RECOVERY

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT

The moment an emergency event occurs, the recovery process begins. Staff, residents and families respond to the crisis situation and simultaneously work towards the return to a state of normal (or new normal) operations and towards the restoration of the psychological health of all who have been impacted. To achieve the most positive psychological recovery outcomes, there are 5 essential elements of assistive intervention that must be considered from the onset of the event.

5 Essential Elements of Immediate & Mid-Term Assistive Intervention in Traumatic Events/Disasters

- **Restore Sense of Safety**
  - Establish command
  - Communicate progress with authoritative voice
  - Utilize media effectively

- **Calming (Reduce Anxiety and Agitation)**
  - Identify & address common concerns
  - Clarify impacts & implications, stabilize expectations
  - Build consistency by using credible spokespeople

- **Establish Sense of Community and Self-Efficacy**
  - Provide resources for basic needs
  - Facilitate individual and collective autonomy
  - Establish a gathering place for mutual support

- **Building Connectedness**
  - Opportunity for exchange with normal cohort
  - Identify, collect, console & transfer evacuees
  - Return evacuees to Home as soon as possible

- **Facilitating Hope**
  - Use an influential spokesperson to instill hope
  - Faith-based spiritual approaches that offer compassion
  - Community resilience slogans, e.g. "We Rise Again"

Academic research shows that post-disaster community cohesiveness fosters hope, builds connectedness and instills a feeling of safety within the community. This simple approach has been shown to result in significantly improved individual psychological and physical health outcomes 6-12 months post-incident, reducing both mortality and the incidence of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

**Post Traumatic Stress Disorder**: An anxiety disorder that develops directly as a result of exposure to a traumatic event or series of events that seriously threaten an individual’s life, safety or emotional integrity.
PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID

It is important during and after an emergency situation to be aware of the ABC’s of psychological first aid: **Attenuation** (lessen the impact of the emergency), **Basic Needs** (e.g. food, water, shelter), and **Compassion** (to staff, residents and family members).

Employees can be affected in many different ways during and after an emergency event has taken place. Depending on the extent of the emergency, employees may:

- **Be torn between their personal and professional responsibilities**: If the emergency event affects the entire community, an employee may have responsibilities to both their job and their family. Family responsibilities may include evacuation, child or elder care, gathering emergency supplies, and dealing with damage to personal property. These external stressors are likely to affect an employee’s ability to focus on the needs of the workplace.

- **Sense a lack of training and preparedness**: Training is the only way for staff to become familiar with the roles, responsibilities, policies and procedures that must be implemented in response to an emergency event. Such training will reduce panic and stress for both staff and residents during an actual emergency situation. When an employee does not feel comfortable in their emergency response role they may not be effective to the team, inadvertently becoming part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

**Disaster Resilience** is defined as the ability of individuals and communities to accept and adapt to adversity. For organizations that provide services to vulnerable populations, disaster resiliency demands:

- **Order in the midst of chaos**
- **Flexibility of actions**
- **Command & Control**
- **Early and accurate situational assessment**
- **Immediate efforts, both proximal and practical**

WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER!