

# PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID

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- Dealing with your own personal losses
- Working in your neighborhood
- Assisting neighbors, friends, or coworkers who have also been injured
- Feeling unsafe and insecure



# Causes of Disaster Reactions



- Heart, breath rate increase
- Blood shunted to muscles, adrenaline increased
- Fine motor control lost
- Pain sensation decreases (endorphins)
- Other senses sharpen or narrow
- Focus or tunnel vision or task saturation
- Time may seem to slow down or go fast



# Autonomic Responses to Immediate Stress



- **Freeze:** “Stop, look, and listen,” or be on guard and watchful
- **Flight:** Flee
- **Fight:** Attempt to combat the threat
- **Fright:** Tonic immobility when in contact with a predator, or playing dead
- **Faint:** Fear-induced fainting

## The Five Fs



- Psychological
- Physical
- Behavioral
- Cognitive
- Spiritual



# Stress Reactions to a Disaster

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- Irritability or anger
- Self-blame or blaming others
- Isolation and withdrawal
- Fear of recurrence
- Feeling stunned, numb, overwhelmed
- Feeling helpless
- Sadness, depression, grief- Mood Swings
- Denial
- Concentration and memory problems
- Relationship problems/marital discord

# Psychological Symptoms of Trauma



- Loss of appetite
- Headaches or chest pain
- Diarrhea, stomach pain, or nausea
- Hyperactivity
- Increase in drug consumption
- Insomnia -- Nightmares
- Fatigue



# Physical Symptoms of Trauma



- Negative
  - Social withdrawal, isolation, avoidance
  - Increased conflict in relationships
  - Vocational- reduced productivity, mistakes
  - Talks about death or suicide, cries easily, fearful
  - Problems with impulse control- scapegoating
- Positive
  - Bonding, empathy, altruism
  - Increase in oxytocin

# Behavioral Symptoms of Trauma





- Impaired concentration
- Impaired decision-making ability
- Memory problems
- Disbelief
- Confusion
- Decreased self-esteem and self-efficacy
- Intrusive thoughts and memories- flashbacks
- Worry



# Cognitive Symptoms of Trauma



- Loss of hope, limited expectations about life
- Intense use of prayer
- Questioning- (“Why Me?”)
- Redefining meaning and the importance of life

# Spiritual Symptoms of Trauma



- Reactions similar to adults
- Cognitive- Disoriented, Confused
- Behavioral- Withdrawal or Detachment, Clinging, Aggression
- Emotional- Fearful, Safety Concerns, Passivity, Regression, Separation Anxiety, Guilt
- Physical Complaints, Sleep Disturbance



# Common Child/Adolescent Stress Response



- Remember CERT is a team
- Brief CERT personnel beforehand
  - to help manage emotional impact of disaster response work
- Rest and regroup
- Take breaks away from the incident site
- Eat properly, stay hydrated
- Be aware of changes in teammates
- Rotate teams and duties -Phase out gradually
- Defuse after shift



# Team Well-Being



- Get enough sleep
- Exercise regularly
- Eat a balanced diet
- Balance work, play, and rest
- Use relaxation techniques
- Allow yourself to receive as well as give
- Connect with others
- Use spiritual resources



# How to Reduce Stress



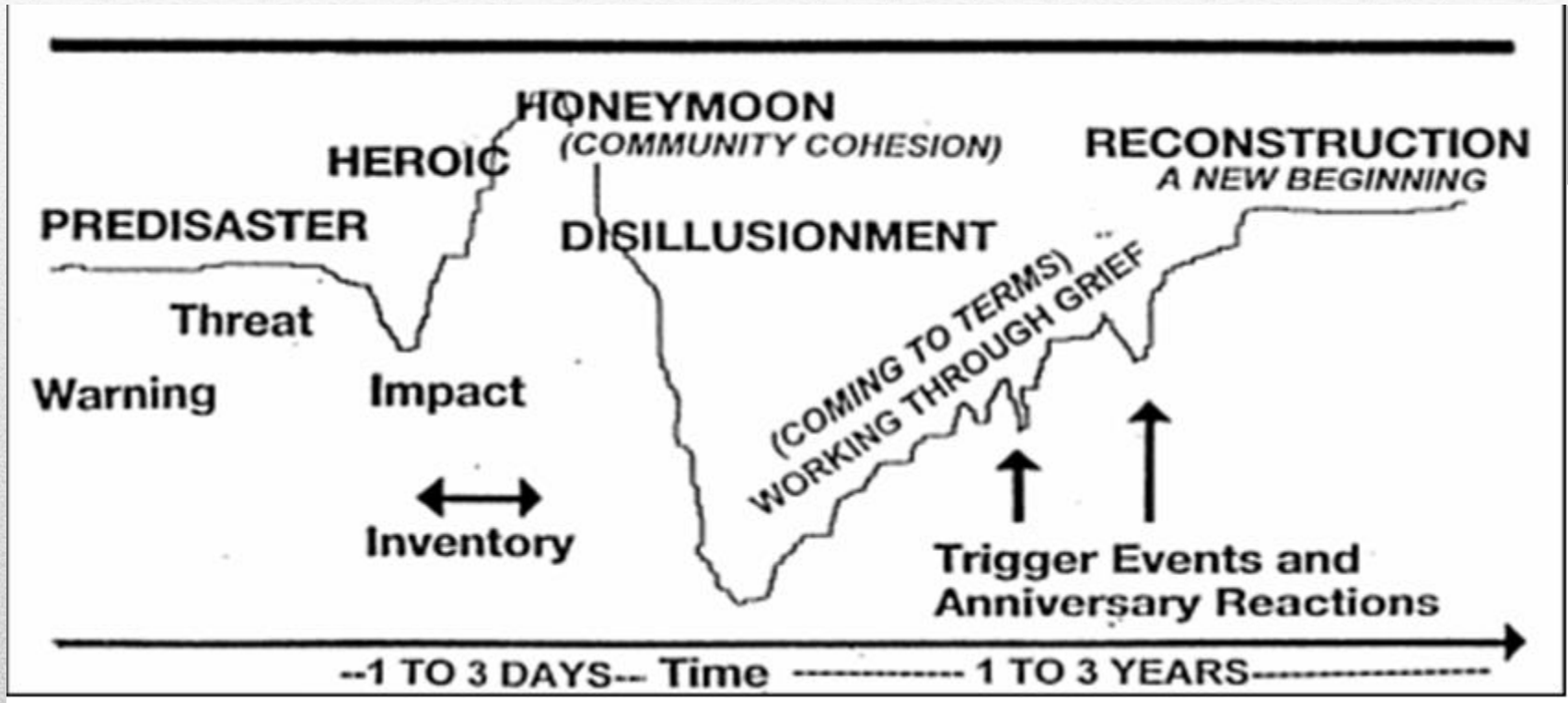


- Be aware of trauma that can follow a disaster
- Explain to family members and friends what you need:
  - Listen when you want to talk
  - Don't force yourself to talk until you are ready
  - Debriefing for CERT- Stress/Disruptive Event
    - Supportive- based on resilience

# Take Care of Yourself



# Phases of a Disaster



From CDC.gov "Disaster Mental Health Primer: Key Principles, Issues and Questions"

- A traumatic crisis is an event experienced or witnessed in which people's ability to cope is overwhelmed by:
  - Actual or potential death or injury to self or others
  - Serious injury
  - Destruction of their homes, neighborhood, or value possessions
  - Loss of contact with family or close friends

# Traumatic Crisis





- Traumatic stress may affect:
  - Cognitive functioning
  - Physical health
  - Interpersonal relationships



# Effects of Traumatic Stress

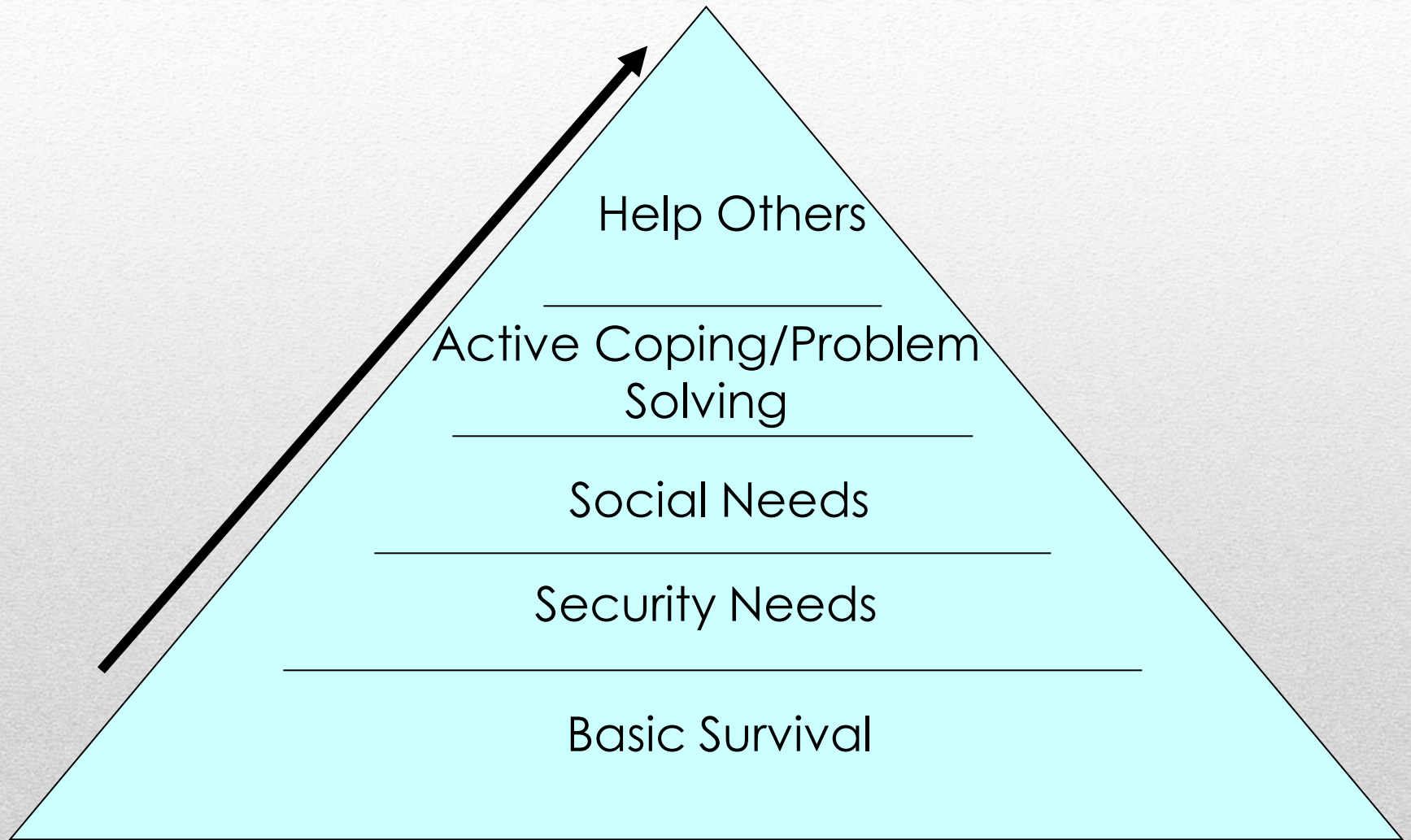


- Prior experience with a similar event
- Intensity of disruption
- Individual feelings about event
- Emotional strength of individual
- Length of time since event

# Mediating Factors



# Hierarchy of Needs in a Disaster



- Stabilize victims
  - Assess survivors for injury or shock
  - Get uninjured people to help
- Provide support by listening and empathizing
- Help survivors connect with natural support systems



# Psychological First Aid- Listen, Protect, Connect



# Protect

- Contact and engage
- Safety and Comfort
- Stabilization

## Psychological First Aid- Protect, Direct, Connect



# Direct

- Information gathering
- Current needs and concerns
- Practical Assistance



# Psychological First Aid- Protect, Direct, Connect



# Connect

- Connection with social supports
- Information on coping
- Linkage with collaborative services



## Psychological First Aid- Protect, Direct, Connect



- Build Trust and Credibility
  - Empathy and Caring
  - Competence and Expertise
  - Honesty and Openness
- Tips
  - Don't Over Reassure
  - Acknowledge Uncertainty/ People's Fears
  - Give People Things to Do

# Crisis (Emergency) Communication





- Put yourself in the speaker's shoes
- Listen for meaning, not just words
- Pay attention to the nonverbal communication
- Paraphrase the speaker



# How to Be an Empathetic Listener



- Calm Presence
- Listening
- Reflecting
- Normalizing
- Prioritizing
- Assessment
- Stress Management



# Basic Tools of Psychological First Aid



- Positive ability of people to cope with stress and adversity
- Primary factors of resilience
  - Caring and supportive relationship
  - Making plans and implementing them
  - Having a positive view and confidence
  - Skills in communication and problem solving
  - Ability to manage strong feelings and impulses

# Resilience



- Ask “getting through” and “making meaning” questions:
  - How did you manage that?
  - What inner strengths did you call upon?
  - What surprised you most about yourself?



# Fostering Resilience



- “I understand”
- “Don’t feel bad”
- “You’re strong” or “You’ll get through this”
- “Don’t cry”
- “It’s God’s will”
- “It could be worse”
- “At least you still have...”
- “Everything will be okay”



## What Not to Say



- “I’m sorry for your pain”
- “I’m so sorry this has happened”
- “Is it all right if I help you with...?”
- “I can’t imagine what this is like for you”
- “What do you need?”

**Say This Instead**



- Be a mind reader
- Assume Trauma
- Pathologize- label with symptoms/diagnosis
- Talk down to a survivor
- Assume they need you
- Spread rumors
- Don't be faddish

## What Not to Do



- Re-unite with family/caregivers
- Respond to physical needs
- Provide opportunities for play
- Listen to and accept their feelings
- Chance to talk about their experience
- Simple and honest answers- correct distortions
- Restrict media exposure



# Specific Ways to Assist Children





- Stay calm. Listen Attentively/
- Maintain Eye Contact
- Be Courteous. Be Patient.
- Keep the Situation under Your Control
- For a person shouting, swearing, threatening  
Signal another CERT, or supervisor- Need HELP  
Have someone call security or police if possible

# Coping with Threats and Violence

