

It's important to acknowledge several key points:

- No one who responds to a disaster or mass casualty event is untouched by it.
- Profound sadness, grief and anger are normal reactions to an abnormal event.
- We all have limitations.



DISASTER RESOURCES

AMERICAN RED CROSS FAMILY WELFARE PROGRAM
Phone: **303.722.7474 / 970.242.4851**

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION /
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE
Phone: **888.246.2675**

FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY
Phone: **800.621.FEMA**

NATIONAL VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS ACTIVE IN DISASTERS
Phone: **301.890.2119**

SAMHSA DISASTER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER (DTAC)
Phone: **800.308.3515**

If you, your family, or other survivors of disaster would like to speak with a counselor, we are here to help.

ASPEN
0405 Castle Creek Road
Suite 207
970.920.5555

CRAIG
439 Breeze Street
Suite 200
970.824.6541

EAGLE
137 Howard Street
970.328.6969

FRISCO
360 Peak One Dr.
Suite 110
970.668.3478

GLENWOOD SPRINGS
6916 Highway 82
970.945.2583

GRANBY
480 E. Agate Avenue
970.887.2179

GRAND JUNCTION
OUTPATIENT
515 28 ¾ Road
970.241.6023

WEST SPRINGS HOSPITAL
515 28 ¾ Road
970.263.4918

MEEKER
267 6th Street
970.878.5112

RANGELY
17497 West Highway 64
970.675.8411

RIFLE
796 Megan Avenue
Suite 300
970.625.3582

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS
407 South Lincoln Avenue
970.879.2141

VAIL
395 East Lionshead Circle
970.476.0930

WALDEN
350 McKinley Street
970.723.0055

24/7 Crisis Response | 888.207.4004

MindSpringsHealth.org

SELF-CARE

for
Disaster Response Workers



NORMAL REACTIONS

Many responders work long hours and days at a time, overriding signs of stress and fatigue and finding themselves in the 'fight' response for the victims (think fight/flight/freeze/faint). Many deny that they themselves need rest or recovery time. This is untrue, we all are human.

SELF-CARE TIPS

ENGAGE IN STRESS-REDUCING TECHNIQUES

Managing stress is an art form, especially for disaster response work. You must actively implement and practice those activities that help YOU.

MANAGING STRESS

- Decrease caffeine & alcohol
- Balance nutrition
- Exercise
- Increase sleep
- Understand your limitations
- Enjoy leisure time
- Be realistic about expectations
- Re-frame perceptions
- Practice spirituality
- Talk about the event, vent
- Don't forget about humor & positivity - laugh about it

Seek out Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) available to you through your employer and pace yourself for a marathon.

AVOID ENGAGING IN

- Extended periods of solo work without colleagues
- Working 'round the clock' with few breaks
- Negative self-talk that reinforces feelings of inadequacy or incompetency
- Excessive use of food/substances/work as a distraction



It's extremely important that you care for yourself. Should you find yourself recognizing any of the following reactions in yourself or others, take action to support self-care and recovery.

- Difficulties communicating thoughts
- Difficulties remembering instructions
- Difficulties maintaining balance, or unusual clumsiness
- Uncharacteristically argumentative
- Difficulties making decisions & problem-solving
- Short attention span
- Unnecessary risk-taking, including substance use
- Difficulties sleeping
- Increase or decrease in activity level, withdrawal
- Irritability, anger and easily frustrated
- Compassion stress: helplessness, confusion, isolation
- Compassion fatigue: demoralization, alienation, resignation
- Physical reactions (headache, nausea, easily startled)
- Attempts to over-control in professional or personal situations, or act out a 'rescuer complex'
- Refusal to follow orders or leave the scene

If any of the previous signs are experienced, it's time to take action.

TAKE ACTION

Get yourself out of there. Someone else can do the job you are doing.

- Take a lower stress work rotation, or return to a more routine work environment
- Go home. Connect with the people you love and who love you.



IN THE FIELD SELF-CARE

FAMILY

- Self-care actually starts with your family. Manage personal resources, plan for family/home safety including child & pet care. Know that your family is safe and out of harm's way. **DO THIS FIRST.**

DRESS

- This is hard, dangerous work. Dress accordingly.
- Wear strong & comfortable shoes. Have extra socks available.
- Layer for Colorado weather.
- Use a hat, sunglasses and sunblock, minimum SPF 45.

PERSONAL

- Have a flashlight & small radio available.
- Have water & protein/whole grain bars available.
- Have your cell phone & charger available but be aware that there may not be cell service available or they may not work in many mountainous areas.
- Self-monitor and pace your efforts.
- Maintain boundaries. Delegate, say 'no'.
- Regularly check in with colleagues, family & friends.
- Take frequent breaks.
- Talk frequently with others about the event.
- Work with partners or in teams.
- Try to be flexible, patient & tolerant.
- Accept you cannot change everything.