

Caring for Ourselves as Responders

Disasters and emergencies of all kinds impact everyone who deals with them, including (and sometimes especially) responders, aid workers, and other volunteers. Caring for our physical and mental health is essential to being able to continue helping.

Basic Self-Care Reduces or Prevents Problems

These suggestions may sound basic and not worth mentioning, but in disaster work there is always more to do than can be done, and taking breaks can be challenging for many of us, especially in the field. It's important for your entire team to continually remind one another of the need to care for their own needs, even giving "permission" or support when necessary.

Meeting Physical Needs	Meeting Emotional Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rest regularly • Stay hydrated • Exercise, stretch, move • Eat healthy food, including vegetables ;-) • Take a multivitamin if practical • Mask, gloves, wear PPE when indicated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take breaks! • Do fun things sometimes • Journal • Meditate • Talk with others • Share losses and celebrate wins together

Raw or Resilient?

Recognizing when we are stressed, triggered, or no longer in an emotionally resilient state helps us know when we need to take more time to care for our own needs. Here are some ways we can recognize which state we are in.

When stressed or traumatized, we may...	When emotionally resilient, we will...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unknowingly hold tension in our bodies. • Ignore signs of hunger, thirst, pain. • Have difficulty making decisions. • Tend to be in arguments/disagreements. • Feel inhibited by fear or anxiety. • Get irritated at differences. • Not know how we feel emotionally. • Have trouble falling asleep. • Snap at people, or get angry easily. • Be unable to feel gratitude. • Feel hopeless or depressed. • Feel incompetent or unhelpful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware of tension and try to relax. • Be aware of our body's signals. • Know what we need to make decisions. • Be able to negotiate challenging events. • Be courageous. • Understand different perspectives. • Sense when emotions need processing. • Be able to settle ourselves to sleep. • Know when we are losing our cool and need a break. • Often be able to find gratitude in hardship • Be hopeful; see a path to improvement. • Feel competent to create change.

SELF CARE

Identify and practice three strategies for self-care and community resilience while engaging in emergency relief work.

CALLED TO ACTION

You were one of the few infant feeding specialists in a large community when the storm came through. Although your home was not affected directly, you work part-time in a hospital that serves the community. You have no potable water, and although the tap is running again and you can flush your toilets, the water is not suitable for bathing or drinking, or preparing food. Everyone is still in a state of shock. You've been helping where you can on your own time but the needs are overwhelming. Your internet is finally back after weeks of being down.

BALANCE

How do you balance taking care of your needs and still show up for your community?

HERE & NOW

What is one strategy that can be done here and now?

RECHARGE

How can you recharge when the demands keep coming for weeks on-end?