

Segment 3 Managing First Responder Stress



EPA

Segment 3 Objective:

Identify methods to cope with field-related stress.

Mental Signs and Symptoms of On Scene Distress

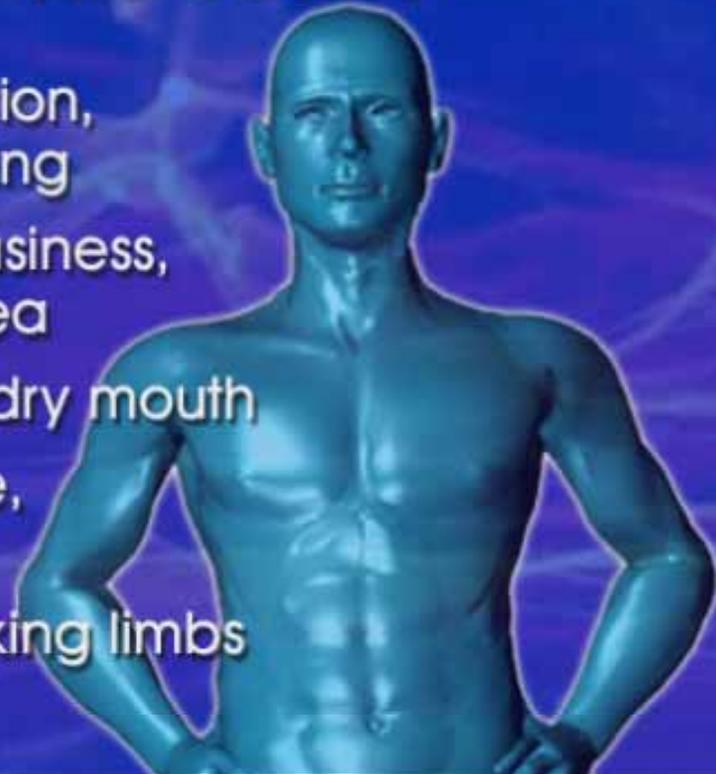
- As distress increases, you lose your ability to think clearly. You will have trouble retaining new information, less ability to concentrate, and a decreased mental agility.
- As distress increases, rationality decreases. You lose your sense of humor, and your ability to trust others.

Common Experiences of On Scene Distress

- Initial feelings of disbelief and denial
- Feeling that the situation is not real
- Fear
- Sorrow, grief at witnessing casualties or deaths
- Numbness, feeling overwhelmed
- Anguish

Common Physical Reactions to Being on the Scene

- Increased rate of respiration, shortness of breath, panting
- Impaired digestion, queasiness, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
- Pale skin, goose bumps, dry mouth
- Increased blood pressure, increased heart rate
- Muscle twitches and shaking limbs



Coping during the Response

- Have experienced personnel supervise the inexperienced.
- Provide on scene briefings for incoming personnel.
- Limit caffeine and sugar intake.
- Maintain time orientation.
- Ensure adequate rest and rotation of personnel.
- Establish system for handling responders facing extraordinary stress.

Coping After the Response

- Eat and sleep
- Within 24–48 hours, if rested, exercise
- No alcohol for a few days after incident
- Talk with trusted friend or family member about how you feel
- Participate in after action briefings to go over lessons learned

Common Aftereffects of a Response

- Emotional responses such as anger and sorrow
- Dreams and nightmares about the incident
- Distractibility
- Frequent thoughts about what happened
- Strains in family and work relationships
- Difficulty in falling asleep or staying asleep

Psychological Disorders Linked to Response Stress

- Depression
- Anxiety disorders
- Post-traumatic stress disorder

Social Support

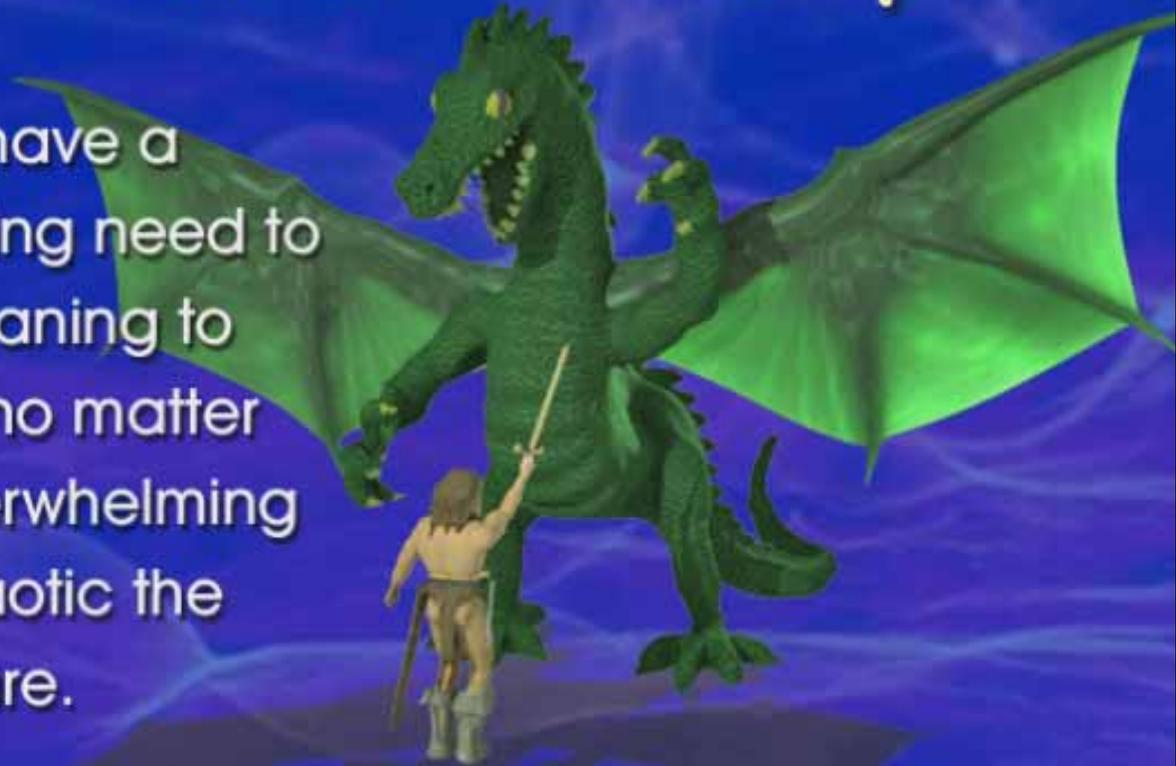
Social support is one of the most important and powerful stress reducers



FEMA news photo

The Power of “The Story”

People have a consuming need to give meaning to events, no matter how overwhelming and chaotic the events are.



Rituals and Memorials



Creating a Supportive Organization



ATSDR

Individual Stress Management

- Exercise
- Relaxation training
- Journal writing
- Meditation

