



Tips for Preparing To Deploy

While each disaster and affected community are unique, similar response challenges can be faced when mobilizing disaster behavioral health resources.

Resilience and Mitigating Stress

Responders can be most helpful to others when they are taking care of themselves physically, emotionally, and psychologically. This needs to be foundational to response, and self-care plans completed in anticipation of potential deployment can be useful as a tool to mitigate stress and maximize flexibility after a disaster. For more information related to disaster responder stress management, [visit the Disaster Response Template Toolkit](#).

Key Concepts of Disaster Behavioral Health

Disaster survivors, individually or as a community, may experience various emotional phases during the recovery process.

During a disaster behavioral health response, responders may need to go to the survivors using community outreach strategies. Most people who are coping following a disaster do not see themselves as needing mental health services and are not likely to seek them out or request them.

Additional key concepts of disaster behavioral health include the following:

- No one who sees a disaster is untouched by it.
- Most people pull together and function during and after a disaster, but their effectiveness is diminished.
- Disaster stress and grief reactions are common responses to an uncommon situation.
- Many emotional reactions of disaster survivors stem from problems of living brought about by the disaster.
- Survivors may reject disaster assistance of all types.
- Disaster mental health assistance is often more practical than psychological in nature.

- Disaster mental health services must be uniquely tailored to the communities they serve.
- Mental health workers need to set aside traditional methods, avoid the use of mental health labels, and use an active outreach approach to intervene successfully in disaster.
- Survivors respond to active, genuine interest, and concern.
- Interventions must be appropriate to the phase of disaster recovery.
- Social support systems are crucial to recovery.

Disasters are complicated. Remember to **always** deploy as part of an integrated response system. Self-deployment of unaffiliated responders can create another layer of chaos in an already complex environment.

Training and Resources

Training and educational resources may assist staff and volunteers in conducting their disaster deployment roles more competently:

- Psychological First Aid (PFA) is an evidence-informed immediate disaster intervention. A commonly utilized online version of PFA training is the National Child Traumatic Stress Network's [5-hour online interactive course](#).
- Some states have their own state-specific disaster behavioral health training that covers concepts such as state-specific deployment protocols, partners, and resources.
- The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) offers access to training through several programs and organizations. For more information [visit FEMA Training and Education](#).
- Specific training for uniformed first responders may also be helpful to understand the unique disaster behavioral health stressors and mitigating strategies that can be used in their line of work. [Find more information on SAMHSA DTAC online training courses](#).
- In anticipation or preparation for a Crisis Counseling Assistance and Training Program (CCP), responders may be asked to become familiar with the CCP model. The "Just in Time" training can be taken as a brief overview of the CCP model and its services. [Find "Just in Time" training](#).

Exercising Disaster Behavioral Health Response Plans

Outside of an actual disaster response, one of the few ways to test our understanding of disaster behavioral health concepts and training is to conduct exercises. Although exercising a disaster response scenario can be a time-consuming process, the benefits to your response structure and community can be immeasurable.

- If you would like to learn more about how to exercise your plan, or understand and be involved in an exercise occurring within your community, consider taking the course [IS-120.C: An Introduction to Exercises](#).
- Once you understand how to conduct and be involved in an exercise, consider setting up your own agency exercises, or reach out to your emergency management or public health agency, healthcare coalition, or broader behavioral health network to be involved in community exercises.

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<https://www.samhsa.gov/technical-assistance/dtac/disaster-responders/deployment-tips>