Recognizing the Signs of Responder Stress

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Objectives

- Understand the nature of stress, emotional and psychological distress
- Understand how it affects people and why
- Help you to recognize the stressors in others
- Help you develop personal healthy coping skills
The Cost of Stress

- 80% of Americans die of stress related illness.

- Quality of life
  - Depression
  - Anxiety

- Relationships
  - Divorce
  - Domestic Violence
  - Child Abuse
Cost

- Workplace
  - Injury
  - Sick time
  - Disability
  - Forced Termination
- Substance Abuse
- Incarceration
- Suicide
Stress is a nonspecific response of the mind and body to any demand.

- Stress is the adaptive reaction of the mind and body to survive and thrive
- Stress is a physiological response to a stressor

Stress is a nonspecific response of the mind and body to any demand.
Stress Types

• **Eustress** – good stress (marriage, relocation, new job)

• **Distress** – bad stress (loss of employment, financial difficulty, illness, death)

The difference may be nothing more than our perception.
(Adapted from P. Nixon: Practitioner, 1979)
Some factors that affect Stress

- Personality / Temperament
- Context
- Experience
- Perception
KEEP CALM
I'M A
FIRST RESPONDER
Responder personalities

- D – Dominant, Driven, Doer (Change the world)
- I – Influencer, Effervescent (Have fun)
- S – Steady, Relaxed (Don’t rock the boat)
- C – Contentious, Detailed (Do it right)
Context

- Training
- Roles
- Positions
- Responsibilities
Experience

- Life Experience
- Specific Experiences
Perception

- A person’s perception is their reality.
- Perception of the event or the meaning attached to it.
- Situation or environment of the event
- Perception of personal and other resources to deal with it.
Reality can be so complex that equally valid observations from differing perspectives can appear to be contradictory.
Forms of Distress

- Fear, anxiety or frustration
- Critical Incident Stress
- Chronic
- Grief and Loss
Critical Incident

- **A Critical Incident** is defined as an event that has the potential to overwhelm one’s usual coping mechanisms resulting in psychological distress and impairment of normal adaptive functioning.

- **Examples:**
  - Things that cause us to be seriously injured or in fear of losing our life.
  - Events that cause carnage, mass destruction and/or mass casualties.
TRAUMATIC CALLS, BURN OUT, COMPASSION FATIGUE - THAT STUFF NEVER GETS TO ME...

I'M A ROCK!

There is no shame in admitting you're human.
Chronic Stress

- Constant stress due to constant stressors.
- Could be the same stressors
- Could be different ones
- Domino stress

- Stress can begat stress
Grief and Loss

“Normal” Functioning

Psychological Well-being

Shock & Denial
- Avoidance
- Confusion
- Fear
- Numbness
- Blame

Anger
- Frustration
- Anxiety
- Embarrassment
- Shame

Depression and Detachment
- Overwhelmed
- Lack of energy
- Helplessness

Acceptance
- Exploring options
- A new plan for the future

Dialogue & Bargaining
- Reaching out to others
- Desire to tell one’s story
- Struggle to find meaning for what has happened

Return to meaningful life
- Empowerment
- Security
- Self-esteem
- Meaning
EVEN HEROES GRIEVE

Grieving Behind the Badge
grievingbehindthebadgeblog.net
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- Intrusive Memories
- Persistent Avoidance
- Nightmares
- Persistent Arousal (hypervigilance)
Human Stress Response
Fight, Flight or Freeze

When faced with such a stressor the mind and body galvanize for action in order to survive.

Reactions:
- Physical
- Cognitive
- Emotional
- Behavioral
Human Stress Response

- In extreme situations the mind and body will eliminate anything that could be a hindrance to survival.
Timing of Response

- Immediate stress response
- Delayed stress response
- Cumulative stress response

- Triggers
Recognizing the Signs of Distress

- Behavioral
- Cognitive
- Emotional
- Physical
- Religious/Spiritual

All signs are based upon deviation from an individual’s norm.
Behavioral

- Withdrawal
- Restless
- Pacing
- Immoral/Unethical Behavior
- Alcohol/Drug Abuse

- Speech Patterns
- Appetite
- Sexual Behavior
- Sleep patterns
- Pornography
- Gambling
Cognitive

- Confusion
- Nightmares
- Intrusive Images
- Hypervigilance
- Suspiciousness
- Blaming

- Poor Problem Solving
- Disorientation
- Difficulty identifying People and objects
- Poor Concentration
- Poor Memory
Emotional

- Fear
- Guilt
- Grief
- Panic
- Denial
- Anxiety
- Agitation
- Irritability
- Depression
- Intense Anger
- Emotional Shock
- Feeling Overwhelmed
- Inappropriate emotional response
Physical

- Chills
- Thirst
- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Fainting
- Twitches
- Vomiting
- Dizziness
- Weakness
- Chest Pain
- Headaches
- Elevated BP
- Rapid Heart Rate
- Muscle spasms
- Shock
- Visual difficulties
- Difficulty Breathing
- Profuse Sweating
Spiritual / Religious

- Loss of meaning in life
- Anger and resentment toward a higher being
- Change in personality
- Paranoia
- Inability to pray
- Withdrawal and cutting off social ties
- Callousness
- Burn-out
Working with Survivors
Responders Emotional Impact on Survivors

Emergency Service personnel need a working knowledge of the effects of severe stress on the average person; they can underestimate their critical role in managing crisis.

The assistance provided emergency services personnel has deep and lasting effects upon the victims.
During an emotional crisis everything said, heard, felt, smelled and seen is permanently imprinted for the rest of a person’s life.
Crisis Response of Survivors

- The survivor’s response maybe highly emotional and they aren’t thinking clearly.

- In fact, they may be become so overwhelmed emotionally that they are incapable of rational thought.
When two worlds collide

The Responder’s cognitive response to the crisis. VS.
The Survivor’s emotional response to the crisis
Some people dream of being a hero...

While others relive it in their nightmares.
Coping

- Adaptive / constructive coping – stress levels decline
- Maladaptive coping – stress levels increase

You can deal with the symptoms or deal with the underlying cause of the symptoms.
How can we fix it?

- Stress Resistance
- Stress Resiliency
- Stress Recovery
- Reducing stressors in our life
Reducing Stress

We cannot eliminate stress, but we can reduce it

- Deal with problems as they occur
- Don’t indulge in things that add to stress
- Monitor relationships
- Draw boundaries
Stress Resistance

- Take personal responsibility and control
- Lifestyle choices
- Build social support
- Have a sense of humor
- Knowledge of stress and stressors
Take personal responsibility and control

• Acknowledge there is a problem and that the problem is yours

• Analyze what the problem is

• Don’t postpone it or avoid it

• Don’t be afraid to ask for help in problem solving

• Develop a plan

• Take control
Lifestyle Choices

- Self esteem
- Care of the body
- Care of the mind
- Learn to relax
Build a Social Support Network

- Having someone you look forward to seeing
- Validation
- Allowing certain people to tell you the truth
Things you can do:

- Spend quality time with friends and family
- Keep things in perspective
- Don’t over think or dwell on it
- Don’t make any major life decisions
- Laugh
- Religion
More things:

- Physical Exercise
- Take time to relax
- Talk to a trusted confidant
- Do things that make you feel good
- Give yourself time and permission to feel rotten
Stress Recovery - Family

- Make family, not your job – priority
- Talk to your family
- Spend time with them
- Do some fun things
Quality Care – When you need it

Competence, Confidence, Compassion

- Counselors
- EAP Providers
- Critical Incident Stress Teams
- Peer Support Teams
- Chaplains
Getting to a “New Normal”
Thank you!

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