

Special Topic: Risk Behaviors

Risk Behaviors

It has been mentioned throughout this course that disasters can cause stress. Responders and survivors alike experience stress, display varied stress responses, and need to utilize stress management skills. However, not all stress responses or stress management skills are positive and beneficial. There are a number of behaviors that survivors and responders engage in that are detrimental. Many of these behaviors are an attempt to manage stress and may work for a short period of time. Yet, in the long run they become a problem in and of themselves, causing more stress and negative consequences for the individual. These negative coping strategies and stress responses are called **risk behaviors**. Such behaviors should be identified and addressed to mitigate the negative consequences they may have. Below you will find a list of common risk behaviors specifically seen in disaster responders.

Examples of risk behaviors:

- Increased use of alcohol and/or drugs
- Increased or inappropriate use of prescription medications
- Beginning or increasing tobacco use
- Unhealthy diet and exercise patterns
- Major changes in sleep patterns
- Deterioration of personal hygiene
- Use of inappropriate humor in public settings
- Fewer attempts to engage in positive coping
- Increased interpersonal conflict and hostility
- Engaging in physical conflicts
- Increased domestic violence
- Withdrawal from interpersonal support
- Engaging in risky sexual behavior
- Physically harming oneself
- Taking unnecessary risks
- Purposefully placing self in harm's way
- Overworking and refusing to take breaks