Critical Incident Stress Management: Building Psychological Resilience

Sponsored By:
Howard County Maryland
Office of Emergency Management
Local Emergency Planning Committee

It never fails, first we have an earthquake, and then it snows...

Emergencies Can Challenge our Resilience
Sometimes... We Just Get Stressed

Stress Reactions
- Physical
- Emotional
- Cognitive
- Physical
- Spiritual

Psychological Phases of Disasters

Pre-disaster
- Threat
- Warning
- Management
- Community
- Planning
- Preparedness

Disaster
- Response
- Recovery
- Reconstruction
- New begins

Recovery
- Loss of
- Property, life, home
- Emotional
- Physiological
- Spiritual

Reconstruction
- Jobs
- Community
- New community
- New begins
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Impact Phase

- Duration: Impact period
- Plans activated
- Survival behaviors
- Responses:
  - Shock
  - Terror
  - Fear
  - "Stun" reaction
  - Freeze reaction

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Heroic Phase

- Duration: Hours to a few days
- Behaviors:
  - Survival
  - Search
  - Rescue
  - Aid

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Heroic Phase

- Altruism is common
- Self-assessment of risk may be distorted
- Separation from family members is distressing
Community Solidarity Phase

- Duration: weeks to months
- Community acts to protect survivors
- Community solidarity

Matt McElroy gets some help from friends to make temporary repairs on the blown-off roof.

Community Solidarity Phase

- Gratitude for survival
- Bonding

Community Solidarity Phase

- Assistance pours into the area
- Media focuses on event
- Belief that life will rapidly return to normal
**Disillusionment Phase**

- Duration: months to years
- Fatigue emerges
- Losses are realistically assessed

Gilbert Stanage, 64, said he spent his savings on his $11,000 mobile home in Port Charlotte, Fla., two years ago but could not get insurance.

**Disillusionment Phase**

- Media pulls out
- Volunteerism declines
- Persons remain displaced
- Hope diminishes
- Resentment builds
- Community cohesion is challenged

**Reconstruction Phase**

- Duration: months to years
- Rebuilding continues
- The new reality is accepted
- Anniversaries or reminders may be distressing
Reconstruction Phase

- Reassessment of priorities and commitments
- Recognition of personal strengths

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Reconstruction Phase

Recovery process for survivors is highly variable:

- Most regain predisaster level of functioning
- Some emerge at a higher level of functioning

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What is Resilience
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Resilience
- Individual
- Family
- Community
- Team

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Building Resilience
- Requires practice and commitment to training
- Willingness to tolerate some pain and change
- Persistence!

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Key Resilience Factors
(Southwick and Charney)
- Former POW’s
- Special Forces Instructors
- Resilient Civilians following severe trauma
**Resilience Factor: Physical Fitness**

- Improves physical health
- Reduces anxiety and depression
- Enhances cognitive functioning
- HPA axis dampening under stress
- Lower cortisol production, less brain exposure to cortisol and less hippocampal neuron damage
- Neurogenesis via increased production of neurotrophic factors (BDNF)

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**Resilience Factor: Realistic Optimism**

- Future oriented attitude
- Hopefulness
- Pay attention to the negative, but don’t let it define your reality
- Focus on strengths

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**Optimism and Resilience**

- Negative emotions can help us survive danger (e.g., fight or flight arousal)
- Positive emotions reduce excessive arousal and broaden our focus
- Allow for reappraisal, positive coping, and finding meaning
- Optimists are effective problem solvers…why?
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**Strategies for Optimism**

- Focus attention on positives
- Intentionally monitor your thinking
- Practice reframing events in a more positive manner
- Act in ways that build positive attitudes

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**Resilience Factor: Cognitive Flexibility**

- Accepting reality of a situation
- Cognitive re-appraisal (30,000 ft. view)
- Gratitude
- Re-appraise failure as an opportunity to self-correct
- Humor

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**Resilience Factor: Facing Fear**

- See fear as a normal chemical process
- Avoidance of fear = Longer suffering
- Focus on the mission or a goal when afraid
- Use outward focus to counter cognitive constriction
- Breathing techniques
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What helps you face fear?

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Resilience Factor: Moral Compass
- Decisions based on core values
- Focus on serving and altruism

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Resilience Factor: Spirituality
- Meaningful Belief System
  - How do you "make sense of the world?"
- Physical and Psychological Benefits
Resilience Factor: Social Support

- Protects against physical and mental illness
- Isolation associated with stress, depression, and PTSD
- Cohesion increases resilience
- Support is healing after trauma

Always work in a buddy system!

*This is in the event of an emergency, each completing course pairs up with a buddy system.*
Support: Role Models

- Mentors help to build resilience by modeling it
- Relationships provide the experience, knowledge, and support to encourage people to challenge themselves and grow

Resilience Factor: Training

- Repetitive Skill Practice / Overlearning
- Stress inoculation
- Mental Rehearsal of Skills
- Modeling
Resilience: Physical Strategies
- Physical fitness / Exercise
- Relaxation Training
- Nutrition
- Sleep / Rest / Vacation
- Talk it out or write about critical incidents
- Medical intervention if indicated

Resilience: Finding Meaning
- Brother/Sisterhood
- Expression (talk, write, art)
- Time for Daily Reflection
- Personal Renewal Activities
- Live Your Values
- Mindfulness
- Transition Rituals
- Humor

Finding Meaning
- Remember those you have helped
- Tell the stories
- Letters, cards etc. to read together
Family Resilience

Commitment

Cohesion
Dear Department of Homeland Security:

I have my duck taped—now what am I supposed to do?

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Tips for Preparing for Emergencies

- Start with Planning
- Pick an Emergency Meeting Place
- Choose Family Contacts
- Remember Pets
- Check with Schools
- Teach Children about Emergencies
- Practice

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Tips for Preparing for Emergencies

- Talk with Neighbors Before the Disaster
- Know your Workplace Emergency Plan
- Have Emergency Supplies on Hand
- Know Your Community Resources In Advance
Team/Organizational Strategies

- Pre-disaster training / stress inoculation
- Pre-disaster briefings
- "Buddy care"
- Provide for contact with family
- Supervisors trained to monitor for excessive stress reactions
- Breaks / meals / rest
- Post disaster staff support

Resources for Resilience

Crisis Intervention and Critical Incident Stress Management

Critical Incident Stress

An acute emotional, cognitive, and physical reaction that results from an exposure to a traumatic event
Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)

- An organized approach to Crisis intervention
- A “package” of crisis intervention techniques
- Trained Teams to support agencies and communities
- Peer Support

Professional Resources for Support
Professional Resources

- Counseling / Therapy
- Crisis Response Agencies
- EAP
- Medical
- Social Services
- PTSD recovery programs
- Spiritual Care
- Grief Resources