

Self-Care and Stress Management for Public Health Emergency Workers

Coping with the Challenges of Public Health Emergency Work

Proactive stress management is essential to the effective delivery of public health services during emergencies and crisis situations. Successful stress management is built upon prevention and planning, a solid understanding of roles and responsibilities, support from colleagues, good self-care and seeking help when needed.

In addition to your expertise in public health matters, your concern and empathy for others helps you to do your job. It is important during times of high stress to be aware of your feelings and how emotions affect your personal and professional life. The most resilient public health workers are those who know how to adjust their level of intensity and focus when they go off duty and how to turn it back on when they are back on the job. This is not denial; it is a coping strategy. It is a way to have emotional protection while working under pressure and support while resting and recharging.

Providing public health services during emergencies can be overwhelming. Our challenge is to maintain our resilience so that we can keep doing the work with care, concern and energy. There are steps we all can take to maintain our physical and mental health, preserve our relationships at work and home, and serve the public during what can be a time of uncertainty and fear.

Take Time to Take Care of Yourself

Ten Things to Do Each Day

1. Get enough sleep.
2. Eat enough of the right foods.
3. Vary the work that you do.
4. Do some light exercise.
5. Do something pleasurable.
6. Focus on what you did well.
7. Learn from your mistakes.
8. Pray, meditate or relax.
9. Share a private joke.
10. Support a colleague.

Self-Monitor for Signs of Stress

Be familiar with the signs of too much stress. Early warning signs include profound sadness, grief or anger. Changes in eating and sleep habits and increased conflict in relationships are also common warning signs.

Seeking Assistance

You may not be the best judge of your own stress as you become intensely involved in your public health emergency work. Looking out for others and having others look out for you is a necessary approach for personal and organizational stress management.

If you are struggling with stress, don't go it alone. A confidential, toll-free helpline staffed by skilled crisis counselors is available at 877-294-HELP (4357; TTY 4356).

