

AFTER-CARE AND SELF-CARE FOR ADULTS
SUPPORTING DOCUMENT TO
THE IDAHO SCHOOL RESPONSE GUIDELINES FOR SUICIDE AND SUDDEN DEATH

After a crisis, taking steps to care for the people involved is vitally important. Prior planning will be key so that structure is in place which ameliorates the stress of the situation and enables people to begin recovery. Remember that some people will be stressed not because they were directly involved, but because they know the victim(s); feel guilty in some way about what happened; have pre-existing physical or emotional conditions; and/or have recent or past events which cause them to re-live the trauma.

Some steps to follow:

1. Hold meetings with staff as soon as possible (hopefully the same day) to de-brief. Allow people to discuss the event, validate feelings, and enumerate what went well, as well as what needs modification. Keep notes of this meeting and implement changes in crisis plan.
 - A. Ask people what they need. Try to offer support for what is reasonable and can easily be offered. Follow up as is possible.
 - B. Ask the group members how they can support one another. List ideas for what people are willing to do to help themselves and others. Ask them to follow through.
 - C. Ask how people have managed in a similar crisis and brainstorm a list of activities. Create a list from these ideas to add to the list that follows or to hand out later.
 - D. Offer a list of ways to minimize stress and symptoms of stress to be aware of in the next days and weeks. Include phone numbers for EAP's or other community resources. (See following handout)
2. Hold another debriefing meeting within a week and continue with other meetings as needed.
3. Continually remind everyone that the victim(s) has a right to confidentiality and that this right must be protected. Also discuss any concerns about media requests and how these are to be handled. Provide a protocol for what will happen the next day.

Other ideas to implement, if helpful:

1. Consider offering an in-house group after school with an EAP counselor or community therapist if a number of staff need more support.
2. Provide educational in-services or workshops around stress management and self-care.
3. Plan a way to have fun together, either with staff only or to include family members—a staff potluck, a volleyball or baseball game, or in-house movie night, whatever works to help people reconnect in a non-stressful way.
4. Find ways to help staff laugh. Consider having a drama group present a funny piece at lunch, share a joke of the day, or place benign cartoons on handouts or doors.
5. Offer in-house exercise, walking, meditation groups or other stress release activities on employees lunch hour or after work.

In Summary

Stress management is key to crisis management. Successful stress management is built on prevention and planning, a solid understanding of how we react to stress, support for colleagues, good self-care, and seeking help when needed.

CRISIS AFTER-CARE FOR STAFF

Things to Remember When Trying to Understand Crisis Events

- * No one who is involved in a crisis is untouched by it.
- * It is normal to feel anxious about our own and other people's safety.
- * Profound sadness, grief, and anger are normal reactions to an abnormal event.
- * Acknowledging our feelings helps us recover.
- * Focusing on our strengths and abilities will help us to heal.
- * Accepting help from community programs and resources is healthy.
- * We each have different needs and different ways of coping.

Some Ways to Minimize Your Stress After a Crisis

- Participate in the organized debriefings or critiques.
- Reconnect with your family members.
- Have a physical checkup if you have continuing or unusual symptoms.
- Continue normal activities, including work and leisure routines. Stay involved with your interests, but limit extra duties for awhile.
- Consider stress management techniques, such as meditation, acupuncture, or massage therapy.
- Draw upon your spirituality and personal beliefs. Take advantage of faith-based counselors or workplace counseling units (EAPs) or community therapists.
- Avoid alcohol, tobacco, or drugs to cope with stress. Seek professional substance abuse treatment, if necessary.
- Talk to and support your peers. Be aware of the difference between needing therapy and regular listening to or talking with a peer or a friend.
- Consider walking, perhaps with a peer group or family members, or continue your own exercise program.
- Monitor yourself for unusual feelings of stress. Alert a supervisor if you see these signs in peers. (List follows)
- Get regular sleep and relaxation and eat healthy.
- Ask for help if you need it.
- Find ways to laugh and appreciate life.

Signs that Adults Need Stress Management Assistance

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| * Difficulty communicating thoughts | * Difficulty sleeping |
| * Difficulty maintaining balance | * Easily frustrated |
| * Increased use of drugs/alcohol | * Limited attention span |
| * Poor work performance | * Headaches/stomach problems |
| * Tunnel vision/muffled hearing | * Colds or flu-like symptoms. |
| * Disorientation or confusion | * Difficulty concentrating |
| * Reluctance to leave home | * Depression, sadness |
| * Feelings of hopelessness | * Mood-swings |
| * Crying easily | * Overwhelming guilt and self-doubt |
| * Fear of crowds, strangers, or being alone | |

The information contained here was compiled from best practice materials from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Red Cross.