



CERT Basic Training

Unit 5: Disaster Psychology



FEMA

Unit Objectives



1. Understand disaster trauma for survivors and rescuers, including CERT volunteers
2. List steps to take for personal and team well-being
3. Demonstrate key steps to apply when providing aid to someone with survivor's trauma



Causes of Disaster Reactions



- Dealing with your own personal losses
- Working in your neighborhood
- Assisting neighbors, friends, or coworkers who have also been injured
- Feeling unsafe and insecure



The Five Fs



- **Freeze:** “Stop, look, and listen,” or be on guard and watchful
- **Flight:** Flee
- **Fight:** Attempt to combat the threat
- **Fright:** Tonic immobility when in contact with a predator, or playing dead
- **Faint:** Fear-induced fainting



Psychological Symptoms of Trauma



- Emotional
- Cognitive
- Spiritual



Physical 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 volunteers for themselves
 - CERT leaders during response



How to 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 yourself to talk until you are ready



Self-Care Tool Box



- This activity provides you with the opportunity to outline a number of self-care tools you can use before and during a crisis so that you are ready to respond during an emergency
- Complete this exercise individually and at your own pace. When everyone has finished, you will have the opportunity to share your responses with the class if you would like

How Team Leaders Reduce Stress



- Brief CERT personnel beforehand
- Remember CERT is a team
- Rest and regroup
- Take breaks away from the incident site
- Establish a culture of acceptance
- Eat properly, stay hydrated
- Be aware of changes in teammates
- Rotate teams and duties
- Phase out workers gradually
- Defuse after shift



PM 5-7



Emotional Phases of a Crisis



- Pre-Disaster
- Impact
- Heroic
- Honeymoon
- Disillusionment
- Reconstruction



Traumatic Crisis



- A traumatic crisis is an event experienced or witnessed in which people's ability to cope is overwhelmed by:
 - Actual or potential death or injury to self or others
 - Serious injury
 - Destruction of their homes, neighborhood, or value possessions
 - Loss of contact with family or close friends



Effects of Traumatic Stress



- Traumatic stress may affect:
 - 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 and empathizing
- Help survivors connect with natural support systems



Listen, Protect, Connect



- Listen to survivors and pay attention to what they say
- Help survivors feel protected by providing support
- Connect survivors to friends and loved ones



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



What Not to Say



- “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 ”
- “At least you still have...”
- “Everything will be okay”



Say This Instead



- “I’m sorry for your pain ”
- “I’m so sorry this has happened ”
- “Is it all right if I help you with...?”
- “I can’t imagine what this is like for you ”
- “What do you need?”

Managing the Death Scene



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



Unit Summary



- Prepare yourself, as rescues may be unpleasant and uncomfortable
- Know the psychological and physiological symptoms of trauma
- Understand the six emotional phases of a disaster
- Take steps to reduce stress, which affects cognition, health, and interactions
- Stabilize individuals
- Listen, protect, and connect to support survivors
- Be an empathetic listener



Homework Assignment



- Read unit to be covered in next session
- Bring necessary supplies to next session
- Wear appropriate clothes to next session

