



# Mental Health Aspects of an Emergency Response

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The findings and conclusions in this presentation are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



# Mental Health is Part of Every Emergency Response

- Anyone can face challenges to their own mental health.
- Everyone can play a role in promoting mental health.




# What is Mental Health?

“...a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”

- WHO, 2001

World Health Organization. *Strengthening Mental Health Promotion*. Geneva, World Health Organization (Fact sheet no. 220), 2001.



# Stress – Distress – Mental Disorder

## **Stress**

How the brain and body respond to any demand

## **Distress**

Stress response that overwhelms a person's ability to take care of themselves and family

## **Mental Disorder**

Characterized by some combination of abnormal thoughts, emotions, behavior and relationships with others

# Community-Level Factors Influencing Mental Health Needs During an Emergency Response




- Stressfulness of the incident
- Community resilience
- Stigma
- Isolation and quarantine



# Stressfulness of the Event



WEST AFRICA  
**Ebola Outbreak**



Likely host = bats

**2 in 5**  
people who got  
Ebola in this  
outbreak died.

**Largest Ebola outbreak in history**

# Community Resilience

“...the ability of community members to take deliberate, purposeful, and collective action to alleviate the detrimental effects of adverse events.”\*

Community members working together:

- Draw on community strengths
- Empower members to support each other
- Incorporate cultural and community values

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/leaders.asp>

\*Pfefferbaum et al., Int J Emerg Ment Health. 15(1):15-29, 2013.



# Stigma

Stigma involves stereotyping and discriminating against an identifiable group of people, a product, an animal, a place, or a nation.

Stigma causes	➔	Fear, mistrust, discrimination
Stigma stops	➔	People getting the help they need
Stigma splits apart	➔	Families and friends



# Stigma During Emergency Response

**FIGURE. Flooded homes after Hurricane Katrina — New Orleans, Louisiana, September 2005**



Photo/Associated Press

## Stigma Related to:

- Cultural differences
- Mental Health
- Fear of illness and death

**Ebola Information for Volunteers  
Working with West African  
Communities in the United States**



# Isolation and Quarantine Increase Stress

- Additional fear or anxiety about:
  - Personal health
  - Financial implications
  - Uncertainty
- Loneliness
- Challenges to self-care
- Risk for depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)



Photo from NorthJersey.com

# Anyone Can Face Challenges to Their Own Mental Health



## CDC Call Center Mental Health Protocol Responding to Callers Expressing Stress, Fear or Anxiety (1/2)

1

Identify caller needs & acknowledge their concerns

- Respond sensitively: All concerns & fears are real, even if not supported by facts

# Populations with Increased Risk



- Children
- Pregnant women
- People with chronic conditions or disabilities
- People with mental or substance use disorders
- Responders



## “Children...are among those most at risk for psychological trauma and behavioral difficulties after a disaster.”\*

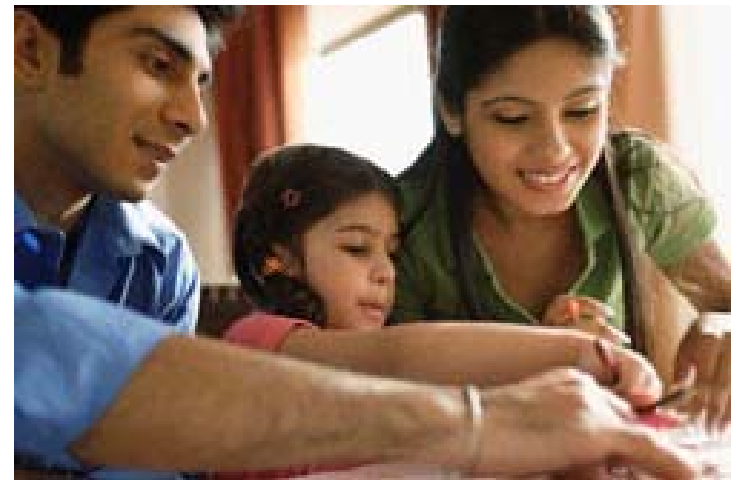
- Children are not small adults.
- Children depend on adults.
- Children need to feel safe.
  - Parents and caregivers
  - Environment
- Development can be impacted.



\*Institute of Medicine. *Preparing for the Psychological Consequences of Terrorism: A Public Health Strategy*. Washington, DC: National Academics Press, 2003

# Supporting Children's Mental Health

- Partner with parents, schools, and healthcare providers
- Share age-appropriate information
- Encourage children to ask questions
- Limit media exposure
- Return to a routine



*Family reunification is paramount*

<https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/index.html>

# Pregnant Women and Individuals with Chronic Conditions



- Pregnancy stress associated with poor outcomes
- Chronic conditions or disabilities may increase stress
- Pre-existing mental disorders may increase vulnerability

# Responders



- Stress
  - Signs of stress
  - Burnout
  - Secondary traumatic stress
- Stigma
- Returning home



# Supporting Responders

- Self-care techniques
- Buddy system
- Family support
- Monitoring responder mental health
- Psychological first aid



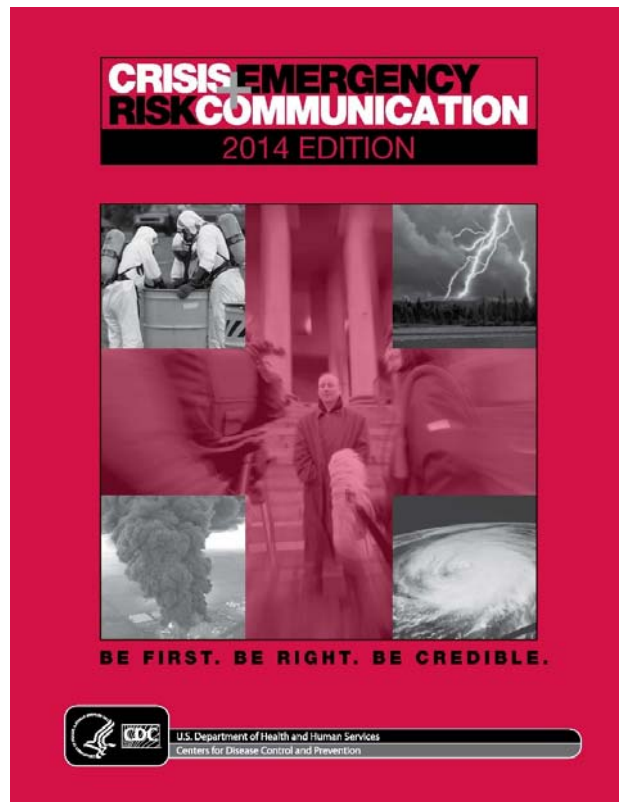
<https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/responders.asp>

<https://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content//NMH05-0210/NMH05-0210.pdf>

# Everyone Can Play a Role in Promoting Mental Health During a Response



# Crisis Emergency Risk Communication



- Build trust and credibility
- Acknowledge uncertainty
- Acknowledge fear
- Give people things to do
- Ask more of people

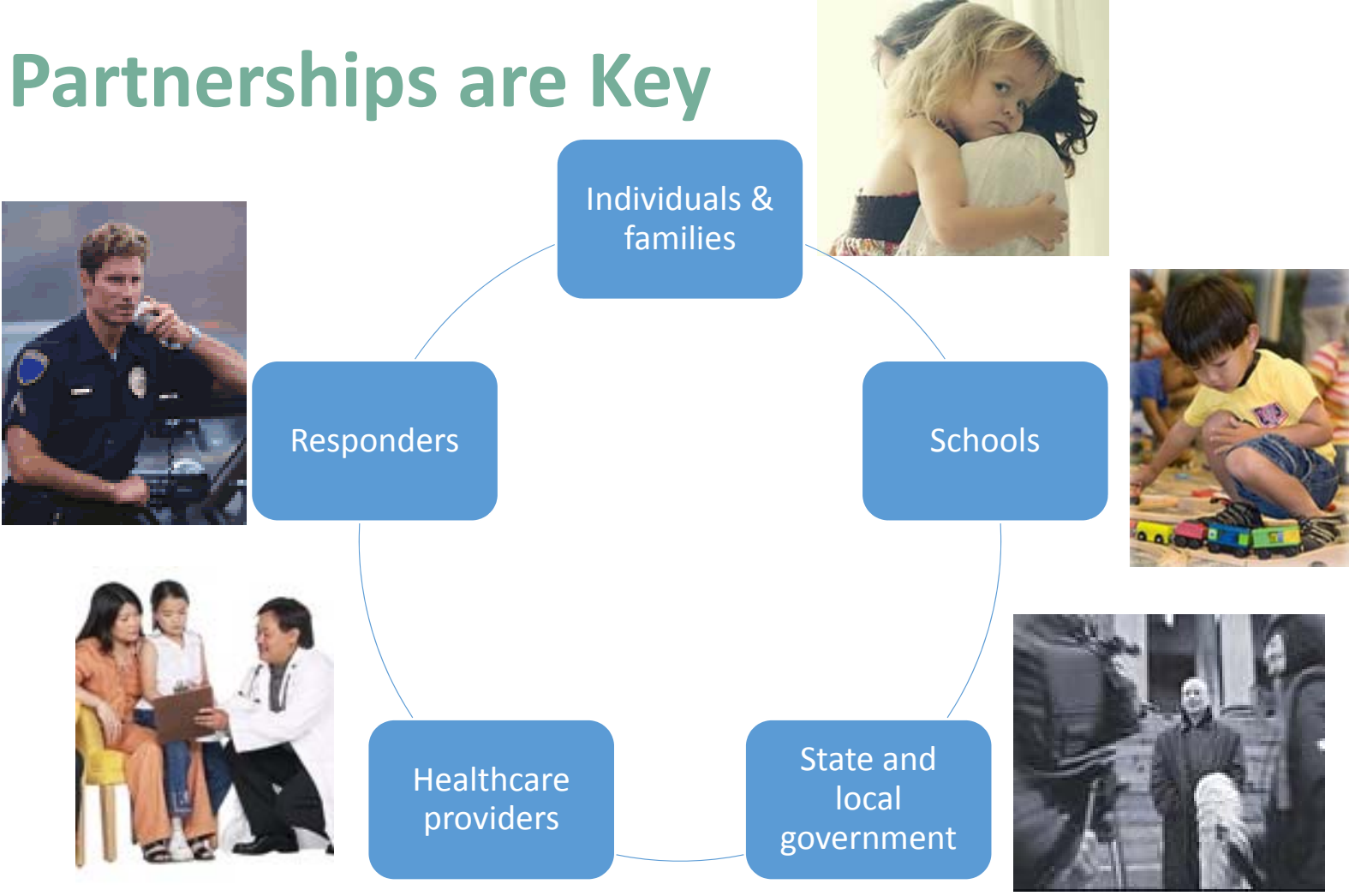
<https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/manual/index.asp>

## Communicators can...

- Use simple messages
- Ensure messages are delivered by credible sources
- Use consistent messages
- Release accurate messages as soon as possible



# Partnerships are Key



# Mental Health in an Emergency Response



# Resources

## CDC

Coping with a disaster: <https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/index.asp>

Addressing stigma: [https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/cerccorner/article\\_123016.asp](https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/cerccorner/article_123016.asp)

## SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Hotline

1-800-985-5990 (TTY for deaf/hearing impaired: 1-800-846-8517); Text TalkWithUs to 66746

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline>

National Child Traumatic Stress Network <http://www.nctsn.org/>

## Psychological First Aid (WHO)

[http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/44615/1/9789241548205\\_eng.pdf](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/44615/1/9789241548205_eng.pdf)

## Antares Guidelines for Managing Stress in Humanitarian Workers

<https://www.antaresfoundation.org/guidelines#.WZ2ul01K71>

