

## FOLLOWING A CRITICAL INCIDENT: TAPPING INTO RESILIENCE FOR HEALTHY SELF-CARE - Document for Volunteer Responders

- 1.) The intensity of a critical incident (i.e. disaster volunteering), and the challenges faced by each person may vary with respect to prior experiences, degree of exposure to the incident or those impacted by it, preparedness, training, support, and physical and psychological levels of health.
- 2.) Returning home and transitioning from the disaster experience can take a while. For example, loved ones and friends may not be able to fully relate to what you have experienced.
- 3.) Most people will be very proud of you for your volunteer efforts – a few might be envious or even a little upset that you left and they didn't get to share the experience with you.
- 4.) You may find yourself ruminating about your experiences for quite some time after you return. One way to prevent thoughts and feelings from consuming your day is to set a specific time to reflect on the experience, and perhaps even write about it. It helps to include both rewards and challenges in your reflections, and to think about what you have learned during your most recent volunteer experience or critical incident.
- 5.) Give yourself a few days before you have to resume your job and other everyday tasks if you can. Try using the first day or two after your return to nurture yourself and to re-connect with family and close friends. Meaningful personal connectedness to those close to you can provide a bridge for transitioning to your usual life patterns. Such closeness and trust can contribute to and sustain one's sense of self and level of resilience.
- 6.) Attempting to put your recent, intense experience into a larger perspective (perhaps with support from a close friend or therapist, depending on issues), can help to make sense of, learn from, and accept the challenges you experienced.
- 7.) Other than a brief call to check-in with your chapter or organization, allow yourself a few days (or more) before seeking further, even local, volunteer chapter/organization assignments.
- 8.) Try to get regular exercise – it can help you cope with the mixture of feelings normally experienced by those working on an intense disaster.
- 9.) Be proactive and try to follow good self-care guidelines: Get adequate sleep – when you first return you may need more sleep than usual, as your body may need to recuperate from the sleep deprivation common in volunteering; eat healthy foods; spend some time in nature and with close friends; check in with other volunteers to see how they are doing; spend time on a favorite hobby or activity that gives you satisfaction;

and consider yoga, meditation, or some calming activity that helps you experience balance and harmony.

10.) The ease of your return may be dependant on the level and quality of support during your volunteer work and upon your return; the presence of recent challenges or losses in your life (which ideally were taken into consideration during screening); and the level of hardship presented by your volunteer assignment.

11.) Finally, it is helpful to recall when you have worked through other challenges and view your patterns of strength, some such skills that you may well take for granted, as a type of resilience that can move you forward while still learning from this experience.

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