

# **Preventing Undesirable Effects of Stress**

And

## **Promoting the Thrill of Effectively Managing Stress**

### **1) Manage the Workload and Work Relationships:**

- Set task priority levels with realistic work plans.
- Being prepared is important. 'Not having enough to do' or 'waiting' is an expected part of being prepared and working in a disaster response.
- Be alert to opportunities for complimenting your colleagues 5 times more often than you complain.
- Your work hours must be arranged to allow adequate sleep (7-8 hours sleep), regular times for breakfast and dinner, and pleasurable exercise.
- Shift schedules should be constant over 10 days to two weeks (preferably three weeks) to protect judgment, emotions, sleep, and safety. Every shift change causes 3 days of 'jet lag.'
- Ask supervisors and managers to schedule meetings at times that protect the sleep-wake schedule of night and late evening shift workers.
- Respect and value the contributions of all volunteer workers, or paid staff, and their jobs. No put downs in casual conversations with clients or other workers.
- Try to offer solutions when you notice troublesome behaviors or procedures.

### **2) Balanced lifestyle:**

- Eat nutritious food, stay hydrated, and avoid excessive caffeine, alcohol, and tobacco.
- Adequate sleep and rest are critical on long assignments.
- Mix the most and least stressful activities throughout the day and/or week.
- Ask for a break when emotions have been intense, or you need to talk with a colleague 'off the record' to deal with frustration, let off steam, etc.
- Stay in contact with your family, if possible.

### **3) Additional self care;**

- Recognize when you over identify with, or are overwhelmed by, victims' and families' grief. Get another volunteer worker to finish, or work, with that family. You will harm the family if you don't get someone else to help.
- Accept a kind effort, by a colleague, to inform you of your heightened emotional response.
- Keep clear boundaries between volunteer work relationships with clients, workers, and your friendships. If a friend is seeking service from you that cannot routinely be provided to everyone, obtain the assistance of another volunteer staff member.
- Taking time to read, go for a walk, listen to some music, limit the number of consecutive days/hours that you have worked, may seem selfish in light of the needs of the community, or of how hard some volunteer workers seem to be working. Show your self respect by taking care of yourself and maximizing your long term effectiveness.
- Maintain your sense of humor; try to reframe problems in a positive light.

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