



KENTUCKY COMMUNITY CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM

CRISIS RESPONSE KIT



CABINET FOR HEALTH
AND FAMILY SERVICES

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Common Stress Reactions After Difficult Events



After a critical incident or traumatic event, it's common to experience a variety of stress reactions. These can affect different aspects of your well-being, including your body, mind, spirit, emotions, and behavior. These reactions are natural responses to stress, and understanding them can help you navigate through challenging times more effectively.

Stress reactions can vary widely from person to person and may show up immediately or later. It's important to know that these responses are temporary and usually decrease over time with appropriate care.

Physical Stress Reactions



The body's immediate response to stress is to activate the "fight or flight" response. Common physical stress reactions include:

- Fatigue or feeling drained
- Headaches or dizziness
- Chest tightness or rapid heartbeat
- Muscle tension or aches
- Sleep disturbances (trouble falling asleep, waking frequently)
- Digestive issues (nausea, stomach aches)

Mental Stress Reactions



Your mind may also react to stress in various ways. Mental stress reactions can include:

- Difficulty concentrating or staying focused
- Memory lapses or forgetting simple tasks
- Racing thoughts or feeling overwhelmed
- Feeling disoriented or confused
- Negative thoughts or a sense of hopelessness.

Spiritual Stress Reactions



For some, difficult events can impact their sense of meaning, purpose, or connection. Spiritual stress reactions may include:

- A loss of faith or questioning beliefs
- Feelings of isolation or disconnection from a higher power or community
- A sense of emptiness or lack of direction
- Moral distress or questioning the fairness of life or the world

Emotional Stress Reactions



Emotions can become heightened or difficult to process during stressful times. Common emotional reactions include:

- Sadness or a sense of grief
- Anxiety or fear about the future
- Irritability or frustration with others
- Shock or disbelief at what occurred
- Guilt or self-blame for what happened or how you reacted



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Behavioral Stress Reactions

Your behavior may also change as you react to stress. Common behavioral reactions include:

- Withdrawal from friends, family, or social activities
- Increased use of substances (alcohol, tobacco, drugs)
- Changes in appetite (eating too much or too little)
- Restlessness or agitation
- Overworking or an inability to relax
- Avoidance of reminders or conversations about the event

Moving Forward: Regaining Control and Healing



It's normal to experience a wide range of physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and behavioral stress reactions after a critical incident. The important thing is to acknowledge your feelings and take proactive steps to care for yourself. By practicing self-care and seeking support, you can begin to regain balance and take control of your well-being. Remember that you are not alone, and there are resources available to help you through this process.



Taking Control of Your Stress in the Immediate Aftermath

It's important to take proactive steps to manage your stress in the aftermath of a critical incident. Here are some strategies for regaining a sense of control:

1. **Acknowledge Your Reactions:** Recognize that your reactions are normal. Everyone processes stress differently, and it's okay to feel a range of emotions and physical symptoms.
2. **Ground Yourself:** Use grounding techniques, such as deep breathing or physical movement, to bring yourself back to the present moment. Focus on your breath, the feel of your feet on the ground, or the sounds around you to reduce overwhelm.
3. **Stay Connected:** Reach out to others for support. Connecting with colleagues, loved ones, spiritual leaders or a counselor can help you feel less isolated and more supported during this time.
4. **Rest and Recover:** Get enough sleep, hydrate, and nourish your body with healthy food. Adequate rest is crucial for emotional and physical recovery after a traumatic event.
5. **Practice Mindfulness:** Engage in mindfulness practices, such as meditation, prayer, or journaling, to help process your thoughts and emotions. Even five to ten minutes a day can help center your mind.
6. **Re-establish Routines:** Get back to your regular routine gradually. Having structure can help create a sense of normalcy and control.
7. **Take Breaks and Give Yourself Permission to Rest:** Allow yourself to take breaks during the day, even if just for a few moments of peace. Engage in activities you enjoy or that help you relax.
8. **Limit Exposure to Stressful Stimuli:** Avoid unnecessary exposure to distressing images or news related to the incident. Protect your mental and emotional space by setting boundaries.
9. **Seek Professional Support:** If your reactions feel overwhelming or last longer than expected, consider seeking help from a mental health professional who can guide you through the recovery process.

What is Compassion Fatigue?

Compassion fatigue is a form of burnout that results from the emotional toll of helping others who are suffering. It can lead to physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion, as well as a reduced capacity to empathize.

Compassion fatigue, often called "secondary traumatic stress," can affect those who regularly care for others in times of crisis. First responders and community members alike may experience this when dealing with intense emotional experiences related to critical incidents or disasters.

Signs to Watch For

Emotional Symptoms:

- Irritability & Mood Swings – Feeling easily frustrated or sad.
- Sense of Helplessness – A feeling that you can't make a difference, even when trying.
- Emotional Numbness – Difficulty connecting with or caring about others.
- Frequent Anxiety or Worry – Increased fear or anxiety about personal safety or the safety of others.



Physical Symptoms:

- Fatigue or Exhaustion – Constant tiredness that does not improve with rest.
- Sleep Problems – Difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or having nightmares.
- Headaches or Muscle Pain – Persistent headaches or tension, particularly in the neck and shoulders.
- Appetite Changes – Loss of appetite or overeating as a coping mechanism.



Behavioral Symptoms:

- Avoidance – Withdrawing from work, family, or social interactions.
- Difficulty Concentrating – Trouble focusing, making decisions, or remembering important details.
- Increased Substance Use – Turning to alcohol, drugs, or other unhealthy coping strategies.
- Loss of Interest in Activities – Lack of enjoyment in hobbies or things once loved.



Cognitive Symptoms:

- Negative Thinking – A pessimistic view of the world, or feeling like everything is "too much."
- Memory Problems – Difficulty remembering details, assignments, or daily tasks.
- Decreased Problem-Solving Ability – Difficulty finding solutions to simple problems or decisions.
- Feeling Disconnected – A sense of detachment or disorientation, as if you are not fully present in the moment.



How to Manage Compassion Fatigue

- Acknowledge Your Feelings: Recognizing compassion fatigue is the first step to healing.
- Talk to Someone: Whether it's a friend, colleague, spiritual leader, or professional counselor, sharing your experiences can be incredibly therapeutic.
- Practice Self-Care: Take regular breaks, get enough sleep, eat well, and engage in physical activity.
- Seek Professional Support: Therapy, counseling, and debriefing sessions can provide vital support for those impacted by trauma.
- Set Boundaries: It's okay to say no or step back when needed—prioritize your mental health.
- Engage in Relaxation Techniques: Mindfulness, meditation, prayer, and deep breathing exercises can reduce stress and anxiety.

Remember: **Compassion fatigue is a natural and human response to the emotional demands of helping others.**

By recognizing its signs and taking proactive steps, you can continue to care for yourself and others.

You are not alone, and seeking help is a sign of strength. Recognizing compassion fatigue and taking steps to address it will help you continue to care for others and for yourself. If you're feeling overwhelmed, reach out to a supervisor or counselor for support.

Building Resilience: Strength in the Face of Adversity

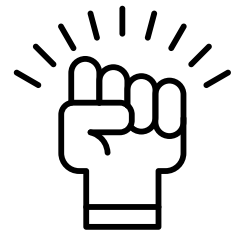
What is Resilience?

Resilience is the ability to recover and adapt in response to challenging or stressful events. It is not an innate trait but a skill that can be developed and strengthened through practice. Building resilience doesn't mean avoiding stress or adversity; rather, it empowers you to cope more effectively with trauma, setbacks, or difficulty. Resilience is a key principle in positive psychology, and its development is essential for maintaining mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being.

By learning resilience skills, you can enhance your ability to manage stress, rebound from adversity, and thrive in the face of life's challenges.

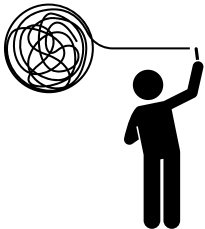
Develop a Growth Mindset

Challenges and setbacks are inevitable, but they can be valuable opportunities to learn and grow. Resilience isn't about avoiding difficulty but learning to cope effectively. Embrace challenges, and view them as learning moments rather than setbacks.



Tip: After a difficult call or event, reflect on what you learned and how to apply it next time. Every experience is a chance to build resilience.

Simplify Your Life



In stressful times, less is often more. Focus on what truly matters—your health, family, and well-being—and eliminate distractions to reduce overwhelm.

Tip: Create a peaceful environment at home or work. Limit distractions and take time to recharge.

Embrace Emotional Agility

Emotions can be intense after traumatic events. Resilience comes from acknowledging emotions, processing them, and letting go.



Tip: After a tough situation, take a moment to breathe deeply, acknowledge your feelings, and talk with a trusted colleague. Letting go of bottled emotions strengthens emotional resilience.

Building Resilience: Strength in the Face of Adversity



Connect with Purpose

Staying connected to something larger than yourself, whether through your work, relationships, or faith, helps provide meaning in tough times.

Tip: Reflect on why you do what you do. Reconnect with the core values that drive both your professional and personal life.



Find Strength in Laughter

Humor can be a powerful tool in building resilience, especially in stressful or traumatic moments. Laughter releases endorphins, reduces stress, and helps you reframe challenges positively.

Tip: Look for light-hearted moments throughout your day. Share a joke with a colleague or watch a funny video. Laughter not only boosts mood but fosters camaraderie and support.

Tip: Shared laughter builds social bonds and reduces feelings of isolation—crucial for resilience. Just remember, humor should be supportive and appropriate for the situation.



Support Each Other

Resilience isn't built in isolation. Support from peers and loved ones is key. In high-stress jobs, like first responding, leaning on teammates helps distribute the emotional load.

Tip: Check in with colleagues after a tough shift. Offering support strengthens not only them but your own resilience as well.



Prioritize Physical Fitness

Physical activity is critical for resilience. It improves mood, reduces stress, and helps recover from both physical and emotional challenges.

Tip: Make exercise a regular part of your routine—whether it's a brisk walk, strength training, or yoga. Even short bursts of activity can release tension and improve focus.

Tip: If your schedule is tight, try stretching between calls or taking short walks after shifts. Regular movement helps prevent burnout and keeps you sharp.

Building resilience is about adopting practices that support your mind, body, and spirit. By cultivating a growth mindset, simplifying life, fostering emotional agility, finding purpose, and supporting each other, you can strengthen your ability to face challenges. And by embracing laughter, physical fitness, and self-care, you are not only preparing for future setbacks, but you are also building the inner strength to thrive.



Mindfulness and Grounding Techniques

Stressful situations can leave us feeling overwhelmed or disconnected. Mindfulness and grounding techniques are simple tools that help manage stress, calm the mind, and stay emotionally balanced, whether in the moment or as part of a daily routine.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the practice of staying present and aware of your thoughts, feelings, and surroundings without judgment.

Why It Helps: It reduces stress, increases focus, and helps manage emotions during difficult times.



Mindfulness Techniques

Box Breathing

- Inhale for 4 counts
- Hold for 4 counts
- Exhale for 4 counts
- Hold for 4 counts
- Repeat as needed to regain calm.

Body Scan

- Start at your feet and slowly bring attention to each part of your body.
- Notice any sensations and consciously release tension as you exhale.

What is Grounding?

Grounding helps you reconnect to the present moment when feeling overwhelmed.

Why It Helps: It helps reduce anxiety and regain control during stressful situations.



Grounding Techniques

5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Exercise

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can touch
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

Physical Grounding

- Focus on an object around you.
- Engage all your senses—its texture, temperature, and details—to help stay grounded in the present moment.

When to Use These Techniques

- When feeling stressed or anxious
- During moments of emotional overwhelm
- After intense or challenging experiences
- As part of your daily routine to build emotional resilience

Resources for Support

- **Crisis Line:** Call or Text 988
- **Mental Health Support:** Seek professional help or counseling if needed.
- **Apps for Mindfulness:** Calm, Headspace, Insight Timer

Self-Care Techniques for Managing Stress and Maintaining Well-Being

Self-care is an essential practice for maintaining mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health. It involves activities and habits that promote relaxation, reduce stress, and improve overall well-being. Incorporating self-care into your routine can help you recharge and stay balanced during difficult times.

What is Self-Care?

Self-care refers to activities that individuals do deliberately to take care of their mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health.

Why It Helps: Regular self-care enhances resilience, reduces burnout, and improves overall well-being, making it easier to handle life's challenges.

When to Use Self-Care Techniques

- Daily to avoid the accumulation of stress
- After a long or challenging day
- When needing a mental break or recharge
- During moments of spiritual disconnect or seeking deeper meaning



Physical Self-Care

- **Exercise Regularly:** Aim for at least 30 minutes of activity most days (walking, yoga, stretching, etc.).
- **Sleep:** Prioritize sleep by maintaining a regular sleep schedule and creating a calming bedtime routine.
- **Eat Healthily:** Fuel your body with nutritious foods to keep your energy levels stable.

Emotional Self-Care

- **Journaling:** Write down your thoughts and feelings to process emotions and gain clarity.
- **Mindful Breathing:** Practice deep breathing exercises (like Box Breathing) to relax and reduce stress.
- **Connect with Loved Ones:** Reach out to friends or family to build emotional support.

Mental Self-Care

- **Take Breaks:** Give your mind time to rest with regular breaks throughout your day.
- **Practice Gratitude:** Take a moment daily to reflect on what you are thankful for.
- **Learn Something New:** Engage your brain with new challenges or hobbies that bring you joy.

Spiritual Self-Care

- **Meditation or Prayer:** Spend time each day in quiet reflection, prayer, or meditation to foster a sense of peace and connection.
- **Nature:** Spend time in nature to reconnect with your surroundings and experience a sense of awe and tranquility.
- **Purposeful Living:** Engage in activities that align with your values and sense of purpose, whether through volunteer work, creative projects, or spiritual practices.



Navigating Grief in Crisis

Grief is a natural response to loss. In moments of crisis, grief can be overwhelming, especially when experienced in the aftermath of trauma. It's important to understand that grief may look different for everyone, and there is no “right” or “wrong” way to grieve. However, there are ways to manage and cope with grief to help restore balance and emotional well-being.

Common Grief Responses

Grief can affect your body, mind, and emotions. It's normal to experience a variety of responses, including:

- **Emotional:** Sadness, anger, guilt, shock, confusion, numbness, or anxiety.
- **Physical:** Fatigue, sleep problems, loss of appetite, headaches, or aches and pains.
- **Cognitive:** Difficulty concentrating, memory lapses, or feeling disconnected from reality.
- **Behavioral:** Avoiding people, withdrawing, difficulty with routine activities, or increased substance use.

Coping Strategies for Grief



Acknowledge Your Grief

- It's important to recognize and feel your emotions. Allow yourself to experience sadness, anger, or confusion—grief is personal, and there's no need to hide your feelings.



Seek Out Caring People

- Reach out to friends, family, spiritual leaders, or trusted colleagues who can provide empathy and support. Sharing your grief with others can lighten the load and help you feel less alone.



Express Your Feelings

- Grieving doesn't just mean feeling sad—it's also about expressing those feelings. Talk, cry, or even write in a journal to release emotions that may feel too overwhelming to keep inside.



Take Care of Your Health

- Grief can take a toll on your physical health, so it's essential to take care of yourself. Try to maintain a balanced diet, get enough rest, and engage in physical activity when you can.



Accept That Life is for the Living

- It's important to accept that, even while you grieve, life continues. While you'll never forget the loss, finding ways to engage with life again—slowly and at your own pace—can help you heal.



Postpone Major Life Changes

- If possible, avoid making major life decisions (moving, changing jobs, etc.) during the initial grieving period. Your emotions may cloud your judgment, and it can be helpful to wait until you've had time to process the grief.



Be Patient with Yourself

- Grief doesn't have a specific timeline. Be gentle with yourself and allow your healing to unfold naturally. Grief is not linear, and some days will be harder than others.



Seek Outside Help When Necessary

- If your grief feels overwhelming or persistent, consider reaching out to a therapist or counselor. Professionals can help guide you through your emotions and provide support during difficult times.

Navigating Grief in Crisis

Tips for Helping Others Grieve



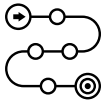
Listen Without Judgment: Sometimes the best thing you can do is simply listen. Let the person express their feelings, whether it's sadness, anger, or confusion, without offering unsolicited advice or trying to "fix" their pain.



Acknowledge the Loss: Offer a simple, sincere acknowledgment like, "I'm so sorry for your loss" or "I can't imagine how hard this must be." Avoid minimizing their grief or offering clichés like "They're in a better place."



Offer Practical Support: Grieving individuals may struggle with everyday tasks. Offering to help with meals, childcare, or other responsibilities can make a big difference.



Respect Their Grieving Process: Everyone grieves differently and on their own timeline. Don't rush them to "move on" or expect them to "get over it." Be patient and allow them to heal in their own time.



Check in Regularly: Grief doesn't end after the funeral. Check in on the person in the weeks and months after the loss. A simple text or call to say "I'm thinking of you" can offer ongoing support.



Encourage Professional Help if Needed: If the person's grief seems overwhelming or prolonged, gently suggest seeking professional support, such as a counselor or therapist, to guide them through the process.

Remember: Healing Takes Time

Grief is a journey that looks different for everyone. While you may never fully "get over" your loss, it's important to take the time you need to heal, be patient with yourself, and seek help when necessary.



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Children experience and express grief, trauma, and stress differently than adults. It's crucial to offer age-appropriate support to help children process their emotions after a crisis.

How Children May React to Trauma

Children's responses to trauma can vary based on age, developmental stage, and the nature of the incident. Common reactions include:

Infants and Toddlers (0-3 years): Increased irritability, sleep problems, changes in eating habits, or clinginess to caregivers.

Preschoolers (3-5 years): Regressed behaviors (e.g., thumb sucking, bedwetting), nightmares, or repetitive talking about the event.

Elementary Age (6-12 years): Difficulty concentrating, irritability, withdrawal, or fear of separation from caregivers.

Adolescents (13-18 years): Depression, anger, rebellious behavior, distancing from family, or engaging in risky behaviors.

Common Behaviors in Children After Trauma

Physical Symptoms: Complaints of stomachaches, headaches, or fatigue without physical cause.

Emotional Responses: Fear, sadness, anxiety, anger, or guilt.

Behavioral Changes: Difficulty focusing, school avoidance, aggression, or withdrawal from family and friends.

Sleep Problems: Nightmares, insomnia, or increased sleep patterns.

Regressive Behaviors: Returning to earlier developmental stages, such as bed-wetting or thumb-sucking.



How to Talk to Children About Trauma

Use Age-Appropriate Language: Simplify explanations without overwhelming details. For example, say, "Something very sad happened, and we are safe now," rather than providing graphic details.

Encourage Expression: Let children express their feelings through talking, drawing, or play. Use art or toys as a way for younger children to communicate feelings.

Validate Feelings: Reassure children that their emotions are normal and that it's okay to feel sad, scared, or confused.

Be Honest, but Reassuring: Answer questions truthfully, but provide reassurance. For instance, "I don't know everything, but we are here to help you feel safe."

Comforting Strategies



Routine and Stability: Children benefit from structure. Try to maintain a consistent routine (e.g., meal times, bedtime) to help provide a sense of safety.

Physical Comfort: Offering hugs, holding hands, or sitting close can provide reassurance to young children, helping them feel safe and secure.

Create a Safe Space: Ensure the child has a quiet, comfortable space to retreat to when feeling overwhelmed.

Model Calmness: Children often look to adults for cues on how to react. Stay calm, listen, and be patient.

Signs a Child Needs Professional Support

- Persistent fear or anxiety that interferes with daily life.
- Severe regressive behaviors (e.g., loss of potty training, loss of language skills).
- Nightmares or insomnia that significantly impact rest.
- Extreme mood swings, withdrawal from family and friends, or outbursts of anger.
- Difficulty with schoolwork or social interactions that doesn't improve over time.
- Physical symptoms such as unexplained stomachaches or headaches that persist.

If any of these signs last for more than a few weeks or intensify, it is important to seek professional help from a pediatric mental health professional or counselor.

Resources for Children's Mental Health

- National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: **988**
For emotional support and mental health resources.
- SAMHSA National Helpline (1-800-662-HELP): Provides resources for mental health and substance use issues.
- Child Mind Institute: Offers resources for supporting children's mental health in times of crisis (www.childmind.org).
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network: Provides specific resources on supporting children in the aftermath of trauma (www.nctsn.org).

For Yourself: Recognizing and Addressing Suicidal Thoughts

If you're having thoughts of suicide, it's important to know that you're not alone, and help is available. Suicidal thoughts are often temporary, and with support, many people find relief and healing.

Signs You Might Be Thinking About Suicide:

- Feeling hopeless or trapped
- Withdrawing from others
- Feeling like you are a burden to others
- Experiencing overwhelming pain (emotional or physical)
- Engaging in reckless or self-destructive behavior
- Having a strong desire to escape life's stressors or problems

Coping Strategies:

- Mindfulness & Grounding: Practice grounding techniques (e.g., 5-4-3-2-1 exercise) to anchor yourself in the present moment.
- Distraction: Engage in activities that require focus, such as drawing, reading, or going for a walk.
- Breathing Exercises: Slow, deep breathing (e.g., 4-7-8 technique) can help regulate overwhelming emotions.

What You Can Do:

Reach Out for Help: Speak to a trusted friend, family member, spiritual leader, or a mental health professional. It's okay to ask for support.

Call a Crisis Hotline: Immediate, confidential help is available:

- Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: Call or Text 988 (**available 24/7**)

Create a Safety Plan: A plan can help you manage moments of crisis:

- List coping strategies (breathing exercises, self-soothing activities).
- Identify people to contact for support.
- Keep a list of things that bring you joy or comfort.



Remove Lethal Means: If possible, remove any harmful items (medications, firearms, etc.) from your environment. Temporarily store them at a family or friend's house. The key is putting time and space between yourself and lethal means.



For Others: How to Help Someone with Suicidal Thoughts

If someone you care about is experiencing suicidal ideation, it's essential to approach them with care and concern. You can make a significant difference in their safety and well-being by offering your support.



Signs Someone Might Be Considering Suicide:

- Talking about wanting to die or feeling like a burden
- Severe mood swings or extreme hopelessness
- Increased substance use or reckless behavior
- Withdrawal from social circles and loved ones
- Giving away possessions or saying goodbye
- Expressing feelings of being trapped or in unbearable pain

What You Can Do to Help:

1. **Take Them Seriously:** Never ignore or minimize the person's feelings. Express that you care and are concerned.
2. **Listen Without Judgment:** Let them talk openly about what they're feeling. Avoid interrupting or offering immediate solutions.
3. **Ask Directly:** If you're concerned, it's okay to ask, "Are you thinking about ending your life?" It's a myth that asking about suicide can encourage it. Instead, it opens the door for them to talk and seek help.
4. **Encourage Professional Help:** Suggest they speak to a therapist or counselor and offer to help them find resources (e.g., 988 or mental health clinics).
5. **Stay with Them:** If they're in immediate danger, stay with them and ensure they aren't left alone. If possible, remove any means they could use to harm themselves.
6. **Call for Help:** If the person is at immediate risk of harming themselves, call emergency services (911 or equivalent) or ask if you can take them to the nearest emergency room.

Create a Supportive Environment:

- **Be Patient:** Recovery from suicidal ideation takes time. Your support can make a big difference in how they feel.
- **Offer Ongoing Support:** Continue to check in with them, even if they seem to be doing better. Suicidal thoughts may return, so ongoing encouragement can be lifesaving.

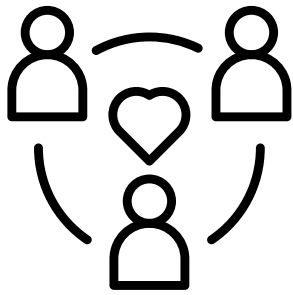
Important! You can call 988 on behalf of someone else or to ask for guidance.

- **Ask for Guidance:** Speak with a crisis counselor for advice on supporting someone suicidal and how to encourage them to seek help.
- **Request Immediate Help for Someone Else:** If someone is in immediate danger, call 988 to assess the risk and receive guidance on keeping them safe until further help arrives.



Peer Support Networks: Strengthening Mental Health After a Crisis

Peer support networks provide essential emotional and mental health support after a crisis. Whether you're a first responder, community member, or disaster survivor, connecting with peers who understand your experience can make a huge difference.



What is Peer Support?

Peer support involves individuals with shared experiences offering emotional, mental, and social support. It helps reduce feelings of isolation, builds resilience, and improves overall mental health after critical incidents.

How Peer Support Helps

- **Emotional Relief:** Share experiences with people who understand.
- **Reduce Isolation:** Connect with others who have gone through similar situations.
- **Improved Resilience:** Strengthen your coping strategies through shared learning.

How to Access Peer Support

- **Look for Established Programs:** Many organizations have formal peer support programs for responders and survivors.
- **Connect with a Trusted Peer:** Reach out to a trusted colleague or co-worker who may offer support.
- **Contact the KCCRT at (888)522-7228:** The KCCRT can deploy a peer support team to your organization for group debriefings and to provide one-on-one support after critical incidents.



When You Need Professional Help

If you or someone else is experiencing:

- Intense emotional distress
- Symptoms of PTSD, anxiety, or depression
- Thoughts of self-harm or suicide

Get help immediately by reaching out to a mental health professional or calling 988 for immediate assistance.

988 SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE 



Creating a Personal Mental Health Plan

Creating a personal mental health plan is a proactive way to take control of your well-being. This plan will help you manage stress, stay resilient, and avoid burnout by identifying what works best for YOU.



Identify Your Stress Triggers

Think about what situations, events, or emotions cause you the most stress. It could be work-related, personal stressors, or other external factors.

Question: What stress triggers have you noticed in your life? What specific situations or emotions tend to cause you the most stress?



Stress Management Strategies

Here are some strategies you can use to manage your stress. Consider which ones may work best for you.

- **Breathing Exercises** (e.g., deep breathing, box breathing)
- **Mindfulness/Guided Meditation** (e.g., 5 minutes of mindfulness or prayer daily)
- **Physical Activity** (e.g., regular exercise, yoga, walking)

• **Question:** What stress management strategies work best for you? When or how can you incorporate them into your day?



Coping Mechanisms for Challenging Times

Think about the activities or practices that help you relax and process your emotions during difficult times.

- **Talking It Out** (e.g., a trusted friend, peer support)
- **Journaling** (writing down thoughts and feelings)
- **Healthy Outlets** (e.g., hobbies, relaxation activities)

• **Question:** Which coping mechanisms do you find most effective when things get tough? How can you build these into your routine?



Build Your Support System

Think about the people you can turn to for support when you need it, including peers, family members, faith group, or mental health professionals.

• **Question:** Who can you rely on for support when stress feels overwhelming? How can you stay connected with these people, especially in times of need?

Creating a Personal Mental Health Plan



Set Mental Health Goals

Setting goals will help you stay focused and track your progress. Consider both short-term and long-term goals.

- **Short-term Goals** (1-3 months)
 - **Long-term Goals** (6-12 months)
- **Question:** What mental health goals do you want to set for yourself? How can you break these goals down into smaller, achievable steps?

Track Your Progress

Regularly check in with your plan to see how well it's working for you. Make adjustments if necessary.

- **Question:** How often will you check in with your mental health plan? What indicators or signs will let you know if you need to make any changes?

My Personalized Mental Health Plan

Based on your reflections, here is your opportunity to create a mental health plan tailored to your needs. Use the following prompts to craft a plan that works best for you.

My Stress Triggers

(What situations, events, or emotions tend to cause you the most stress?)

My Stress Management Strategies

(What strategies will help you manage stress? How/when can you use them?)

Creating a Personal Mental Health Plan

My Coping Mechanisms

(What coping mechanisms work best for you during challenging times?)

My Support System

(Who can I turn to for support when needed?)

My Mental Health Goals

(Short-term and long-term goals to support your mental health.)

My Progress Check-In Plan

(How often will you review your mental health plan? What signs will prompt adjustments?)

Congratulations 🎉 on creating your personalized mental health plan! Remember, your plan is a living document—adjust it as your needs change. By staying proactive and committed to your well-being, you're building resilience for the future. Take care of yourself, because your mental health matters.



Effective communication in crisis situations is crucial for both first responders and those affected by the crisis. Clear, calm, and empathetic communication can help to reduce stress, prevent escalation, and foster trust. This resource will provide strategies for communicating under pressure, including the principles of active listening, de-escalation, and how to help others feel heard and supported.

Key Principles of Crisis Communication

Stay Calm and Focused



Why It's Important: In a crisis, emotions can be heightened. Maintaining composure and calm helps to create a safe space for effective communication. Calmness promotes clarity and reduces the chance of further escalating the situation.

How to Do It:

- Take a deep breath and maintain a slow, steady voice.
- If possible, pause before speaking to gather your thoughts and assess the situation.
- Use neutral, non-threatening body language (avoid crossed arms or tense posture).

Active Listening



Why It's Important: Active listening helps others feel validated, heard, and understood, which can reduce emotional distress and foster trust. It also provides you with essential information to respond effectively.

How to Do It:

- Listen attentively: Focus entirely on the speaker. Avoid interrupting or formulating your response while the other person is talking.
- Reflect back: Paraphrase or repeat back key points to ensure understanding. For example, "It sounds like you're feeling overwhelmed because of..."
- Acknowledge emotions: Recognize the feelings behind the words. Use phrases like, "I can see that this is really upsetting for you," to show empathy.

Use Simple, Clear Language



Why It's Important: In high-stress situations, people may have trouble processing complex information. Using clear, straightforward language ensures the message is understood and reduces confusion.

How to Do It:

- Speak in short, simple sentences.
- Avoid jargon or technical terms unless they are absolutely necessary and ensure they are explained.
- Focus on one point at a time to avoid overwhelming the listener with too much information.

Empathy and Compassion



Why It's Important: Crisis situations often involve strong emotions, such as fear, sadness, or anger. Responding with empathy and compassion can reduce feelings of isolation and create a sense of safety.

How to Do It:

- Acknowledge the other person's emotional state. For example, "I can only imagine how difficult this must be for you right now."
- Show understanding through both your words and actions. Sometimes, simply sitting with someone in silence can communicate that you care.
- Avoid minimizing or dismissing the person's feelings. Phrases like "It could be worse" or "You'll get over it" are not helpful in a crisis.

Maintain Non-Verbal Awareness



Why It's Important: Non-verbal communication, such as body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice, plays a critical role in how messages are received. People may be more sensitive to non-verbal cues during a crisis.

How to Do It:

- Maintain eye contact (but avoid staring, as this can feel intimidating).
- Use an open posture (e.g., arms uncrossed, leaning slightly forward) to appear approachable.
- Match your tone of voice to the situation—use a calm, soothing tone, especially when the other person is distressed.
- Be aware of personal space. In some cultures or situations, standing too close may be perceived as threatening, while in others, physical presence may offer comfort.

Offer Reassurance and Hope



Why It's Important: People in crisis may feel powerless or lost. Offering reassurance and hope can help them feel that there is a way forward, even if the situation is difficult or uncertain.

How to Do It:

- Acknowledge the crisis, but focus on the actions that can be taken. For example, "We are doing everything we can to keep you safe."
- Offer small steps to move forward. This helps prevent the person from feeling overwhelmed by the enormity of the situation. "Let's start by taking a few deep breaths together."
- Encourage connection to support systems: "You are not alone in this. We have resources available to help you."

De-Escalation Techniques



Why It's Important: In some situations, individuals may become agitated or aggressive. Knowing how to de-escalate can prevent violence and ensure that everyone remains safe.

How to Do It:

- **Stay calm:** As the situation becomes tense, maintaining a calm demeanor is essential.
- **Use "I" statements:** Avoid making accusatory or judgmental statements. Instead, use statements like "I understand this is difficult" to de-escalate tensions.
- **Offer choices:** When possible, give the person options. This can help them feel more in control. "Would you like to sit down, or would you prefer to talk outside?"
- **Set clear, calm boundaries:** Let them know what behavior is not acceptable in a way that is firm but non-threatening. "I understand you're upset, but yelling will only make it harder for us to solve this together."

