

Psychological First AID

http://www.sph.umn.edu/pfatutorial/#responder_self_care_basics

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There is an excellent tool for Psychological First Aid (PFA) from the University of Minnesota for download to Android and Apple smart phones. An overview and instructions on how to download the tool is located at the following URL:

<http://www.sph.umn.edu/ce/perl/mobile/pfatutorial/> .

The tool contains a PFA overview of for disaster victims as well as responders. In addition, the tool has a series of case studies to allow individuals to apply their knowledge of PFA. For those interested in further study of PFA, there is a section with a list of references. The on-line tool is located at: <http://www.sph.umn.edu/pfatutorial/> .

Responder Self-Care Basics

Responder self-care is a critical component of Psychological First Aid. Responders deploy on short notice, face terror and destruction, and work long hours. These challenges make normal mechanisms of self-care difficult to access and easy to overlook.

It is imperative for responders to tend to their physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. Without adequate self-care, fatigue, adrenaline, and a desire to help can lead to ineffective, or even regrettable, decisions and practices.

Self-care includes actions taken before, during and after deployment.

Self-Care Before Deployment

- Create personal and family disaster plans. Planning for potential emergencies at home will help provide peace of mind during deployment.
- Develop a Personal Resiliency Plan or Self-Care Plan. Identifying personal stressors, red flags, and favorite coping strategies in advance will help responders take better care of themselves.
- Practice your Self-Care Plan during day-to-day life. This will make it more likely for self-care to be utilized during response.
- Participate in pre-incident training. The more knowledge acquired before a disaster, the better prepared you will be at the time of deployment.
- Evaluate your readiness to respond to the disaster. Recognize if your own physical and emotional health status makes you unable to perform the required functions of a specific deployment request.

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Self-Care During Deployment

- Set personal boundaries, including the number of hours you will work and the amount of exposure to traumatic stimuli with which you are comfortable.
- Take care of yourself. You are modeling healthy behavior for survivors and other responders.
- Follow your Self-Care Plan. Taking brief stress management breaks, performing basic bodily care, and checking in with colleagues, family, and friends are all important practices in maintaining an ability to respond.
- Eat properly, drink plenty of water, get rest and exercise, and avoid abuse of alcohol and drugs.
- Talk often to people who care. Never be afraid to ask for support from family, friends, mental health professionals, or clergy.
- Develop a “buddy” system with a co-responder. Agree to keep an eye on each other's functioning, fatigue level, and stress symptoms.
- Writing, journaling, drawing, and painting can be stress management tools.
- Try to be flexible, patient, and tolerant.

Self-Care After Deployment

- Allow for emotional adjustment upon returning to your usual routine.
- Prepare for changes in how you see the world as you are processing your experiences that may not be mirrored by others in your life.
- Pay extra attention to rekindling close interpersonal relationships.
- Participate in formal mechanisms of obtaining help.
- Increase leisure activities; pay extra attention to health and nutrition and sleep.
- Make time for self-reflection on what you experienced during deployment.

Responder Reactions To Traumatic Stress

Responders such as yourself may experience stress reactions similar to others who have been exposed to traumatic events. However, responders may also have reactions specific to their role as a responder. Examples include:

- Concerns for your family's wellbeing while deployed
- Fear of long-term health impacts to yourself and your family
- Domestic pressures caused by the disaster such as school closures or disruptions in childcare as well as ongoing pressures such as family illness are heightened during deployment
- Compassion fatigue from repeatedly caring for others
- Refusal to relinquish control when shift is finished and difficulty maintaining self-care activities (e.g., getting sufficient rest)