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Tips for Managing and Preventing Stress: A Guide for Emergency and Disaster Response Workers

Normal Reactions to a Disaster Event

Signs That You May Need Stress Management Assistance

Ways to Help Manage Your Stress

Normal Reactions to a Disaster Event

- No one who responds to a mass casualty event is untouched by it
- Profound sadness, grief, and anger are normal reactions to an abnormal event
- You may not want to leave the scene until the work is finished
- You will likely try to override stress and fatigue with dedication and commitment
- You may deny the need for rest and recovery time

Signs That You May Need Stress Management Assistance

- Difficulty communicating thoughts
- Difficulty remembering instructions
- Difficulty maintaining balance
- Uncharacteristically argumentative
- Difficulty making decisions
- Limited attention span
- Unnecessary risk-taking
- Tremors/headaches/nausea
- Tunnel vision/muffled hearing
- Colds or flu-like symptoms.
- Disorientation or confusion
- Difficulty concentrating
- Loss of objectivity
- Easily frustrated
- Unable to engage in problem-solving
- Unable to let down when off duty
- Refusal to follow orders
- Refusal to leave the scene
- Increased use of drugs/alcohol
- Unusual clumsiness

Ways to Help Manage Your Stress

- Limit on-duty work hours to no more than 12 hours per day

- Make work rotations from high stress to lower stress functions
- Make work rotations from the scene to routine assignments, as practicable
- Use counseling assistance programs available through your agency
- Drink plenty of water and eat healthy snacks like fresh fruit and whole grain breads and other energy foods at the scene
- Take frequent, brief breaks from the scene as practicable.
- Talk about your emotions to process have seen and done
- Stay in touch with your family and friends
- Participate in memorials, rituals, and use of symbols as a way to express feelings
- Pair up with a responder so that you may monitor one another's stress

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