



REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE
MINISTRY OF FAMILY AND
SOCIAL SERVICES

SUPPORT TO PROFESSIONALS IN TIMES OF DISASTERS AND EMERGENCIES



Prepared in cooperation with the Ministry of Family and Social Services and UNICEF.

Which situations may cause acute stress?

Causes Related to the Situations:

- Long-term exposure to a disaster or a case of emergency
- Working under tough field conditions (malnutrition, lack of rest, and accommodation problems etc.)
- Working under heavy environmental conditions (extreme cold, extreme heat, difficulty of transportation, intense malodor)
- Witnessing death or injury
- Adverse impact of a disaster/emergency on acquaintances (coworker, family member, etc.), their injury or death
- Working under time pressure
- Being subjected to the anger of those affected, etc.



Personal Causes:

- Being away from loved ones for a long time,
- Struggling in team interactions and being reluctant to share and build relationships,
- Struggling to cope with stress and deal with problems,
- Failure to make oneself prepared to cope with a disaster or an emergency (regular implementation of self-care skills, professional development, identifying and strengthening strengths and weaknesses, etc.),
- Feeling an extreme sense of responsibility on one hand, and feeling insufficient on the other

Organizational Causes:

- Failure to strengthen relevant skills in the preparation phase when it comes to disasters and emergencies,
- Gaps in maintaining the professional training, experience, and learning process
- Inadequacy in providing the needed supervision support.

Working with People Facing Traumatic Events:

- Disaster and emergency relief professionals working with people who have experienced traumatic events or witnessed one are indirectly affected by their trauma and may exhibit secondary traumatic stress reactions even if they do not directly experience them.
- One may suffer from intense emotions such as fear, sadness, and despair as a consequence of witnessing the pain inflicted on people affected by disasters, listening to their traumatic stories, being exposed to unpleasant details and images of such events, and making effort to intensely show compassion and mercy for people affected by them.



Remember!

It is normal for most of the disaster and emergency relief professionals who witness traumatic events and respond to them as part of extraordinary cases such as disasters and emergencies to suffer from signs of stress. Not everyone under stress suffers from burnout. Burnout points to a more severe clinical picture involving physical signs of exhaustion such as emotional (despair, hopelessness, loss of self-respect etc.) and usually chronic exhaustion associated with long-term and recurrent acute stress.

It is important to know about potential signs of stress and take actions about them to fulfill your duties without being hurt and exhausted.

Symptoms to be Mindful of

Physical Symptoms:

- Exhaustion,
- Changes in heartbeat and respiration,
- Extreme response of startle and always being alerted,
- Muscle strain and pain,
- Recurrent headache, stomachache, back pain, and chest pain
- Sleep and nutritional disorders, etc.



Mental Symptoms:

- Lack of focus,
- Forgetfulness and absence of mind,
- Struggling to think and understand,
- Constantly thinking over traumatic events or avoid what reminds of a traumatic event,
- Identifying oneself with those experiencing trauma ("it could have been me" or "this could have happened to my child, too"),
- Thinking that nobody understands them,
- Decline in decision-making skills, etc.



Emotional Symptoms:

- Feeling heroic, invincible, and extremely energetic,
- Wishing to get away from people or be alone,
- Worrying about their own safety or the safety of others,
- Often feeling strong emotions such as anger, bad temper, sadness, despair, hopelessness, and guilt,
- Reduced will to work, and poorer work efficiency,
- Desensitization, and working with no feeling to show, etc.

Behavioral Symptoms:

- Withdrawal, and not taking care of their responsibilities and interests,
- Avoiding team meetings, and failure to express oneself and experiences,
- Making mistakes more often,
- Reduced sense of humor and frequent arguments,
- Neglecting personal needs (skipping meals, little sleep, not using breaks to rest, putting off domestic communication),
- Smoking, using excessive medication, and increase in harmful habits, etc.





Remember!

It is important to support and be there for those who have experienced a disaster.

Remember how precious your job is and take good care of yourself.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE SELF-CARE SKILLS

Recommendations for Pre-Mission Preparation

Mentally prepare yourself

- How ready are you for it? Contemplate and analyze challenges and learning outcomes.
- Identify what could cause stress for you during a mission.
- Observe how you react emotionally, mentally, behaviorally, and physically when you are under stress.
- Identify your strengths as well as those areas that need to be supported when you feel stressed out.
- Attend training courses on what to do to cope with stress and repeat what you learned in past training courses.
- Gather what you've learned and introduce habits to improve your skills to cope with stress in ordinary times into your life.
- Try to identify what feels good when you are under stress and what you can do in times of disaster (chatting with friends or family members, etc.).
- Focus on what your capabilities mean for those with a traumatic background if you cannot overcome every challenge.
- Revise your domestic responsibilities, and think about family members/friends whom you would delegate your responsibilities to when you are on site.
- Devise a plan on how to communicate with family members and share the process with them.
- Avoid unrealistic expectations and negative thoughts.



Improve your theoretical knowledge and make use of experiences

- Revise and upgrade your professional proficiency and attend training courses.
- Collect information about sociocultural characteristics and physical circumstances of where you are assigned.
- Learn from experience about the challenges you may face in the field and ways to deal with them.
- Review legislation, guidelines, manuals, and plans for disasters and emergencies.
- Review the local disaster response plan of the working group you are/will be part of.

Have your tool kit ready

- Logistic groups may not be able to reach you immediately. That is why make sure you prepare yourself to meet your needs for a few days without relying on others.
- Try to get more information from people with a field experience.
- Make sure that your tool kit contains;
 - clothes (raincoat, jacket, long-sleeve, and short-sleeve t-shirts, socks, caps/headsets to keep warm or cool, extra pair of shoes, and underwear) convenient and resilient to seasonal/weather conditions (extreme heat, cold, or rainy climate), tough environmental conditions (flood, avalanche, etc.), and long-term work,
 - Formal dress of the working group that you are part of (vest, jacket, uniform, etc.)
 - High-calorie foods that would not quickly perish such as biscuits, hazelnut, and dried apricot,
 - Medication you use, vitamins, and sunscreen,
 - Hygienic supplies (soap, cologne/disinfectant, wet towel, tissue, mask, dry shampoo, etc.)
 - Technical hardware, if needed (charger, powerbank, laptop, earphones, external memory card, etc.).





Remember!

Healthy body and mind is crucial for relief efforts. While it may sound something you cannot afford to do when you are on a mission, spare time to take a break, get rest, and relax.

Recommendations During Duty

Take good care of yourself.

- Do not neglect your interests and skills that do good for you (writing, drawing, reading, listening to music).
- Make sure you have a sufficient and well-balanced diet.
- Do not neglect drinking water.
- Be mindful of your sleep patterns and take breaks to rest.
- Be active. Do physical exercises such as walking, working out, exercising, and teamwork, even if it lasts for 10 minutes.
- Be mindful of the recommendations of your teammates about your self-care.



Talk, share, and seek support if needed

- Stay in touch with your family and friends.
- Focus on what you do in a professional environment and try to isolate yourself from anything else.
 - Use your energy and personal resources for things that you have control over.
 - Try to talk about different and joyful things outside working hours.
 - Rely on humor that makes you feel good in your talks.
 - Attend both professional and social events as part of your team.
 - Remember that you may also have negative thoughts that can make you feel insufficient, apart from your positive thoughts.



Act in solidarity with your coworkers

- Spare time to talk about experiences, reactions, emotions, and coping mechanisms. Be supportive and be open to seeking support.
- Remind your coworkers about their self-care (diet, breaks, etc.), and ask them to warn you when you neglect yours.
- Draw on practical tips from more experienced coworkers.
- Be aware of your own and your coworkers' strengths and weaknesses, and support one another.
- Remember that anybody can be stressed and anxious in a professional environment. Talk to your friends in an open and non-judgmental way about problems or challenges.
- Talk about something not related to disasters or emergencies. You may sit down somewhere far from the place of duty. Get rest and take a break to drink tea/coffee.



Use regular and supportive supervisory support, if available

- Try to use a supervisory support, if any, that would build a sense of confidence, provide you with the information you need, emphasize your strengths, and offer constructive criticism.
- Attend support sessions held before professionals leave the field.

Know your reactions and think positively

- Do not neglect any signs of stress when you exhibit them. Initially, focus on your own resources such as taking a break, engaging in more social relations, and having a regular sleeping schedule. Talk to your teammates and psychosocial experts to seek help unless you show improvement.
- Even if you cannot solve every problem, focus on what you can do and what it means for traumatized people.



- Avoid unrealistic expectations and negative thoughts.
- Acknowledge that you work under challenging conditions and you may go through some changes. Try to be mindful of your emotions, reactions, and thoughts about things that you go through on a day-to-day basis.
- Feel free to take notes for a day and write down how you cope and what you struggle about. For instance, you may come to notice some negative thoughts: "I am desperate. I'm losing control. I'm scared. I'm going to fail." Apart from them, you may also notice more positive thoughts and note them down: "I've done it before. I can do it again."



Remember!

Many disaster and emergency relief professionals exhibit similar reactions at work. Remember that you are not alone!

Take time to rest, relax, and unwind. Try to turn the following exercises into a set of habits to follow before going on a mission.

• Breathing exercise

This exercise helps you relax and reduce your distress whenever you need.

- Sit down in a way to keep both feet on the ground and relax your body muscles.
- Count from 1 to 5 to slowly breath to fill your lungs with air.
- Hold it for 2 seconds.
- Count from 5 to 1, and slowly release your breath.

Do the exercise for 2 or 3 times in a row, and focus on how your heartbeat and breathing slow down.

• Relaxing

Relaxing will help you out whenever you are tense, anxious, scared, or furious.

- Sit comfortably and take a few seconds to realize what your body is going through at the moment.
- Breathe and stretch all the muscles of your face, neck, and throat as long as you can.
- Breathe out and relax all your muscles.
- Take a few seconds to see how you feel.
- Breathe and stretch your arms and hands.
- Breathe out and relax all your muscles.
- Do the same stretching/relaxing routine for your back, chest, stomach, hips, legs, and feet.
- Stretch all your muscles at the same time in the end. Take a deep breath and relax all your muscles as you breathe out.
- Observe what is happening to your body. Focus on relaxing and unwinding.



• Grounding

- The purpose of this exercise, which helps keep unintended thoughts under control, is to raise awareness about your surroundings and body through your senses and get you back to the moment that you are in.
- Sit comfortably in a way to release your hands and feet.
- Start taking slow and deep breath.
- Look around and repeat the name of five objects that do not cause discomfort or stress in your mind.
- Keeping taking slow and deep breath.

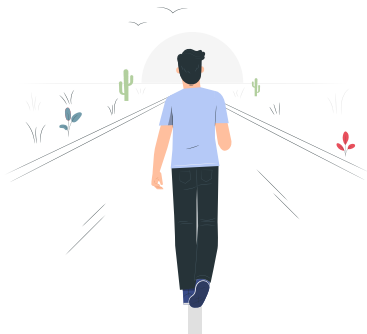


- Now listen to sounds you hear around and think over five sounds that do not cause discomfort or stress for you.
- Keeping taking slow and deep breath.
- Try to focus on your body senses and how you feel, and remind yourself of five feelings that do not cause discomfort or stress for you.
- Slowly and deeply breathe in and breathe out.
- Be mindful of tastes in your mouth now. Try to name the tastes you notice.
- Keep breathing in and out slowly and gently.
- Try to notice the smells around you. Try to tell smells that do not cause discomfort from others and name them in your mind.

• Awareness

Walking with Awareness: Being active brings both your body and mind to the present moment and makes it easier to cope with stress. Plan a 10-minute walk and make sure it is somewhere quiet and calm.

- Take notice of where you step on, standing where you are. Take notice of your whole body.
- Bring yourself to the present moment by regularly, calmly, and gently breathing.
- Let your thoughts slide and refocus on your body.
- Now prepare yourself for a 10-minute walk with awareness.
- Notice the moment you step on the ground and how your body moves.
- Let in the sounds, smells, and what is going on around you, and keep walking.



Taking Notice of Your Emotions: We experience a great deal of emotions throughout a day to the varying extent. Emotions are intertwined in some cases, and we struggle to tell what emotion affects us:

Feeling sad is not the same as being angry or being disappointed. We usually mistake one emotion for another in most cases. This exercise will help you get to know your emotions.

- Start taking calm, deep, and gentle breath.
- Focus on getting to know your emotions and take notice of yourself.
- Close your eyes and focus on your emotions. Name them without being judgmental.
- What emotion do you have right now? What emotion does it resemble? Keep acknowledging your emotions without being judgmental and gently take notice of them.
- As you breathe in and out, give a color to the emotion you have at the moment.
- Now imagine the strongest version of the color you've picked and try to see its most vivid and glamorous version.
- Breathe in and out again.
Breathe in and out gently, calmly, and deeply.
- Focus on your emotions and start fading the color. Focus on the color being duller, shaded, pale, and faded.
- Take notice of your emotion and its ever-fading color.

What May Happen After Your Duty Is Finished and Recommendations

- Your mind may be less tolerant to stimulants than it normally would. Your sensitivity to stimulants such as sound, light, noise, and honking may increase.
- Getting back to work right after you return from your place of duty can be a challenge in most cases.
- You may tend to stay away from people or fail to figure what it all means (“People around me feel sorry for such irrelevant stuff” or “That’s what you call a problem?”). It is normal to have such reactions, which are expected to wane after a while.
- Get rest and spend time with your loved ones. Quickly get back to your daily routine.
- Attend support meetings or sessions for workers if you need and share your thoughts. Find out new coping mechanisms and incorporate them into your life.
- Try to get feedbacks about your job, your efforts, and the way you fulfill your responsibilities.
- Remember that you can extend a helping hand to those who have suffered from some trauma and support them to hold onto life.



Remember!

Go easy on yourself, it takes time to deal with tough times. **Do your best**, and be patient about what you cannot do, and make a distinction between what you can and cannot.

Do not hesitate to seek help. You are not alone. You are not hopeless!



When to Seek Help from a Mental Health Specialist?

- If you feel distressed, concerned, anxious, or furious, and you struggle to cope with them,
- If your extreme emotions adversely affect your self-care, social relations, and professional life,
- If you feel extremely hopeless,
- If you recollect tough times over and over again and struggle to focus on something specific,
- If your sleep and dietary patterns significantly change,
- If you think of hurting yourself and/or others, THEN make sure you promptly seek help.





Remember!

You can seek help from psychosocial support staff deployed in times of disaster and emergency through Provincial Directorates of Family and Social Services.



**REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE
MINISTRY OF FAMILY AND
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**FOR PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT APPLICATION AND
REFERRAL IN CASE OF NEED:**

..... Provincial Directorate of Family and Social Services

Address:

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Tel: