



Managing MASCAL Trauma Impacts on Responders

Reference: FEMA Crisis Counseling Program, Department of Mental Health

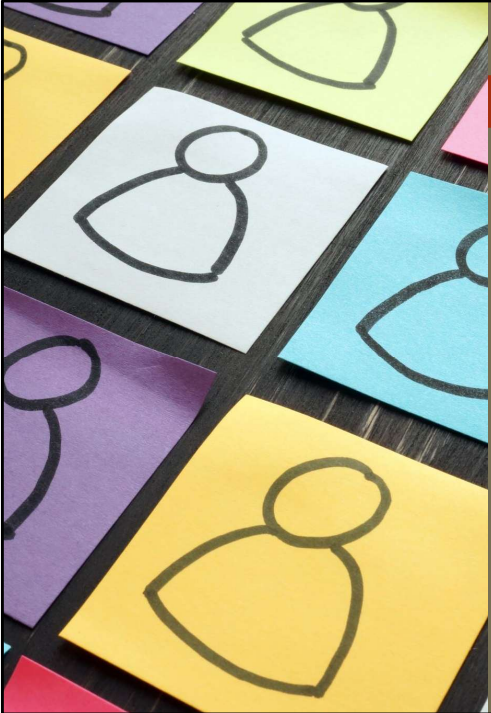
Reality is if we have a bad disaster here you will be seeing some terrible things as first responders.

Purpose of this presentation: make you aware of how responding in a disaster can affect YOU, and some techniques for managing the impact.

Objectives

- Understand the psychological effects of trauma on first responders
- Understand critical stress indicators, physical and emotional reactions, and long-term consequences of disaster exposure
- Understand the short and long-term effects of stress
- Know how to maintain resilience, and promote self-care





Importance of Psychological Responses during a Disaster

- Mind-body link: psychological responses affect our physiological responses
- Overwhelming emotions can disrupt rational problem-solving
- Psychological responses to disaster/trauma can promote adaptive and maladaptive individual and group behaviors

Mind body: BP/HR go up. Cortisol released that is the “fight or flight” mechanism

Group behavior: domino effect



Normal Reactions to a Disaster Event

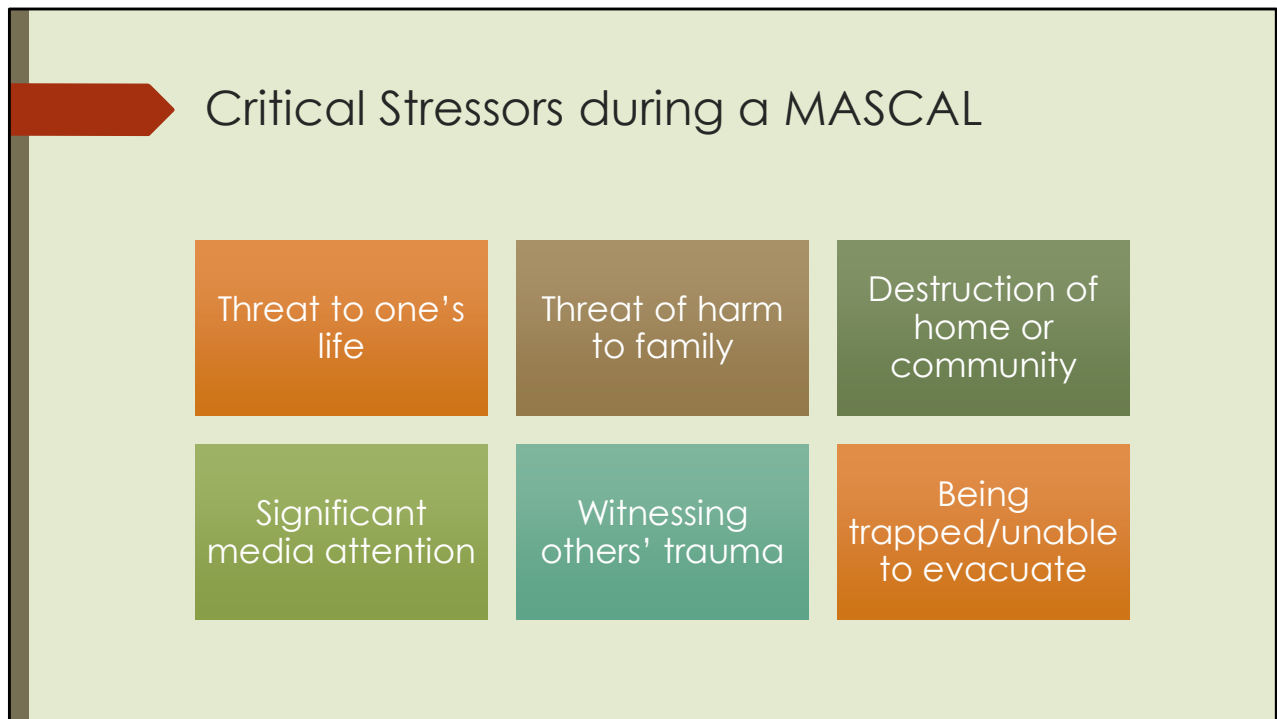
- No one who responds to a mass casualty event is untouched by it
- Profound sadness, grief, and anger
- Wanting to remain on the scene
- Over-riding stress and fatigue
- Denying the need for rest and recovery time

+sadness, grief, anger are normal reactions to an abnormal event

+wanting to remain on scene until the work is finished

+Dedication and commitment to helping others can sometimes cause an imbalance between what's good for them and what's good for you= increased stress/fatigue

+recovery time: pay attention to yourself and your team mates regarding a need to rest and recover. Aviators good at this; they understand lack of rest leads to fatigue= ERRORS, mistakes



YOU can experience

+threat to one's life: constant state of vigilance, hyper-alertness=stress response in constant hyper-arousal

+family: anxiety, stress

+own home/neighbor's home=distress

+media attention: on radio/TV/social media....24/7

exposure to the event. Friends calling to check on you.

+in our small community can be neighbors, friends trauma

+unable to evacuate....unable to get away from the trauma

Reactions to a Disaster



Physical Reactions



- Fatigue, exhaustion
- Gastrointestinal distress
- Appetite change
- Tightening in throat, chest, or stomach
- Worsening of existing medical conditions
- Dizziness
- Somatic

This is a laundry list how stress, anxiety, distress manifests in your body.

+fatigue: tired but not sleepy, can't sleep

+GI: diarrhea, N/V

+increased/decreased appetite

+panic attack

+worsening: diabetes, heart condition...chest pain/palpitations

+dizziness: feel like fainting

+somatic: muscle aches, nervousness (tremoring)

Emotional Reactions

- Depression, sadness
- Irritability, anger, resentment
- Anxiety, fear
- Despair, hopelessness
- Guilt, self-doubt
- Unpredictable mood swings
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Apathy



can happen days, weeks, months, years after the incident

Cognitive Reactions

- Confusion, disorientation
- Trouble concentrating or remembering things
- Difficulty making decisions
- Preoccupation with disaster
- Recurring dreams or nightmares
- Questioning spiritual beliefs



+Brain fog

+Detached from present moment

Behavioral Reactions

- Sleep problems
- Crying easily
- Avoiding reminders of the disaster
- Excessive activity level
- Increased conflicts with family
- Hyper-vigilance, startle reactions
- Isolation or social withdrawal
- Changes in appetite



Chronic Stressors




- Family disruption
- Work overload
- Bureaucratic hassles
- Financial constraints

Family dynamics may change

Work; can also be ADL “work”

Bureaucracy: insurance companies, cell phone disruptions

Bank: ATM not working, can’t get money



Effects of Long-Term Stress

Anxiety and
vigilance

Anger,
resentment
and conflict

Uncertainty
about the
future

Complicated
grief
reactions

Diminished
problem-
solving

Isolation and
hopelessness

Health
problems

Physical and
mental
exhaustion

Substance
use or abuse

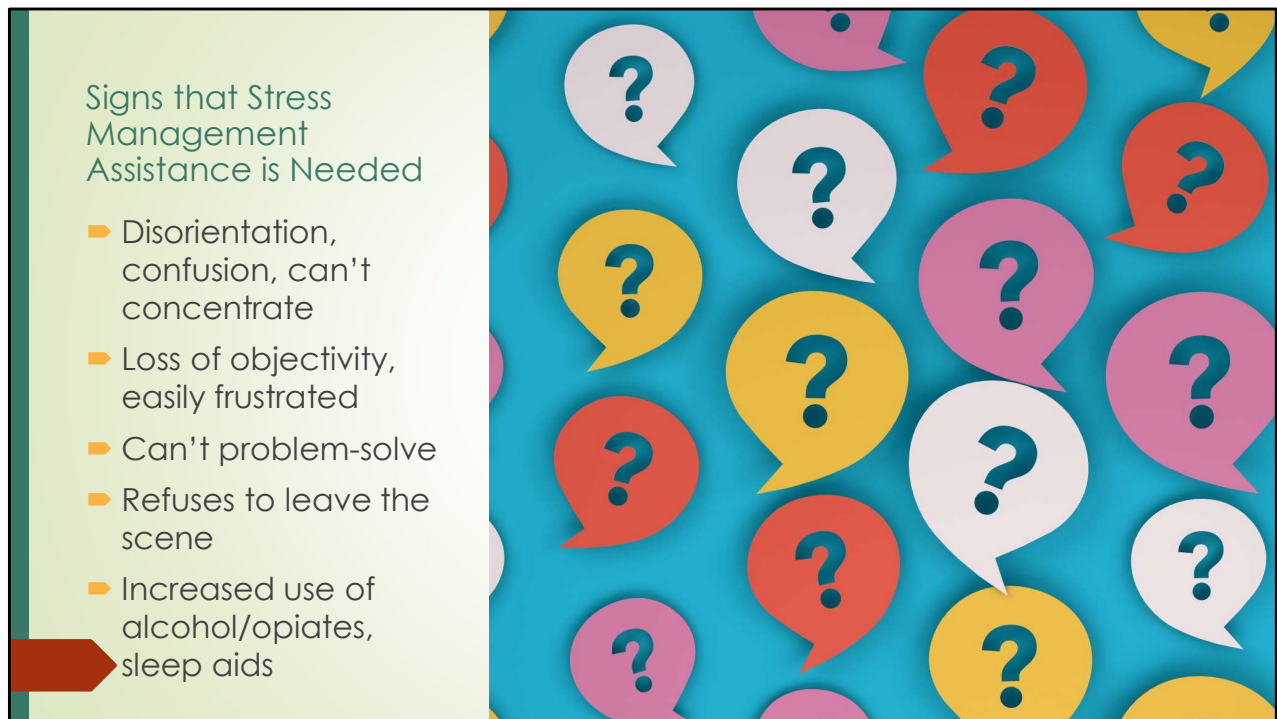
Lifestyle
changes

“stress insult” can cause LT stress effects

Stress is:

- Productive *and* destructive
- Acute and delayed
- Cumulative
- Preventable and manageable

Like caffeine; can keep us going
Cumulative; keeps going up and up
Preventable/manageable because it is identifiable



When levels of stress become unmanageable; these are some of the identifiable behaviors you might see in yourself, your teammates

We already discussed some of Physical, emotional, cognitive reactions to stress



Again, step 1 is to identify that you are stressed. Keep checking yourself during a MASCAL disaster response!

“Even heroes need to talk.”-----Marketing slogan for Project Liberty, New York's post-9/11 Crisis Counseling Program

- Pair up with another responder
- Talk about your emotions
- Frequent breaks for water and healthy snacks
- After the event, participate in memorials, rituals



+Pair up: to monitor each other's stress: “how ya doing buddy?”

+Talk with family and friends; share w/them what you're going through/what happened that day
Important to talk about emotions to process what you've seen/done

+put snacks in your cargo pockets, aid bag
+breaks for stress reduction techniques

Participate in memorials; to process your feelings. Your tendency will be to avoid reminders of the event: shared grief



Stress Reduction Strategies

- Deep breathing: 5-5-5
- Stretching
- Adequate sleep: progressive muscle relaxation
- Connect with others

What's excellent about **5-5-5 deep breathing** is that you can do it anywhere in the world and at any time. You don't need any tools; all that's required is breath.

Here's how to accomplish 5-5-5 deep breathing:

1. Inhale very slowly through your nose for 5 seconds
2. Hold your breath for five seconds
3. Exhale very slowly through your nose or mouth for 5 seconds
4. Hold your breath for five seconds
5. Repeat the process

Repeating this cycle for as little as one minute can work wonders and calm your nerves. When practicing deep breathing, try your best to control your thoughts. Aim to focus solely on your breath, but if your mind wanders, identify that it's simply a thought and redirect your mind's focus back to your breath.

Neck/scapular, shoulder stretch

5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique

- ▀ Deep breath/exhale slowly
- ▀ See: 5 things
- ▀ Touch: 4 things
- ▀ Hear: 3 things
- ▀ Smell: 2 things
- ▀ Taste: 1 thing



Grounding techniques bring you back to the present moment when feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or stressed.

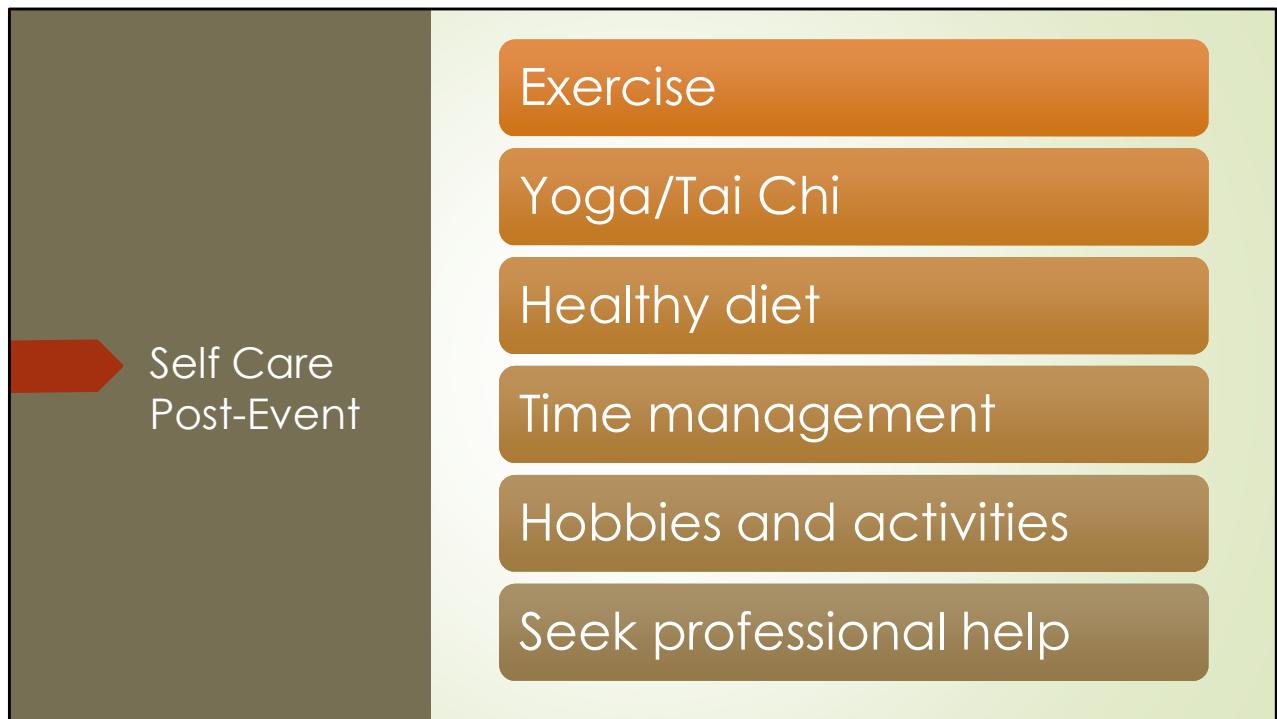
+2 eyes, 2 hands, 2 ears, 1 nose, 1 tongue

•By engaging your senses, you redirect your attention away from racing thoughts and worries and focus on your immediate surroundings.

•Calms the nervous system:

This technique interrupts the body's "fight or flight" response, helping to calm your nervous system and reduce the physical symptoms of anxiety.

•Provides immediate relief:



Exercise; even stretching

Yoga/tai chi; contain time for meditation and teach you how to quiet your mind

Healthy diet: avoid excessive alcohol and/or drug use. Avoid caffeine if you are super responsive to caffeine

+after an event; need down time. Schedule that in!

+resume hobbies/activities

+seek help if any symptoms: physical, cognitive, emotional, behavioral become unmanageable

Right about now, thinking why on earth would I want to be a first responder w/all awful things that can happen to me?



Don't wait....NOW develop a Personal stress framework: came back from Iraq where I saw effects of stress on soldiers, worked w/the Army surgeon general and army medical dept staff to develop Performance triad: adequate exercise, adequate diet, adequate sleep to optimize soldier performance...paying attention to these 3 things can help immunize you against the effects of stress. Develop coping mechanisms for falling asleep, using the 5-4-3-2-1 when cooking meals, incorporating exercise. Start using now so if a disaster hits, you will be fully optimized to meet stress head on.

Questions?

