Behavioral Health is Essential To Health

Prevention Works

Treatment is Effective

People Recover
Self-Care for Disaster Behavioral Health Responders

Jeannette David
April Naturale, Ph.D.
April 23, 2012
Welcome and Introductions

• Lori McGee, M.A., Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Disaster Technical Assistance Center (DTAC) Deputy Director
• Julie Liu, M.A., SAMHSA Public Health Advisor
• April Naturale, Ph.D., SAMHSA DTAC Senior Advisor
• Jeannette David, Georgia Disaster Mental Health Coordinator
Goals

- To define the disaster behavioral health responder audience
- To define the stressors specific to disaster behavioral health responders, including secondary traumatic stress
- To provide best practices in self-care for disaster behavioral health responders
- To provide tools that can be used to promote self-care and assist in self-assessment
- To address the supports that can be provided by supervisors and management structures
Overview of Training

- Goals
- Definitions
- The Physiology of Stress
- Risk Factors that Can Increase Negative Stress Responses
- Symptoms of Stress
- Secondary Traumatic Stress
- Self-Care Skills
  - a) Personal, b) Professional, and c) Supervisory
- Self-Assessment
- Frequently Asked Questions
Definitions

• Disaster Behavioral Health Responders
• Stress
• Secondary Traumatic Stress
• Self-Care
Who Is the Disaster Behavioral Health Community?

- Responders of all disciplines are all responsible for helping survivors in ways that address their behavioral health needs.

- The disaster behavioral health community includes everyone in the field, not just mental health, substance abuse, or rescue and recovery workers.

- The disaster behavioral health community encompasses public health workers, physicians, nurses, aides, medical examiners, mental health staff, substance abuse workers, law enforcement, fire and rescue workers, construction workers, drivers, 911 operators.
What Is Stress?

• Stress is first a perception.
• Then it is a physiological response to fear—of death or serious harm to oneself or someone you care about.
• Stress is geographic.
• Stress is culture bound.
What Is Secondary Traumatic Stress?

Secondary traumatic stress (STS) is the experience of trauma symptoms (acute or posttraumatic) in counselors as a result of and in relationship to their exposure to the trauma material of clients.
Differences in Terms

• Compassion fatigue and STS are often used interchangeably and can happen after one experience.

• Vicarious trauma is defined as a buildup of exposure to clients’ trauma.

• Burnout is different due to the cause, which is usually related to administrative or organizational problems.
What Is Self-Care?

The ability to maintain physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual health in times of stress
Components of Self-Care

• Set up and maintain support systems—personal and professional.
• Plan and schedule use of breaks, lunch, and benefit time such as vacations and personal time off.
• Maintain a balance of work and leisure—practice stress management exercises during breaks and opportune moments as well as during off time.
The Physiology of Good Stress

- Stress allows us to perform better—it alerts us to the need to **fight, flee, or freeze**.
- Stress produces cortisol, which improves memory and enhances immune function.
- Stress increases the level of adrenaline in the body, which increases strength and endurance.
- Stress provides a spike in blood pressure, flooding our muscles and brain with oxygen.
The Physiology of Bad Stress

• The allostatic system (controls hormones that mediate the effects of stress—especially on the cardiovascular system) become too charged with no chance to vent the buildup of energy.
• Increases in cortisol, endorphins, adrenaline, and other hormones can become harmful.
• The overload can damage memory, hurt your immune system, and enlarge your stomach.
Sources of Stress

• Where does your stress come from?
• What do you bring from your life?
• What’s happening around you?

For answers to these questions, look at these aspects of your experiences:
• Immediate response to disaster
• Long-term response to disaster
What Do You Bring from Your Life?

- Personal commitments
- Professional commitments
- Physical and mental condition
- Vulnerabilities
- Self-awareness
What’s Happening around You?

• The “type” of disaster matters.
• What is your level of training and preparedness?
• How supported are you?
Immediate Response to Disaster

- Physical environment
- Personnel and coworkers
- Schedule
- Routine
Long-Term Response to Disaster

- Continued exposure
- Attachment issues
- Availability of resources
- Frustration
The Stress Cycle

An event occurs of neutral value or meaning.

The individual appraises whether the event is a threat or a challenge.

Biochemicals are released to enhance the ability of one’s mind and body to respond.

The individual responds to the threat or challenge through fight or flight.

The biochemicals are depleted through the exertion to meet the threat or challenge.

Fatigue follows the depletion of biochemicals from the exertion.

After a period of rest, the individual is able to prepare for and meet a new threat or challenge.

From the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Crisis Counseling Assistance and Training Program
Symptoms of Stress

• Problems sleeping
• Change in appetite
• Feelings of being overwhelmed and helpless
• Difficulty with setting priorities
• Conflicts with coworkers, friends, and loved ones
Symptoms of Secondary Traumatic Stress

STS symptoms mirror those of the disaster survivor:

• Distressing images, dreams
• Loss of interest in activities
• Detachment
• Avoidance of thoughts and feelings
• Persistent arousal
Skills: Personal

• Self-recognition
  – When am I stressed?

• Self-awareness
  – What helps me?

• Self-regulation
  – How do I “turn it down”?

• Self-control
  – How do I know when I am OK?
Skills: Personal

• Adopt and maintain a balanced lifestyle.
  – Exercise and eat healthy meals.
  – Get enough rest and spend time with your social support network.

• Apply stress reduction techniques.
  – Reduce physical tension by engaging in such activities as taking deep breaths, meditating, and walking mindfully.

Skills: Personal

• Apply stress reduction techniques.
  – Use time off for exercise, reading, listening to music, taking a bath, talking to family, or having a special meal.

Skills: Professional

• Backup; training
• Managing workload
• Feeling competent and confident about work
• Talking with your supervisor or team leader
Skills: Professional

• Peer support
  - Peer support relationship is one of EQUALITY.
  - Responders provide emotional or practical help to each other.
  - Colleagues, members of organizations, groups of individuals, and others meet as equals to give each other support on a reciprocal basis.
  - Peers maintain contact and support after deployment.
Skills: Supervisory

• Provide effective management structure and leadership.
• Define clear purpose, goals, and roles.
• Nurture team support.
• Create a buddy system.
• Develop a plan for stress management.

Self-Assessment

• Be the one to stop the stress cycle.
• Share your stress indicators with your buddy.
• Check to see if you are sticking to your self-care plan; schedule self-care activities.
• Monitor your compassion fatigue, compassion satisfaction, and burnout on a routine basis with the ProQOL-V self-assessment tool.
Summary

• All disaster responders can benefit from identifying the symptoms of stress and learning how to engage in self-care activities.

• Stress affects us all, but we can decrease the negative outcomes with personal and professional supports.

• Identifying and seeking support, scheduling self-care activities, and monitoring are effective ways to take care of oneself.
Resources

• ProQOL-V self-assessment tool  
  http://www.proqol.org/ProQol_Test.html

• National Center for PTSD: Information on PTSD and access to the Pilots Database  
  http://www.ptsd.va.gov

• National Child Traumatic Stress Network’s Learning Center for Psychological First Aid  
  http://learn.nctsn.org

• The Disaster Distress Helpline, 1-800-985-5990

• Ready.gov, FEMA’s planning and preparedness website  
  http://www.ready.gov

• SAMHSA DTAC, toll-free: 1-800-308-3515  
  http://www.samhsa.gov/dtac
Established by SAMHSA, DTAC supports SAMHSA's efforts to prepare States, Territories, and Tribes to deliver an effective behavioral health (mental health and substance abuse) response to disasters.
The DBHIS contains themed resources and toolkits about disaster behavioral health preparedness and response specific to responders and other special populations:

- Public Safety Workers/Disaster Responders DBHIS [http://www.samhsa.gov/dtac/dbhis/dbhis_psw_intro.asp]
Frequently Asked Questions

• What is the best way for peers to approach each other when one is in need of help?
• How do responders help each other with serious problems like alcohol and substance use and abuse?
• How do behavioral health responders set boundaries while still being team players?
Presenter Contact Information

• Jeannette David
  - jedavid@dhr.state.ga.us

• April Naturale
  - anaturale@icfi.com

• Julie Liu
  - Julie.liu@samhsa.hhs.gov

• Lori McGee
  - lmcgee@icfi.com
Thank You!

Please remember to complete the short feedback questionnaire when you exit the meeting.