

**Stress First Aid: Psychosocial Support in Crisis Situations
Self-Care and Coworker Support**

The Stress Continuum



Helping people in situations of ongoing crisis or adversity can be highly fulfilling and meaningful but can also be highly stressful. First responders and other helpers often have a heightened sense of responsibility and empathy for those they are helping and may disregard their own needs. Time pressures, long working hours, and few breaks can make it difficult for helpers to take care of themselves, so it's important to check in with each other regularly.

The stress continuum was developed to acknowledge that First Responders and helpers can be affected by the crisis and by their work helping others. You can use it to help you understand where you are on the continuum, to guide conversations with coworkers, and to prompt self-care and coworker support actions that can bring you back towards the green zone.

Ready (Green)	Helpers are well rested, supported, and feel motivated, focused, and energized.
Reacting (Yellow)	Helpers are affected by transient stress that includes a wide array of situations that can be both distressing or motivating, like a new job or a task that is hard, but you feel good about achieving it.
Injured (Orange)	Helpers start to feel injured by stress. A person can enter this zone when there is either an accumulation of yellow zone stress over a long period of time, or exposure to traumatic stress, loss, or inner conflict (moral injury). Helpers may feel they can no longer control their stress reactions, or they no longer feel like themselves. Reactions are more significant and harder to manage, and the people around them might also comment that they are different. They may feel numb which is protective in the middle of high stress circumstances but doesn't serve a person as well when they want to connect with those they love.
Ill (Red)	Helpers start to become ill, and experience physical disorders, depressive or anxiety disorders, PTSD, or substance use disorders. In this zone, we see more significant or long-lasting stress reactions.

Stress First Aid (SFA) for self-care and coworker support has the same elements that are used for others affected by the crisis. You can use these elements for self-care and to support your coworkers by asking the same types of questions:

- **Check** - How can I check in regularly with myself or my coworkers to make sure we're doing okay?
- **Cover/Safety** - Do I or one of my coworkers need to feel safer? If so how can we move in that direction?
- **Calm** - Do we need to feel calmer? If so how can we move towards that?
- **Connect** - Do we need social support? If so how can we move towards getting that?
- **Competence/Self-efficacy** - Would it be helpful to have more skills or resources to get through this? If so how do we get them?
- **Confidence/Hope** - Do we need to feel more confident or hopeful? If so, how do we move in that direction?
- **Coordinate** - Do we need to coordinate with others to get more resources or support? If so, what's the best way to get them?

Some of the following suggestions may help you deal with stress.

Increase Sense of Safety

- When you feel unsafe, distract yourself by focusing on something near you or your own breath or thought (e.g., counting).
- Call on those people, places, or actions that feel safe to you
- Actively seek information
- Request help from coworkers or supervisors
- Get an accurate understanding of risks in order to better plan
- Get help with personal responsibilities
- Self-monitor for stress reactions
- Give yourself permission to take care of yourself and set boundaries for yourself
- Realize that no one is perfect, and everyone is going to have strengths and vulnerabilities – be aware of your own.

Cultivate Ways to be More Calm

- Realize that it is understandable to feel anxious and worried about what may happen.
- Prepare for a range of possible scenarios.
- If you find that you are getting more stressed by watching the news, reduce your exposure, particularly prior to sleep.
- While circumstances may be stressful and beyond your control, you can try to offset them with positive calming activities. Practice slow, steady breathing and muscle relaxation, as well as any other actions that are calming for you (yoga, exercise, music, keeping the mind occupied).

Stay Connected

- Seek support from family, friends, mentors, clergy, and those who are in similar circumstances.
- Be flexible and creative in accessing support via phone, email, text messaging, and video calls.

Improve Your Sense of Control and Ability to Endure

- Accept circumstances that cannot be changed and focus on what you can alter.
- Modify your definition of a “good day” to meet the current reality of the situation.
- Problem-solve and set achievable goals within the new circumstances in your life.
- Evaluate the absolute risk and recognize the benefits of accepting a certain level of risk in order to maintain as much of your normal routine as possible.
- Those who have been faced with life-threatening situations recommended the following strategies:
 - Quickly recognize, acknowledge, and accept the reality of the situation.
 - Make a plan for dealing with feelings of being overwhelmed or overly distressed. Preparation can make you feel more in control if these feelings arise and help you move through them quickly.
 - Combat unhelpful emotions by using distraction or staying busy---both mentally and physically.
 - Avoid impulsive behavior.
 - Get organized.
 - Increase positive coping behaviors that have worked in the past.
 - Shift negative self-statements to statements that allow you to function with less distress. Try changing “this is a terrible time” to “this is a terrible time, but I can get through this.”
 - Rather than getting discouraged, focus on what you can accomplish or control.
 - Seek out mentoring or information to improve your ability to make decisions and take actions when necessary.
 - Try to engage in the situation as a challenge to be met, which can increase your ability to act both creatively and decisively.

Remain Hopeful

- Consider the stressful situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective.
- Look for opportunities to practice being more patient or kind with yourself.
- Give yourself small breaks from the stress of the situation, if possible.
- Take satisfaction in completing tasks, even small ones.
- Find things to be grateful about, if possible.
- Draw upon your spirituality, those who inspire you, or your personal beliefs and values.