

Self-care Tips for Emergency and Disaster Response Workers

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 you're able.
- 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 you're able.
- Talk about your emotions to process what you 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.

Source: U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration