

HEALING HELPERS:

Caring for Ourselves and Others During and After Crisis

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MHTTC

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New England MHTTC

HCW Well-Being

- Supplemental grant for all regional MHTTC projects
- Focused on creating national library of resources to support the well-being of all HCWs
- New England MHTTC Well-Being Initiative:
 - Personal well-being & self-care
 - Organizational well-being best practices
 - Cultural perspectives on well-being
- Products: tip sheets and resource development, listening-sessions and webinars, peer-support, best practices

Overview



We Are Here

Public Health Volunteers
& Surviving the Pandemic



Vulnerability

How Volunteers are
Vulnerable to Trauma,
Stress, and Burnout



Resilience

How Volunteers Cultivate
Resilience in Ourselves
and Others

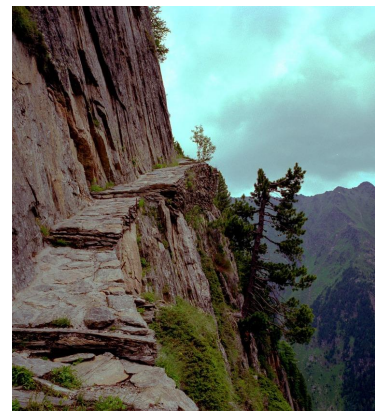


Before we Begin:

Mindful Moment

We Are Here

In order to effectively care for others, we must first take care of ourselves. This is especially true in disaster relief, where the emotional toll can be as challenging as the physical demands



What Makes Volunteers Different than Employees/ Professionals?

Motivation

Volunteers are driven by:

- Altruism
- Sense of community
- Desire to help
- Service

Background

Volunteers:

- Receive task-specific training/skills
- May have volunteer-specific backgrounds
- Have widely varied backgrounds
- May not have disaster/emergency-related training

Disruption

Volunteers work:

- In challenging environments
- In unpredictable environments
- Under emotionally & physically stressful conditions
- As-needed or last minute

Maine Responds Volunteers

Volunteers have assisted with public health efforts on:

- Vaccination
- COVID-19 response
- Mpox response
- Refugees
- Disaster supports
- Community preparedness/education
- Natural disaster response

Supported Maine's COVID-19 pandemic response:

- 695 volunteers
- 55 missions
- 6,941 shifts
- Supported 3,000 mental health staff
- Done work valued at 1.65 million

A Stressful Job in Public Health has Gotten Harder

| Mental Health: | Family Life: | Work: | Violence: | Inequity: |
|---|---|---|--|--|
| Stress, depression, anxiety, insomnia; with a high prevalence of PTSD and increased suicide risk. | Worry about exposing families to COVID, illness and trauma; parenting and being absent or inattentive with children; fragmentation of relationships | Not supported at work, with toxic organizational factors; high rates of burnout, trauma, compassion fatigue; lack of recognition; low pay; changes in public perception of our work | Increased violence towards self or others; victimization in the workplace, at school, in public. | These effects were disproportionate among women, BIPOC people and people who had an SES of middle or lower income. |

Defining the Terms

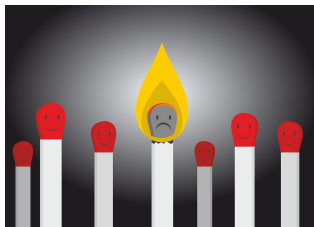
- **Stress:** "any change that causes physical, emotional, or psychological strain"
- **Trauma:** something that is too soon, too fast, or too much for the mind and body to process
- **Compassion Fatigue:** "emotional residue or strain of exposure to working with those suffering from the consequences of traumatic events"
- **Moral Distress:** when one knows the ethically correct action to take but feels powerless to take that action
- **Burnout:** "Cumulative process marked by emotional exhaustion and withdrawal associated with increased workload and institutional stress, NOT trauma-related"

Source: American Institute of Stress, n.d., 2020

Burnout: An Occupational Risk

According to WHO: "a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed" with 3 indicators:

- Exhaustion
- Compassion fatigue, detachment, cynicism, depersonalization
- Feeling useless or that your work is meaningless; a decreased sense of self and/or a reduced sense of accomplishment



Source: ICD-11, WHO, 2019

Signs of Burnout, Trauma & Moral Distress

- Cynicism & Criticism
- Impatience & irritation
- Low energy & exhaustion
- Apathy & disinterest
- Limited concentration/memory
- Physical symptoms or changes
- Sleep changes
- Sadness
- Use of substances or addiction
- Isolation & loneliness
- Getting sick or feeling run down
- Skipping work or being late
- Anger

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE FOR YOU?

Consequences of Ignoring Burnout

To us:

- Chronic fatigue
- Disordered eating
- Substance abuse
- Headaches
- High blood pressure
- Increased risk of cardiovascular diseases
- Higher musculoskeletal pains
- Exacerbation of existing illness
- Sleeping problems
- Lack of concentration
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Suicidal ideation or risk of completed suicide
- Family stress
- Compassion fatigue

To our work and clients:

- Decreased quality in performance
- Reduced productivity
- Poor attention and concentration,
- Lower quality decision making and judgment.
- Poor quality of work life
- Less satisfaction
- Low morale and motivation
- Absenteeism
- Workplace disagreements or violence
- High employee turnover due to leaving the job or the field
- Less compassion for patients and lower patient satisfaction with care
- Increased mistakes and practice errors

Source: Mosadeghrad, 2014; American Inst. of Stress, 2021



- More vaccine resistance and continued fear of surges
- Deaths of despair: Rising deaths as a result of overdose, suicide, loneliness
- Growing mental health crisis: Acuity, severity, duration
- Exhaustion and trauma
- Violence
- Cultivated resilience & adjustment
- Reconnection to our social fabric
- People accessing help
- Awareness and stigma reduction
- Re-centering on what's important
- **Opportunity to redefine how we work, live, and serve**

Vulnerability

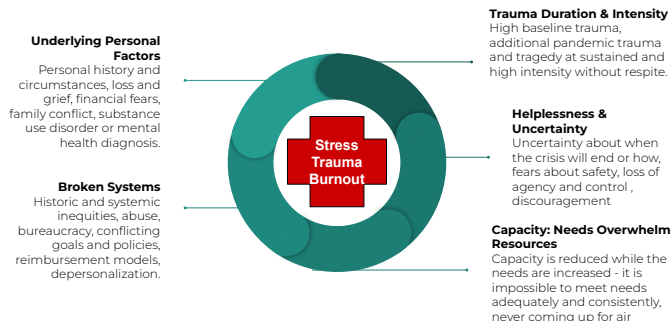
Every disaster relief volunteer has a story, a reason for being there, and an emotional journey that is often unseen but deeply felt.



Keep in Mind...

- **Equity & Privilege:** Suffering and trauma are not distributed equally.
- **Organizational Influence:** Personal well-being cannot make up for a toxic environment or a broken system.
- **Culture Counts:** You can make these concepts explicitly valued and modeled, and ensure that they are enacted, particularly for people with LESS power.
- **Diverse Perspectives:** Trauma and burnout are individual. Well-being and self-care look different for everyone, but *everyone has the capacity to extend love and care to themselves.*
- **Priorities:** You have a right (obligation) to prioritize your personal well-being. You don't have to "earn" it.
- **Patience:** Most of us have to learn, practice, and recommit

Intersecting Crises in Volunteering



These Factors Cause Stress Responses

Anxiety

Fears about: the future, safety, well-being, family, health, uncertainty

Exhaustion

Depression, fatigue, not enjoying anything, unable to do things outside of work

Grief

Sadness about profound and long-lasting loss: lives, time, income, health, abilities, connection, plans

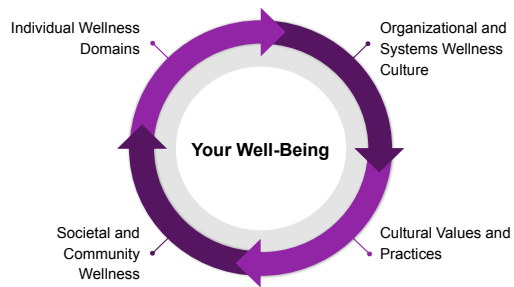
Anger

Anger at: the loss of control, injustice and disparity, frustration with the actions of others

Guilt

Survivorship, not wanting to do this, not being able to do this, not coping, not doing enough

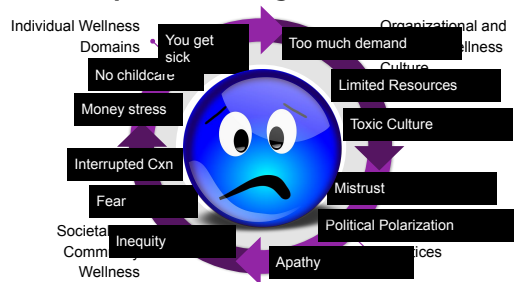
Personal Wellness Occurs in a Broader Context



Volunteers' Strengths can Become Vulnerabilities

| | | |
|----------------------|--|---|
| Perfectionism | Valuing excellence and precision; driven to achieve | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nothing is ever good enough Impossible standards Shame or blame about/hiding mistakes |
| Toughness | Able to persevere through difficult circumstances; unflappable | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to ask for help Not knowing when to stop or take a break Compassion fatigue or callousness |
| Service | Putting others before self; desire to serve to make the world better | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ignoring own needs Not making needed changes Being "good" to own detriment or cost |
| Loyalty | Committed to people and organizations; team-focused | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeling anonymous or voiceless Not being able to speak out for change Rigidity of mission over people |
| Integrity | Strong moral code: right vs wrong | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Black and white thinking Rigidity Moral distress: Guilt in imperfect or gray areas |

A System Disrupted & Damaged



Pre-Deployment Strategies

- Education:** Understand the potential mental health risks associated with disaster relief work.
- Skill Development:** Learn stress management techniques and psychological first aid.
- Expectation Setting:** Have realistic expectations about the work and its emotional impact.



Deployment Strategies

- Self-Care:** Prioritize personal well-being, including adequate sleep, nutrition, and physical activity.
- Peer Support:** Build a network of support with fellow volunteers to share experiences and offer mutual support.
- Emotional Awareness:** Be aware of and acknowledge your feelings and reactions. It's okay to feel overwhelmed or distressed.
- Stress Management:** Practice stress-reduction techniques such as deep breathing, mindfulness, or meditation.
- Boundary Setting:** Establish clear boundaries to separate work from personal time and avoid overextending yourself.

Post-Deployment Strategies

- **Debriefing:** Participate in formal debriefings to process experiences and emotions.
- **Mental Health Check-Ins:** Seek professional help if experiencing symptoms of PTSD, depression, or anxiety.
- **Reflective Practices:** Engage in reflective practices like journaling to process your experiences.
- **Reintegration Support:** Seek support in readjusting to everyday life after returning from deployment.



Ongoing Support for Volunteers



- **Advocate for Support:** Encourage the organizations you work with to provide support for volunteers.
- **Feedback Mechanisms:** Use available channels to provide feedback.
- **Know the Symptoms:** Be aware of the signs of burnout, compassion fatigue, moral injury, and trauma.
- **Early Intervention:** Seek help at the first sign of mental health difficulties.
- **Healthier Coping Mechanisms:** Address challenges directly and in a healthy way.

What Gets in the Way of Caring for Ourselves?

- I'm too busy or tired
- Other people need me more and I need to help them first
- I will later, when I have more...(time, energy, money, vacation, help)
- I don't care anymore
- My need is too great and the system is too broken
- I don't know how
- It's so self indulgent
- People/colleagues/my family/community will think I'm lazy/sick/bad/not a team player

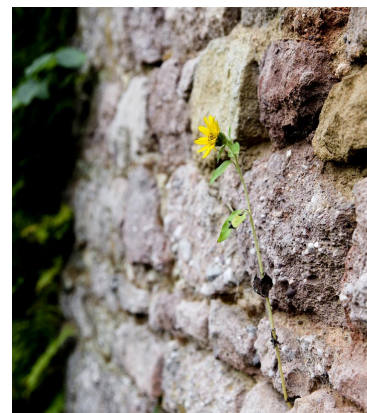
I am less important than the people I care for

I don't really matter

My "SELF" is not worth caring for

Cultivating Resilience in a Challenging World

Being aware of the psychological impacts of disaster relief work is as important as any physical training a volunteer can undergo



Real self care is *always* an inside job.

HOW DO WE SUPPORT OURSELVES AND EACH OTHER?



Create a Vision



Rethink Volunteering



Address your Stress



Honor Trauma & Grief



Seek out Joy & Connection



Rest & Reset

Create a Vision for Yourself



What do you want your life to look like next year, in five years, or at your retirement party?

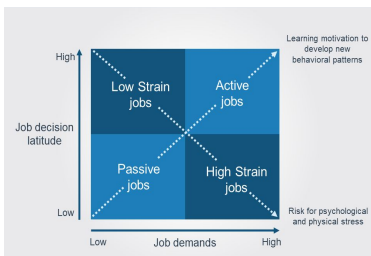
- Is this a challenge or easy?
- What do you hope for?
- Lay out the steps
- Return to your values
- Identify your supports and ask for help
- Focus on your strengths
- Find what rejuvenates and enlivens you
- Follow your curiosity

Create a Vision: Strengths



- Cultivate a strengths-based approach and mindset (practice makes perfect)
- Make time for gratitude
- Honor and seek out joy, pleasure, and play
- Notice what you have accomplished
- Speak with love and compassion to yourself and to others
- Give yourself and others the benefit of the doubt

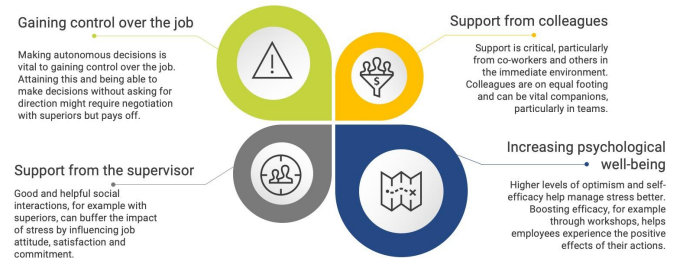
Rethink your Volunteer Work: Is it Working?



Source: Karasek's Demand-Control Model of Work Stress

- Where does your work fall on this model?
- Has that changed or will it change?
- Is the problem you or your job? The culture? The organization?
- Do you have the ability/skills/agency to make changes?

Rethink your Work: What Works?



See Karasek & Theorell (1990), Treiber & Davis (2012), Rubino et al. (2012).

www.cikju.net | CQ Net - Management skills for everyone!

Address Your Stress

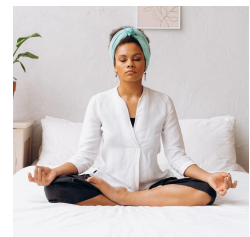


- Look at how you're spending your time and rebalance as needed
- Pay attention to H.A.L.T.= Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired
- Be conscientious about your health
- Move and eat as well as you can
- Limit alcohol or other substances
- Get outside
- Laugh and play (like a kid with bubbles!)
- Set boundaries
- Learn something new or DO something new

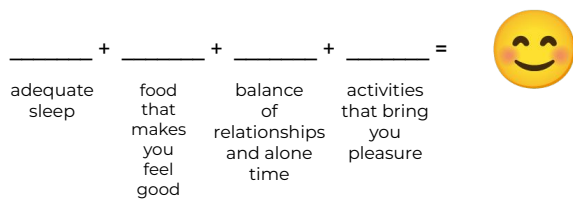
Address Stress: Self-Care & Mindfulness

Be here now in the moment (if you're washing the dishes, wash the dishes)

- o Breath Work
- o Meditation
- o Yoga & Movement
- o Mindful Habits
- o Rest & Disconnect
- o Rituals and Routines



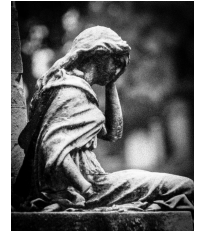
Address Stress: Finding Your Formula



Source: Dana Asby, M.A., M.Ed.

Honor your Grief

- Acknowledge your own suffering and grief
- Accept that grief is unpredictable and unique for you and others
- Consider a ritual, ceremony, celebration, or rite
- Ask for support from others
- Allow yourself to seek and find comfort
- Wait to make big decisions
- Recognize the difference between grief and depression



APA, 2020; MHA, 2021



- Talk it out: therapy, friends, family, online support groups
- Face it: facing, identifying, processing without avoidance
- Take care of yourself: treat yourself as you would a cherished loved one
- Be patient with yourself: healing takes time and you are tender
- Ask for help when/if you need it: you aren't alone

Cultivate Connection

- Identify and access your network
- Reach out to others who are suffering
- Access professional help
- When you are able:
 - Model self-care and well-being
 - Make it transparent
 - Set boundaries and identify your needs
- Seek out inspiration in your colleagues and clients
- Practice deep listening



Cultivate Connection: Leadership

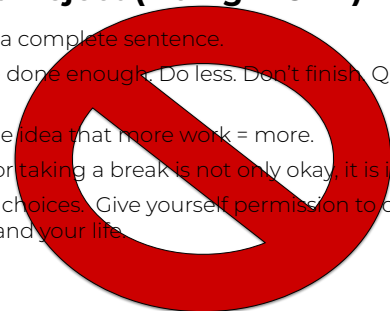


Connected leaders:

- Have high standards
- Place well-being at the center
- Are trauma-conscious & mindful
- Care for themselves
- Know that their team is their greatest asset
- See themselves and their team as people *first*
- Prioritize equity
- Honor their organization/team vision and values
- Address issues directly and transparently
- Are accountable, apologize, and are flexible

Rest and Reject (Doing MORE)

- "No." It's a complete sentence.
- You have done enough. Do less. Don't finish. Quit. Enlist help.
- Reject the idea that more work = more.
- Resting or taking a break is not only okay, it is imperative.
- We have choices. Give yourself permission to choose yourself and your life.



Strengths to Vulnerabilities to Strengths

| | | |
|---------------|---|---|
| Perfectionism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nothing is ever enough Shame or blame | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am perfectly imperfect, just like everyone I value high standards without perfection |
| Toughness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to ask for help Not knowing when to stop | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I know that I can survive this and thrive I am strong and capable |
| Service | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ignoring own needs Burnout | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can serve because I care for myself first Service can be balanced with receiving |
| Loyalty | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeling voiceless Rigidity of mission | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I'm dedicated to my team and their wellbeing We can work together to care for self |
| Integrity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Black and white thinking Guilt in gray areas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can be honest about my own needs If I can't care for my clients, I speak up |



Take a Moment to Reflect on your Work:

How have you continued?



www.LaKeishaHankins.com  [lakeisha_hankins](https://www.instagram.com/lakeisha_hankins)

Thank you

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