

Disaster mental health toolkit

Supporting staff wellbeing
in-the-moment

Introduction

During disaster activation, prioritizing staff mental health is crucial for effective response. This toolkit equips leaders with actionable strategies to support employee wellbeing in-the-moment during Emergency Activation.

Key strategies

1 Quick stress reduction

Calming breaks

Encourage leaders and their teams to take brief breaks to engage in calming activities such as deep breathing, stretching, or progressive muscle relaxation.

Recharge breaks

Suggest short breaks where team members can step away from their tasks and engage in activities that help them recharge, grab a snack, listen to music, call their family, or even simply close their eyes for a moment.

2 Compassionate communication and leadership

Model vulnerability

Share your concerns and emotions to foster an environment of openness.

Acknowledge challenges

Recognize the difficulties faced by your team and express empathy.

Check-in regularly

Prioritize brief check-ins with team members before or after their shifts to ensure they feel supported. Showing appreciation and promote team cohesion: encourage mutual support and unity among team members.

3 Balancing emotions

Self-compassion

Leaders can practice self-compassion and remind staff to treat themselves with kindness and self-care during challenging times.

Grounding techniques

Offer simple grounding exercises to help employees manage overwhelming emotions.

Grounding through touch

Have the team touch an object nearby and describe its texture, temperature, and shape in detail. This brings their focus to the present and their immediate surroundings.

5-4-3-2-1 Technique

Guide the team to name five things they can see, four things they can touch, three things they can hear, two things they can smell, and one thing they can taste. This exercise engages multiple senses, grounding them in the present moment.

Square breathing

Instruct the team to take a slow inhale for a count of four, hold for four, exhale for four, and then pause for four. This pattern creates a calming rhythm.

4

Observing signs of distress in team members

Physical signs

Look for changes in sleep patterns, appetite, or excessive fatigue.

Emotional signs

Be attentive to increased irritability, sadness, or emotional withdrawal.

Behavioral signs

Notice if team members exhibit restlessness, isolation, or diminished performance.

5

Recognizing distress and providing psychological first aid

Create a safe space

Offer a private area where team members can talk about their feelings.

Active listening

Listen without judgment and validate their emotions to promote a sense of support.

Normalize reactions

Explain that stress reactions are normal during emergencies and disasters.

Offer practical support

Provide resources, like mental health contacts, for further assistance.

Implementation tips



Emergency Response Team training

Ensure all leaders are familiar with the toolkit's strategies before disaster activation.



Quick Reference Guide

Provide each leader with a physical or digital copy of this toolkit for immediate access.



Shift check-ins

Regularly engage in brief check-ins with team members before or after their shifts to assess their wellbeing.



Open communication

Foster an environment where team members feel comfortable discussing their emotional state.

Here to HELP Toolkit for disaster support



Hear and recognize distress

- Pay attention to signs of distress in team members.
- Be attentive to changes in behavior or mood.



Engage with empathy

- Approach team members with empathy and understanding.
- Listen actively and validate their feelings.



Lend psychological first aid

- Provide a safe space for team members to share their experiences.
- Offer practical support and resources for emotional needs.



Promote compassionate communication

- Foster open and honest conversations.
- Use empathetic language and active listening techniques.

The “HELP Toolkit” guides leaders in offering essential support to their teams during challenging times. Each step contributes to creating an environment of understanding, care, and emotional wellbeing.

We support your well-being.

By keeping this Disaster Mental Health Toolkit at your fingertips during disaster activation, you are equipped to provide essential support for staff mental wellbeing. Prioritizing employee mental health, including regular shift check-ins, contributes to a resilient workforce and enhances overall disaster response effectiveness.



Text **HOME** to **741741** or call **800.383.1908**

A live, trained counselor will respond from a confidential, secure platform.

Connect with the LCMC Health Be Well Center

504.896.9379 or **LCMC-WellBeing@LCMCHHealth.org**

Employee Health Hotline

504.962.6270

Nurse Hotline

504.962.6202

People Service Center

504.702.5525

More resources are available



Other resources:

Call 988 for 24/7 mental health, crisis, and disaster emotional support and counseling. SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Hotline: Call or text 1.800.985.5990 for year-round disaster crisis counseling for people in emotional distress, information on how to recognize distress, referrals, and healthy coping tips.