

Special Topic: Managing Anger and Agitation

Anger Management: Responders

Disasters can generate a variety of emotions, ranging from slight to extreme. As a responder it is important to attempt to limit the amount of stress that you are under, work to manage your stress appropriately, and control how your emotions impact you. In the special topic document *Stress and Stressors*, common reactions to stress were identified. One particular stress response that is important to identify and explore in greater detail is anger. Anger is an emotion that often accompanies high levels of stress during periods where physical exertion begins to take its toll. The following tactics can help you deal with bouts of anger during disaster response.

Identify your triggers.

What makes you angry? Is it a particular situation? Is it a phrase, word, tone of voice? Most of us have trigger situations during which we are more likely to react with anger. Examples include times when we are hungry, tired, stressed, or overwhelmed. Identify your triggers and let those around you know what they are. Knowing your triggers for anger can help you take charge of your feelings and control them.

Don't dwell.

Anger is a common emotion and one you can deal with constructively. Finding a practical and satisfactory solution quickly allows you to let go of your anger and move on without negatively taxing your relationships.

Live healthfully.

When feeling angry, many people attempt to cope by using alcohol or medications. However, alcohol and other substances interfere with rational problem-solving and may actually intensify feelings of anger, leading to an escalation of the situation. Physical exercise is an excellent stress management technique and also an effective way to diffuse anger. Go for a walk, a swim, or a jog to give yourself a safe time out that may prevent you from acting out your anger. A drop in blood sugar levels can also intensify anger and negative emotions. Make sure that you eat regular, healthy, energizing meals that sustain you throughout the day to prevent this from happening.

Sorry does not have to be the hardest word.

It is important to have our feelings acknowledged and equally important to validate other's feelings. Saying, "I am sorry," is not synonymous with admitting defeat. You do not even have to agree with the other person's point of view. Rather, it implies that you respect the other person's reactions and you empathize. This action opens the door to constructive communication, problem-solving, and relationship-building.

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Anger Diffusion: Survivors

As previously discussed, anger is a common reaction to stress. This is not limited to responders, but can also occur in survivors. Before, during, and after the disaster incident survivors are exposed to a multitude of stressors. The resulting stress reactions continue throughout the disaster experience. Anger, along with a wide arrange of other responses, can be found in survivors of a disaster. This anger and agitation can be related directly to their disaster experience or can be exacerbated by other stressors. When working with survivors it is important to recognize when an individual is experiencing anger or agitation. Although experiencing those emotions is understandable, when the survivor becomes distressed or disruptive there may need to be an intervention. Diffusing anger and agitation is a way for the responder to intervene, assist the survivor in calming themselves, and lower the possibility of confrontation or increased agitation. The following items are steps and approach techniques for the responder to diffuse a situation based on the survivor's display of anger or agitation.

Disruptive or verbally challenging survivors

- Respond calmly.
- Do not assert control.
- Speak in a gentle manner, and if necessary, calmly repeat statements.
- If you find that the individual does not comprehend, try changing the way you state your points.
- Use active listening skills (reflecting, paraphrasing, and summarizing).
- Give survivors an opportunity to regain control of themselves.
- Do not take comments personally.
- Maintain presence and professionalism.

If this approach does not diffuse the situation and the survivor escalates in their agitation, see the below items.

Increasingly disruptive or verbally agitated survivors

- Continue to utilize the same approach techniques (listed above).
- Maintain a safe distance from the survivor.
- Attempt to identify what may be leading to an increase in agitation.
- Address/Remove any factors that may be increasing the survivor's irritation.
- Encourage the survivor to accompany you to a less stressful location (especially if other survivors are present).
- Indicate to the survivor you may need assistance to help them.
- If the survivor becomes threatening, seek immediate assistance.