helping the helpers
crisis characteristics

- Significant casualties
- Rapidly escalating developments may extend beyond resources
- Likely to attract media
- Limited and conflicting information on the situation
- Impact may continue well beyond the event
ripple effect

Community Reactions

Organization’s “World”

Impact on general operations

Impact on Emergency Response Teams

Impact on individuals & families
considerations

Event will impact the team members personally

Most responses are normal – it is the situation that is not normal

Some people may be highly emotional

Much of this work involves “operating in shades of gray”

Requires healthy boundaries
Survivor reactions

- Concern for basic survival
- Confusion
- Grief over loss of loved ones and valued/meaningful possessions
- Fear and anxiety about personal safety and that of their loved ones
- Disaster-related isolation or crowded living conditions
preparedness

ERP

Defined roles / Checklists

Drills / Exercises

Training
Based on industry standards

Site assessments

All-hazards approach

Roles and Responsibilities

Checklist based

Identify resources

Accessibility
roles / responsibilities
Traditional, hierarchical communication is valuable in a team environment, but insufficient.

Open and timely communications should occur between team members, not defined by roles or responsibilities.

Err on the side of over communicating.
training
To be gone

To go

To work as a team
prepare to be gone

- Talk with supervisor
- Talk with colleagues
- Leave contact information
- Think about caretaker responsibilities
- Single parent considerations
prepare to go

• Maintain updated contact information
• Gather information regarding event specifics
• Do self-assessment for readiness
• Review checklist for packing/supplies
• May not have “creature comforts” on-site
• On-site contact information
• Notify family
prepare to work as a team

• Who do you report to?
• Assignment
• Briefings/updates
• Schedules
• Submit paperwork
  – Daily action logs
  – Expense payment forms
  – Appropriate receipts
Supportive policies that recognize the stressful nature of emergency response work

Briefing on situation / cultural diversity / safety concerns

Operational work setting / teams / shifts / supplies / community resources

The first day on site—ensure that coping strategies are in place

Balance the workload and vary the tasks
assessment

Personal experience of trauma / loss
Family responsibilities
Health issues
Work commitments
team member concerns

- Feeling untrained or unprepared
- Fear of not knowing the “right answers”
- Personal connection – loss of a colleague
- Fear of being physically attacked
- Fear of being blamed (media stories)
response issues

- Role ambiguity
- Mismatching skills with tasks
- Lack of clarity of tasking
- Rapidly changing priorities
- Lack of team cohesion / communication
- Command and control ambiguities
- Team / Family conflict
Conflict

1. Acknowledge that conflict exists
2. Focus on problem, not personalities
3. Encourage involved parties to reach solution first
4. Mediate if necessary
5. Identify issues at core of conflict
6. Focus issues in context of team objectives
consequences
physical signs

- Headaches / Dizziness
- Heart palpitations
- Neck / Back pain
- GI upset
- Sleep difficulties
- Fatigue
behavioral signs

- Increased irritability and anger / emotionality
- Increased isolation and avoidance
- Appetite change
- Ineffective or self-destructive coping behaviors
- Hyper-vigilance / startle reactions
work-related signs

Concentration difficulties
Impaired ability to make decisions
Decreased productivity
Dread of working with certain individuals or families
Diminished sense of purpose
long term effects

- Relationship problems
- Substance abuse
- Decreased immune response
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Burnout
“The truth is that for all the pain, these symptoms are a blessing. They point out to us that our life is out of balance and needing intervention.”

(Gentry, 1998)
building resiliency
**Ability to adapt in the face of adversity, trauma or tragedy**

~ American Psychological Association

**Ability to be successful personally and professionally, in a highly pressured, fast-paced and continuously changing environment**
prior to response

Health and Wellness

Work/Family Balance

Flexibility

Stress Management

Ability to maintain boundaries
response support

- Information
- Workload management
- Adaptability / flexibility
- Reality checks
- Balanced hydration, nutrition, rest, exercise
- Team and personal support system
strategies for resiliency

- Keep things in perspective
- Avoid seeing problems as insurmountable
- Realistic plans with identified actions
- Practice daily “mindfulness” techniques
- Humor / crying
- Go off site
- Positive indulgences
You will have helped people at the worst imaginable time

Your contact will be brief and they may not say “thank you”

Know that by responding, you have HELPED

This experience may affect you more deeply than you expect
“If a man going down into a river swollen and swiftly flowing is carried away by the current how can he help others across?”

- Buddha
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