# GUIDEBOOK FOR TEAM SUPPORT WORKERS IN EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTRES

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# INTRODUCTION

This Guidebook is written for those who may be deployed to an Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) to provide psychosocial support to EOC members. This role is often described as a **Team Support Worker** (TSW). This guide will provide a brief overview of the structure of emergency management response, the roles and responsibilities within an EOC, and discuss "operational readiness/guidance for deployment," workplace stress and the impacts of stress on a person's emotional intelligence and decision making. The appendices offer further information, tips and resources for TSWs to assist EOC members with the psychosocial impacts of a disaster before, during and after the activation of an EOC. The guidebook also contains valuable information and resources for TSW self-care, as any TSW deployed to an EOC will be exposed to the same events or stressful situations as the EOC members.



# INTRODUCTION TO EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

When you are deployed to an EOC as a TSW it is important for you to understand some of the common terminology and practices of "Disaster and Emergency Management." The information outlined in this introduction prepares you for the environment you are about to work in, as this environment will most likely be very different from what you are used to in your regular job.

When a disaster occurs, local governments rush to provide emergency or disaster management services to those who are impacted by the event. However, emergency response is just one of a continuum of services or phases included within emergency or disaster management: (1) prevention, (2) preparedness, (3) mitigation, (4) response, and (5) recovery. This guide will discuss how the TSW can be engaged in the preparedness, response and recovery phases. But the focus for this section is on better understanding the response phase and how an EOC functions during the response phase.

Many communities have their own emergency response plans. These plans mostly deal with the direct (and tangible) impacts of a disaster on a community, and tend to outline proper emergency responses, provide for the first necessities of life, and ensure critical infrastructure services to community residents. However, often people experience difficulty coping with the physical, mental, emotional, and sometimes economic impacts of a disaster. Some of the impacts may have long-lasting effects on persons' well-being and ability to function which can last for weeks, months or even years after an event. In a disaster, first responders (including EOC members) may experience additional work-related stress through the events they directly, or indirectly, witness on top of any possible personal impacts (such as if one's own home has been damaged).

# Emergency Response Levels

When a (major) accident or disaster occurs, first responders will be sent to the scene. Depending on the gravity of the situation a Support Centre may be activated to manage and offer behind-the-scene support to the responders. This section first discusses the various forms of support that leadership services offer in a disaster, followed by a summary of the EOC environment in particular. By understanding the structure of an EOC, and the different coloured vests that people wear in the EOC, you will be able to navigate more easily within this environment and it will be easier for you to understand the interaction and dynamics between different EOC members.
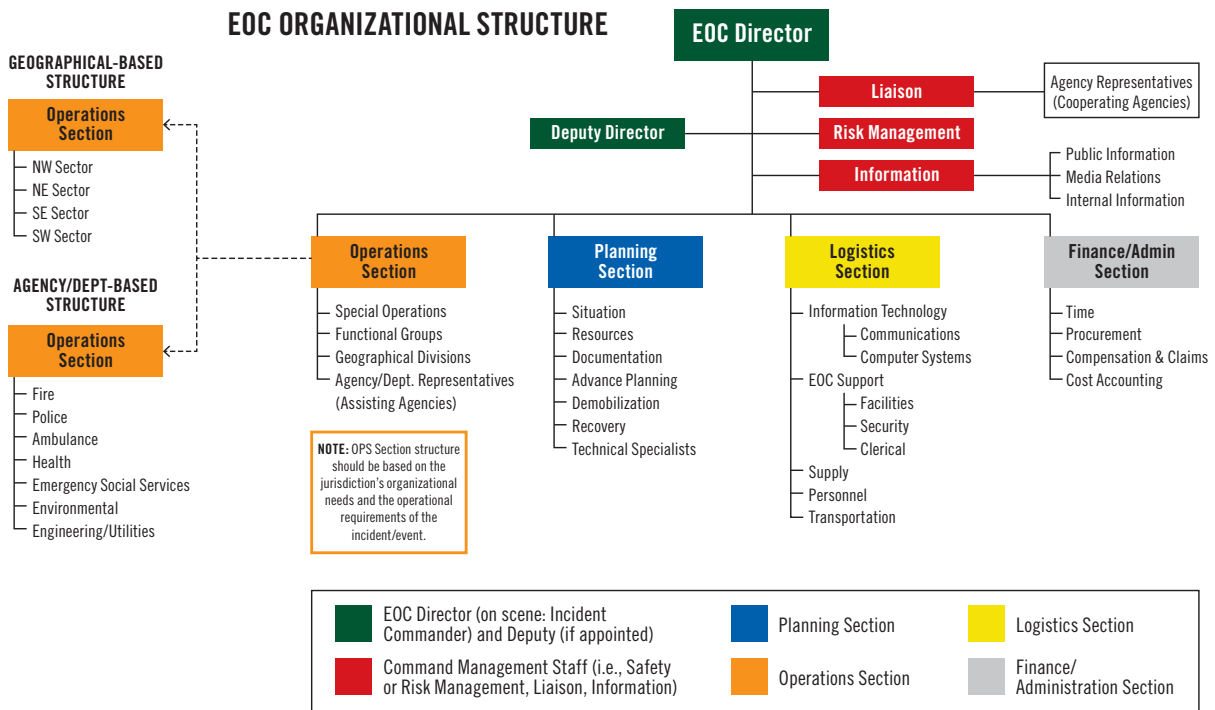
Depending on the scale of the disaster, any of the incident response levels listed below may be activated. A large scale disaster like a regional flood or earthquake will require support at the site level as well as the provincial/territorial level. Smaller incidents, for example a local flood or mass casualty incident may only need site operations (ICS) and site support (EOC).

- **Provincial/Territorial Level**: Provides direction and control and coordinates the overall provincial or territorial response and resources.

- **Regional Level**: Coordinates and facilitates provincial/territorial information, policy direction and resources; supports local authorities and provincial agencies; responsible for specific geographic areas.
- **Site Support Level**: Emergency Operation Centre (EOC); provide strategic or tactical support to site operations; report through to the Regional level.
- **Site Operations Level**: Incident Command System (ICS); integrated, on-scene emergency management.[1]

## EOC Environment

For those communities that use an Incident Command/Management System (ICS/IMS) there are five management functions, which may be present in an EOC: (1) management, (2) operations, (3) planning, (4) logistics, and (5) finance/administration. There are three staff functions that assist EOC management: Risk Management, Liaison, and Information. In an EOC these specific functions are identified by pre-determined colours, which are used by all agencies using ICS/IMS and are recommended best practice for others (e.g., local governments, First Nations, NGOs, etc. (see Appendix A).[1]

## EOC ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

**GEOGRAPHICAL-BASED STRUCTURE**

**Operations Section**
- NW Sector
- NE Sector
- SE Sector
- SW Sector

**AGENCY/DEPT-BASED STRUCTURE**

**Operations Section**
- Fire
- Police
- Ambulance
- Health
- Emergency Social Services
- Environmental
- Engineering/Utilities

**EOC Director**

**Deputy Director**

**Liaison** — Agency Representatives (Cooperating Agencies)

**Risk Management**

**Information**
- Public Information
- Media Relations
- Internal Information

**Operations Section**
- Special Operations
- Functional Groups
- Geographical Divisions
- Agency/Dept. Representatives (Assisting Agencies)

**NOTE:** OPS Section structure should be based on the jurisdiction's organizational needs and the operational requirements of the incident/event.

**Planning Section**
- Situation
- Resources
- Documentation
- Advance Planning
- Demobilization
- Recovery
- Technical Specialists

**Logistics Section**
- Information Technology
  - Communications
  - Computer Systems
- EOC Support
  - Facilities
  - Security
  - Clerical
- Supply
- Personnel
- Transportation

**Finance/Admin Section**
- Time
- Procurement
- Compensation & Claims
- Cost Accounting

Legend:
- EOC Director (on scene: Incident Commander) and Deputy (if appointed)
- Command Management Staff (i.e., Safety or Risk Management, Liaison, Information)
- Planning Section
- Operations Section
- Logistics Section
- Finance/Administration Section

During a typical activation of an EOC in a major disaster all of the sections above would be activated. In the case of a smaller event, some of the above mentioned sections may be activated, while others may not.

## Deployment: Operational Readiness

The setting and situation of an EOC will vary every time an EOC is activated depending on the kind of event that needs support. You may, for example, be deployed to an EOC dealing with a major forest fire, and as a result you may be exposed to smoke inhalation in the surrounding community. Or you may be deployed to remote areas where basic needs are hard to come by, or cell phone coverage and/or internet is sporadic or intermittent. In such situations the deployment may impact your personal health, safety or needs you deem important to your personal well-being. When there is a need for psychosocial support at an EOC, and you receive a request to be deployed as a Team Support Worker, there are several issues and questions regarding the deployment that you should address in order to assess whether or not you are ready to accept the assignment.

Some examples of issues to consider:

- Are you familiar with the EOC you are being deployed to?

- Are you familiar with the town, city or region you will be working in?

- Are you familiar with the culture, local politics, other sensitive topics, etc. that could affect your deployment?

- Are you aware of the local working conditions? Examples that could impact your job performance could include the elevation you will be working at, weather conditions, availability of certain amenities etc. Do you need to bring anything with you?

- What could be some personal limiting factors? For example, are there any personal health issues you should take into consideration? Who will take care of your family? Are there any upcoming special events you may miss?

- What is the context of the deployment? What do you know about the disaster? How long will you be gone for? What will your role be? Who will support you?

A brochure by the British Columbia Disaster Worker Care Committee (Government of British Columbia) lists several questions that could help you to assess whether or not you are ready for an assignment (see Appendix C).[2]

# WORKPLACE STRESS

When you are being deployed to an EOC as a TSW, you are there to help the EOC team function in an effective and respectful manner. One of the ways you can relieve the pressure on the EOC team is to monitor individual stress levels and provide help or guidance in how to deal with increased feelings and expressions of stress. This section starts with an introduction to workplace related stress, followed by a summary of vicarious trauma, and ends with a concise review of the effects of stress on persons' emotional intelligence and their ability to make decisions in a stressful situation. Having a good understanding of the various stress symptoms and the effects of stress on a person's emotional intelligence and subsequent decision making, will allow you to recognize symptoms of stress among EOC members (and in yourself). If the stress levels are affecting decision-making processes in the EOC, you can then offer support or guidance.

Stressful situations at any work place can present themselves in many ways, for example, high workloads, pressure to excel or achieve certain goals, uncomfortable or unfamiliar work environments, etc. are all stressors. As well, first responders, and EOC personnel and volunteers (including TSWs who may also be volunteers), are sometimes (directly or indirectly) exposed to dramatic events or incidents that may have an impact on one's mental well-being. Stressful situations in the EOC are often compounded by the extremely long hours EOC members work, EOC personnel may work 15-16 hour days, and may sometimes even work for several days straight. As a result of these exceptionally long hours (in a stressful environment), fatigue and exhaustion are a leading cause of the deterioration of individual functioning and EOC personnel may start to show various other symptoms of stress as a result (e.g., irritability, tunnel vision, outburst of anger, etc.).

Individuals experiencing stress can show symptoms of depression or **burn out** as time progresses. In acute cases of stress (**Acute Stress Disorder**) symptoms can include social withdrawal and dramatic changes in sleep patterns, eating patterns and mood. These symptoms of stress can linger for periods of days, weeks, months, and even years or decades.

## Vicarious Trauma as a Stressor

Vicarious trauma, also known as "compassion fatigue," "insidious trauma," "vicarious traumatization" or "secondary traumatization," can be described as "the cumulative transformative effect on the helper working with survivors of traumatic life events."[3] The helper can be a therapist or counsellor who listens to survivors' stories, or it can be a first responder who may witness or hear about multiple distressing scenes while on the job. EOC personnel may often witness or be indirectly exposed to traumatic events in this way.

Indirect exposure to traumatic events may have impacts on one's personal and professional life. On a personal level people may experience cognitive, emotional, behavioural, spiritual, interpersonal or physical changes. On a professional level, the worker may experience problems with performance of job tasks, changes in morale, behaviour and interpersonal relationships.[4] Having an understanding of what vicarious trauma is, and who it affects, will allow you to recognize the symptoms in EOC members or yourself. The following are a list of the common symptoms of stress as a result of being involved in prolonged events:

| COGNITIVE | EMOTIONAL | BEHAVIOURAL | SPIRITUAL | INTERPERSONAL | PHYSICAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Diminished concentration | Powerlessness | Clingy | Questioning the meaning of life | Withdrawn | Shock |
| Confusion | Anxiety | Impatient | Loss of purpose | Decreased interest in intimacy or sex | Sweating |
| Lack of focus | Guilt | Irritable | Lack of self-satisfaction | Mistrust | Rapid heartbeat |
| Loss of meaning | Survivor guilt | Withdrawn | Pervasive hopelessness | Isolation from friends | Breathing difficulties |
| Decreased self-esteem | Shutdown | Moody | Ennui | Impact on parenting (protectiveness, concern about aggression) | Somatic reactions |
| Pre-occupation with trauma | Numbness | Regression | Anger at God | Projection of anger or blame | Aches and pains |
| Trauma imagery | Fear | Sleep disturbances | Questions of prior religious beliefs | Intolerance | Dizziness |
| Apathy | Helplessness | Appetite changes | | Loneliness | Impaired immune system |
| Rigidity | Sadness | Nightmares | | | |
| Disorientation | Depression | Hypervigilance | | | |
| Whirling thoughts | Hypersensitivity | Elevated startle response | | | |
| Thoughts of self-harm or harm toward others | Emotional roller coaster | Use of negative coping (smoking, alcohol or other substance abuse) | | | |
| Self-doubt | Overwhelmed | Accident proneness | | | |
| Perfectionism | Depleted | Losing things | | | |
| Minimization | | Self-harm behaviours | | | |

These symptoms can have an effect on how EOC members do their jobs, their levels of morale, their social functioning and behaviour. The following are some of the more common impacts:

**TABLE 2** Impact of secondary traumatic stress on professional functioning (Yassen, 1995)[4]

| PERFORMANCE OF JOB TASKS | MORALE | INTERPERSONAL | BEHAVIOURAL |
|---|---|---|---|
| Decrease in quality | Decrease in confidence | Withdrawal from colleagues | Absenteeism |
| Decrease in quantity | Loss of interest | Impatience | Exhaustion |
| Low motivation | Dissatisfaction | Decrease in quality of relationship | Faulty judgement |
| Avoidance of job tasks | Negative attitude | Poor communication | Irritability |
| Increase in mistakes | Apathy | Subsume own needs | Tardiness |
| Setting perfectionists standards | Demoralization | Staff conflicts | Irresponsibility |
| Obsession about detail | Lack of appreciation | | Overwork |
| | Detachment | | Frequent job changes |
| | Feelings of incompleteness | | |

Self-care is of great importance to mitigate vicarious trauma in helpers. Some examples of protective strategies that helpers can adopt, whether they are a social worker, counsellor, first responder or EOC member, include:[6,7]

• take breaks during your work day or shift;

• debrief and talk to peers: you are not the only one exposed to vicarious trauma, make sure to talk to your colleagues (e.g., supervision group/ team);

• develop mindful self-awareness: e.g., what are your strengths and skills? What are your personal limits?

• practice self-care: making sure to balance personal, life, and work needs and demands; find and maintain personal relaxation activities or hobbies that help you relax and stay grounded (e.g., sports, yoga, cooking, reading);

• regularly self-assess your emotional well-being; and

• actively attend training exercises and workshops related to work and well-being.

## Emotional Intelligence/Impacts of Stress on Decision Making

**Emotional intelligence** (EI) is a component of intelligence related to a person's experience and expression of emotions. Emotional Intelligence focusses on awareness of oneself and on our relationships with others, and consists of four key components.

1. **Emotional self-awareness**: e.g., How well do *I know* my own emotions? Do others see myself the same way as I do? How confident am I about my skills and abilities? What are my strengths and weaknesses?

2. **Emotional self-management**: e.g., How well can I manage my own emotions (under stress)? Do my actions reflect my thoughts and values?

3. **Empathy or awareness of others**: e.g., How well can I read others' emotions, needs and feelings?

4. **Leadership style/ building relationships**: e.g., How can I help and support others? How can I assist in a conflict?[8]

Being aware of, and assessing your own EI, can help to reduce stress, improve decision making and effective communication, reduce the risk of burn-out, increase job satisfaction, and can ultimately lead to the retention of emergency service workers.

Effective emergency response requires the employment of a person's EI skills in order to remain calm and focused in the midst of highly stressful situations so that it is possible to draw upon the necessary expertise to develop appropriate solutions. Studies at the Justice Institute of British Columbia have shown that EI scores, before and after, an emergency management simulation exercise changed. Regular training exercises could help individuals become more aware of their own emotional response to, and management of, stress, while at the same time build on their relationships with others.

# PRE-DISASTER: SETTING THE FOUNDATION

During a disaster response, EOC members are often exposed to increased levels of stress. This can result in EOC members experiencing an array of physiological and psychological responses that could affect their work and day-to-day activities, and could lead to longer-term psychological symptoms. It is therefore important to offer psychosocial support from the initial stages of a disaster.

A Team Support Worker (TSW) can provide psychosocial support within the EOC, utilizing various strategies to:

• build trust and credibility;

• provide psychosocial education;

• provide psychosocial support;

• provide support to decision makers; and

• provide post-event debriefing and continued support.

## Role of a Team Support Worker in an EOC

As a Team Support Worker (TSW) you have received training in providing psychosocial support to those responding to a disaster, and you are probably employed as psychologist, social worker, or counsellor.

A TSW can:

• provide education about the causes and impacts of stress and psychological trauma;

• share coping strategies;

• provide psychosocial support to EOC members;

- provide support to decision makers when faced with high risk/high-consequence decisions; and
- advise on the deployment of additional psychosocial support to front line responders and affected civilian populations.

## Building Trust and Credibility (During Exercises)

In order to do your work as a TSW as effective as possible, you will need to build a relationship with EOC teams. Being included in training and exercises before a disaster occurs is an important strategy for you to start building trust and credibility. It allows:

- EOC members to better understand the need for psychosocial support and lets them become familiar with the role of a TSW;
- you to show team members what you can bring to the functioning of the team in regards to reducing stress and anxiety; and
- you to practice your skills in a non-crisis situation.

In the case of exercises or training, opportunities exist for you to start building relationships with the EOC team, and as such, help create an open and accepting atmosphere for the presence of a TSW in an EOC. If an opportunity presents itself, prior to an exercise or simulation, you could for example introduce yourself to the EOC team through an email or phone call (or even in person), and explain why you will be joining the EOC. This allows the EOC team to ask any questions about the role of a TSW before the exercise begins, and start building a relationship with you. If no opportunity exists to start building a relationship with the EOC team prior to the exercise you could try to provide a general introduction regarding the TSW role immediately prior to the start of an exercise.

During a disaster, you will be in the EOC to help and the EOC Director can greatly facilitate this by introducing you in a positive, accepting fashion and by explaining your role within the EOC. If the opportunity exists, time and room could be reserved for you and the EOC members to get to know each other better and for you to address any questions the EOC members may have.



# DURING A DISASTER: PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

When a disaster happens and an EOC is activated, a TSW can be deployed to fulfill a number of roles within the EOC, including providing psychosocial education and psychosocial support to EOC team members, and providing support to decision makers. This section will offer you some background information and practical examples of how you can provide psychosocial education and support in an EOC.

## Providing Psychosocial Education

EOC members, along with all workers involved in a disaster response, will be exposed to stressful circumstances, whether from witnessing the destruction caused by the disaster, working in an often chaotic environment, or having limited resources at their disposal to respond to the incident. Under such conditions it is normal for EOC members and

other responders to experience some common stress responses – these could be physical, psychological/ emotional, cognitive, or behavioural – and may not impact their ability to function in their role. However, when multiple, intense stress responses are experienced together it could affect job functioning. Therefore, recognition of the signs and symptoms of stress is essential for early intervention.

A key role of a TSW is to identify "teaching moments" when you can provide information to EOC members about the signs and symptoms of stress and potential short- and long-term impacts. For example, you can point out times when increased stress is likely to be felt. It is often useful to point to EOC members that in many cases the symptoms of stress are physiological and they have no direct control over these responses. For example, the release of adrenaline is an automatic response and this in turn increases heart rates and respiration rates. Through psychosocial education you can help to ensure all members of the team are able to recognize and respond to increased stress in themselves and their peers before it begins to impact their work within the EOC.

Some of the strategies you can use to share information about stress during a disaster include:

- Making information on stress available in a break room;
- Handing out "Stress Tips" cards or brochures (see Appendix C); and
- Hanging up posters on stress management such as the "Leadership in EOCs" poster (see Appendix C).

During particularly stressful or emotional events, such as a line-of-duty death, you can work with the EOC Director to encourage acknowledgement of the event and its potential impacts. You can suggest appropriate action, such as taking a moment of silence, to recognize the contributions of the first responder to his/her community.

## Common Disaster Worker Stress Reactions

**TABLE 3** The following have reactions in disaster workers have been noted (DeWolfe, 2000)[9]

| PSYCHOLOGICAL & EMOTIONAL | COGNITIVE | BEHAVIOURAL | PHYSICAL |
|---|---|---|---|
| Feeling heroic, invulnerable, euphoric | Memory loss | Change in activity | Fatigue |
| Denial | Disorientation | Decreased efficiency and effectiveness | Increased blood pressure |
| Anxiety and fear | Confusion | Difficulty communicating | Upset stomach, nausea, diarrhea |
| Worry about safety of self and others | Slowness of thinking and comprehension | Increased sense of humor | Change in appetite, weight loss or gain |
| Anger | Difficulty calculating, setting priorities, making decisions | Outbursts of anger, frequent arguments | Sweating or chills |
| Irritability | Poor concentration | Inability to rest or "letdown" | Tremors (hands, lips) |
| Restlessness | Limited attention span | Change in eating habits | Muscle twitching |
| Sadness, grief, depression, moodiness | Loss of objectivity | Change in sleeping patterns | "Muffled" hearing |
| Distressing dreams | Unable to stop thinking about the disaster | Change in patterns of intimacy, sexuality | Tunnel vision |
| Guilt or "survivor guilt" | Blaming | Change in job performance | Feeling uncoordinated |
| Feeling overwhelmed, hopeless | | Periods of crying | Headaches |
| Feeling isolated, lost, or abandoned | | Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or drugs | Soreness in muscles |
| Apathy | | Social withdrawal, silence | Lower back pain |
| Identification with survivors | | Vigilance about safety or environment | Feeling a "lump in the throat" |
| | | Avoidance of activities or places that trigger memories | Exaggerated startle reaction |
| | | Proneness to accidents | Increased heartbeat, respiration |
| | | | Menstrual cycle changes |
| | | | Change in sexual desire |
| | | | Decreased resistance to infection |
| | | | Flare-up of allergies and arthritis |
| | | | Hair loss |

## Providing Psychosocial Support in the EOC

There are a number of ways that you, as a TSW, can provide psychosocial support within the EOC. For example, you can:

- encourage members to eat nourishing food, stay hydrated, and take regular breaks;

- assist the EOC Director to problem solve ways to reduce stress; and

- identify and address issues that might arise within the EOC, such as when a team member is having difficulty coping.

Fatigue, due to long work hours, is one of the primary causes of stress in an EOC. As a TSW, you can assist in making sure that taking breaks becomes normalized within the EOC environment. EOC members should take regular breaks and this should happen before they get to the point of really needing one and before they begin exhibiting the signs and symptoms of fatigue and stress. Everyone within the EOC should be seen to be taking breaks. Strategies for getting EOC members to take breaks could include implementing a buddy system and asking team members to check if their buddy needs a break, or accompanying team members on their breaks.

Anywhere a TSW can provide a greater sense of control for individual members or the team can help reduce stress within the EOC. You can encourage activities that promote routine, such as holding regular briefings or documenting priorities on a whiteboard, which can create a sense of control in what may be a chaotic environment.

Depending on the situations encountered within the EOC, there are several strategies for providing psychosocial support that you, as a TSW, might be able to utilize, such as: providing Psychological First Aid (PFA); and Crisis Intervention or Motivational Interview techniques.

## Psychological First Aid

**Psychological First Aid** is a humane, supportive response to a distressed person who has recently been exposed to a serious crisis event, is suffering, and may need support. Psychological First Aid has five key objectives: (1) establish safety and security; (2) connect to restorative resources; (3) reduce stress-related reactions; (4) foster adaptive short- and long-term coping; and (5) enhance natural resilience.

**Psychological First Aid** has three key steps:

### Look
- Contact and engagement;
- Assessing needs and concerns;
- Protecting people from further harm/stabilization.

### Listen
- Listening to people, but not pressuring them to talk;
- Information gathering;
- Comforting people and helping them to feel calm;
- Providing practical care and support;
- Helping people to address basic needs (for example, food and water, information).

### Link
- Provide information on coping;
- Provide linkages with collaborative services;
- Help people connect to information and social supports.

**LOOK**
Connect & engage;
Ensure safety,
comfort & stability

**LISTEN**
Gather information
& offer practical
assistance

**LINK**
Connect with
social supports &
refer to services

Providing Psychological First Aid responsibly means:

- Respecting safety, dignity and rights;
- Adapting what you do to take account of the person's culture;
- Being aware of other emergency response measures; and
- Looking after yourself.[10]

## Crisis Intervention

**Crisis Intervention** consists of an evaluation and assessment of the immediacy of the crisis situation, along with an assessment of the team member's ability to cope with the crisis, followed by generating options for problem-solving to deal with the crisis.

Five steps of Crisis Intervention:

1. Develop a relationship and build rapport (includes introductions and defining overall goals);
2. Initial evaluation of severity of crisis situation (includes assessing risk to self and others with a goal of ensuring safety);

3. Help assess and mobilize strengths and resources (includes helping identify support networks and own internal resources and strengths);
4. Work together to develop a positive plan of action (includes collaboration to problem solve);
5. Test ideas and new behaviours (to determine whether the plan is working and allowing for adjustments to be made).[11]

## Motivational Interviewing

**Motivational Interviewing (MI)** techniques utilize a collaborative, person-centered style of communication to stimulate motivation for behaviour change and can be useful for guiding EOC members who are experiencing the impacts of stress.[12] Motivational Interviewing focuses on four key skills, summarized by using the mnemonic "**OARS:**"

Five steps of Crisis Intervention:

- **O**pen-ended questions to create forward momentum to use in helping the team member explore change;
- **A**ffirmations or statements of recognition about team member's strengths;
- **R**eflective listening where careful listening to what has worked in the past and what hasn't allows for reflecting back to the team member effective strategies focused on change; and
- **S**ummaries, a particular form of reflective listening that reflects back to the team member what she or he has been telling you and can be used to shift attention or direction.[13]

## Providing Support to Decision Makers

By keeping the overall response in mind, a TSW is in a unique position to provide support to decision makers. With your training in providing psychosocial support during disasters, you have specialized knowledge that other members of the EOC may not have. This means that as a TSW, if kept aware of the situation unfolding in the community, you may be in a good position to help evaluate the need for volunteers or staff to be deployed to provide psychosocial care to on-scene first responders and the public. You can further assist by coordinating the deployment of DPS volunteers, other TSWs or mental health staff.

Additionally, you can provide psychosocial support to decision makers in difficult or no-win situations through a discussion of trade-offs and you can help to manage stress related to making high risk, high consequence decisions in the EOC. Utilizing strategies such as reflective listening or asking open-ended questions may be useful to assist decision makers in moving through the decision making process. By helping decision makers understand that there may be no one right answer in situations where there is a lack of information or available resources, you may be able to alleviate some stress.

## Diversity in the EOC

EOCs are made up of both uniformed (police, fire, ambulance, military) and non-uniformed responders. The use of black humour by uniformed responders to cope with tragic and visually disturbing situations can be shocking to non-uniformed members of the EOC, which can impact them negatively. In situations where such humor, or other possibly offending or disturbing coping mechanisms, are expressed in an EOC, as a TSW you can monitor the effects on EOC members, and discretely make users of such humor aware of the effects on others.

Non-responders who spend less time in emergency management roles may find it difficult to make their views heard in often extroverted world of first responders and feelings of guilt can arise for these members when they feel they should have been more forceful in expressing their views. All EOC members, whether uniformed or non-uniformed, male or female, experienced or inexperienced, often have valuable suggestions to contribute towards the decision making process and these perspectives may be lost if they are not given the opportunity to speak. You can help

facilitate creating an open and respectful work space, in which everyone is able to contribute to a discussion.

When you are being deployed to an EOC you should be mindful that the EOC team consists of a diverse group of people (e.g., male/female, uniformed/nonuniformed, young/old, experienced/unexperienced) and that not every member of the EOC may be accepting or receptive of psychosocial care.

## Team Support Worker Self-Care

As a TSW, you should practice the same things you encourage EOC members to do, such as taking regular breaks outside the EOC, eating nourishing food, and staying hydrated. After the shift is over, doing something enjoyable for yourself is another good strategy for self-care. This could be some form of exercise, spending time with your family, or any other hobby or activity that helps to unwind.

> It's important to remember that you, as the TSW, are experiencing the same events as EOC members and can also experience vicarious trauma. There is a need to ensure psychosocial support for yourself as well through self-care and other supports.

Debriefing after the event with other TSWs or psychosocial volunteers who were involved can also be beneficial. Engaging in clinical supervision, where

you meet with another mental health professional to discuss any issues that have may have arisen, is another good practice for proper self-care and to provide clinical supervision.

Some questions that you can ask yourself as part of your self-care:

• What do I value most about doing disaster mental health work?

• What are (or do I expect to be) the most stressful and the most rewarding aspects of disaster work?

• How do I know when I am stressed?

• How might my co-workers know when I am stressed?

• What can others do for me when I am stressed?

• What can I do for myself?[6]

# POST-DISASTER: FOLLOWING UP

## Post-Event Debriefing and Continued Support

Psychosocial care shouldn't end when the disaster response is over. Psychosocial support should be ongoing, with follow-up in the days and weeks after the event. In some cases, it could take months, years, or even longer for the disaster event to be fully processed by those involved in the response. This section offers some information on available post-event support for first responders, which will help you understand what is available for EOC members and what alternative options and resources you can suggest to them. Some examples of how you can assist or stimulate the set-up of informal support are also provided.

Continued support for EOC members can be formal or informal and should take into consideration the different resources available for uniformed and non-uniformed EOC personnel. For example, uniformed EOC members (police, fire, paramedics) may have a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing

(CISD) following a major event through their own employer, while it is less likely that non-uniformed (e.g., municipal staff) would have these same practices in place. CISD "is intended for use with emotionally healthy people who are experiencing acute, normal stress reactions to abnormal traumatic events."[14] It is not designed to be utilized as a stand-alone intervention, rather as one component of Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM), which comprises a number of crisis intervention services that usually include pre-crisis training, individual crisis counseling, demobilizations, defusings, group debriefing, and post-incident referral.[15] While there is a lack of consensus about whether CISD is an effective intervention for managing stress responses after a crisis situation, a recent randomized controlled study would suggest that when done properly, within the appropriate time frame ad by a trained facilitator they can be quite helpful.[16] When utilized it should be on a voluntary or "as needed" basis as part of a more comprehensive stress management program that it is facilitated by a well-trained CISM practitioner who

is familiar with the culture within the first-responder community and other EOC members.[17]

Following a disaster event, a TSW can make sure the proper information and resources are available to all EOC members, such as brochures or lists of potential referrals, or they can let team members know to expect a follow-up, whether by phone or in person. Informal gatherings of EOC members, for example a potluck or BBQ, can also be a source of psychosocial support following an incident. This gives team members an opportunity to reconnect with one

another and share their personal experiences after the stress of the actual event has passed.

Incorporating Team Support Workers into the Emergency Operations Centre is a vital step in creating an understanding that all responders, including EOC members, are regular people, not immune to the impacts of stress and trauma. Integrating TSWs into EOCs is a proactive step towards providing the psychosocial support that will allow EOC members to continue doing their jobs effectively for a long time to come.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## Am I ready to go to an assignment?

- A brochure by the British Columbia Disaster Worker Care Committee (Government of British Columbia) lists several questions that could help you to assess whether or not you are ready for an assignment (see Appendix C).

- The brochure lists questions regarding your personal health, employment and financial situation, and your personal and family life. You may have additional questions regarding your deployment to an EOC, below you will find some frequently asked questions:

## What do I do when I first get to an EOC?

- Introduce yourself to the person in charge. The EOC Director will normally wear a green coloured vest;

- Introduce yourself to each EOC member individually if the situation allows you do so;

- Make sure there are food and drinks available, or find out where you could get refreshments (i.e. is there a kitchen area/break room);

- Familiarize yourself with the surroundings; e.g., is there a quiet room/respite centre? What facilities are available to you and the EOC members? Is there internet, so that you can email? etc.;

- Post your own shift schedule in a central place, so that EOC members know when you are on a break, or when another volunteer takes over;

- Provide information to EOC members about your role.

## How can I help EOC members who need some practical personal assistance?

- Find out where people are staying. Is there a hotel or some other form of accommodation arranged for them? How will they get there?

- Set up a "family contact service" to assist EOC members who want to reach their families or have problems reaching them;

- Find out what other services or amenities are available for EOC members.

## Where can I find out more information about an EOC?

- Check out the Justice Institute of British Columbia's 'Emergency Operations Centre, Operational Guidelines, 2nd edition' (see references).

## What should be in my go-kit?

- In an emergency your Go-Kit or emergency kit should allow you to sustain yourself for 72 hours. It is wise to have a kit ready in case you are deployed. In case of an emergency that also affects your own community (e.g., flood, earthquake), you should also make sure to have an emergency kit available for any other family members you leave behind.

- You can find more information about go-kits or emergency kits online: http://www.getprepared. gc.ca/cnt/kts/index-en.aspx.

## Where do I get a go-kit?

- You can make your own Go-Kit or purchase a go-kit available from:

- FAST: http://fast-safety.myshopify.com/

- Red Cross: https://redcrossproducts.ca/category/3/ emergency-preparedness

## Things you should bring to your deployment

- Bring a personalized Go-Kit, this kit should include any information or resources you may want to hand out to EOC members;

- Bring the appropriate personal items (e.g., personal hygiene, chargers for phone and laptop, book, exercise outfit or small equipment) that you expect to need during the length of your deployment;

- Make sure you bring the contact information of the person or organization who asked you to volunteer or be deployed;

- Bring this Guidebook with you to refresh your memory!

# APPENDIX A: INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES

| MEMBER FUNCTION | RESPONSIBILITIES |
| --- | --- |
| **EOC Director** | |
| | – Exercises overall management responsibility for the coordination between emergency response and supporting agencies in the EOC. |
| | – Provides support to local authorities and provincial agencies and ensures that all actions are accomplished within the priorities established. |
| | – Establish the appropriate staffing level for the EOC and continuously monitor organizational effectiveness to ensure that appropriate modifications occur as required. |
| | – Ensure that inter-agency coordination is accomplished effectively within the EOC. |
| | – Direct, in consultation with the Information Officer, appropriate emergency public information actions using the best methods of dissemination. Approve the issuance of press releases, and other public information materials as required. |
| | – Liaise with Policy Group and / or Elected Officials. |
| | – Ensure risk management principles and procedures are applied for all EOC activities. |
| **Incident Command Staff** | |
| Information Officer | – Serve as the coordination point for all public information, media relations and internal information sources for the EOC. |
| | – Coordinate and supervise all staff assigned as Assistant Information Officers and their activities. |
| Safety/Risk Management Officer | – Ensures that good risk management practices are applied throughout the response organization and that every function contributes to the management of risk. Protects the interests of all EOC participants, agencies, and organizations by ensuring due diligence in information collection, decision-making, and implementation. Monitors situations for risk exposures and ascertains probabilities and potential consequences of future events. |
| | – Provides advice on safety issues. The Risk Management Officer has the authority to halt or modify any and all unsafe operations within or outside the scope of the EOC Action Plan, notifying the EOC Director of actions taken. It should be noted that while the risk management officer has responsibility for safety, it is recommended that a safety specialist be appointed who is familiar with all aspects of safety and relevant legislation. |
| | – Ensures that appropriate security measures have been established to allow for only authorized access to the EOC facility and documentation. |
| Liaison Officer | – The Liaison Officer functions as a point of contact for, and interaction with, representatives from other agencies arriving at the EOC. |
| | – Liaise with any DOCs (Department Operation Centres), MROCs (Ministry Regional Operation Centres), and organizations not represented in the EOC. |
| | – Coordinate agency representatives for the EOC as required to ensure adequate EOC structure, and fill all necessary roles and responsibilities enabling the EOC to function effectively and efficiently. |
| | – Assist and serve as an advisor to the EOC Director and Management Team as needed, providing information and guidance related to the external functions of the EOC. |
| | – Assist the EOC Director in ensuring proper procedures are in place for directing agency representatives, communicating with elected officials, and conducting VIP / visitor tours of the EOC facility. |
| | – Liaise with local authorities other EOCs, Provincial and Federal organizations, communicating EOC guidelines, directives, Action Plans and Situation Information. |

| MEMBER FUNCTION | RESPONSIBILITIES |
|---|---|
| **General Command Staff** | |
| Operations Section Chief | – Ensures that the Operations Coordination function is carried out including coordination of response for all operational functions assigned to the EOC. |
| | – Ensures that the operational objectives and assignments identified in the EOC Action Plan are carried out effectively. |
| | – Establish the appropriate level of Branch and Unit organizations within the Operations Section, continuously monitoring the effectiveness and modifying accordingly. |
| | – Coordinate any activated DOC's in the operational area. |
| | – Maintain a communications link between Incident Commanders (sites), DOCs and the EOC for the purpose of overall response, resource requests and event status information. |
| | – Ensure that the Planning Section is provided with the Branch Status Reports and Major Incidents Repo rts. |
| | – Conduct periodic Operations briefings for the EOC Director and Management team as required or requested. |
| | – Supervise the Operations Section. |
| Planning Section Chief | – Ensures that the following responsibilities of the Planning Section are addresses as required: |
| | – Collect, analyze, and display situation information. |
| | – Prepare periodic Situation Reports. |
| | – Prepare and distribute EOC Action Plan and facilitate Action Planning process. |
| | – Track Resources. |
| | – Conduct Advance Planning activities and report. |
| | – Document and maintain files on all EOC activities. |
| | – Provide technical support services to the various EOC Sections and Branches. |
| | – Establishes the appropriate level of organization for the Planning Section. |
| | – Exercises overall responsibility for the coordination of branch/ unit activities within the section. |
| | – Keeps the EOC Director informed of significant issues affecting the Planning Section. |
| | – In coordination with the other section Chiefs, ensures that Status Reports are completed and utilized as a basis for EOC Situation Reports, and EOC Action Plans. |
| Logistics Section Chief | – Ensure the Logistics function is carried out in support of the EOC. This function includes providing telecommunication services and information technology, locating or acquiring equipment, supplies, personnel, facilities, and transportation as well as arranging for food, lodging, and other support services as required both for the EOC and site requirements. |
| | – Establish the appropriate level of branch and / or unit staffing within the Logistics Section, continuously monitoring the effectiveness of the organization and modifying as required. |
| | – Ensure section objectives as stated in the EOC Action Plan are accomplished within the operational period or within the estimated time frame. |
| | – Coordinate closely with the Operations Section Chief to establish priorities for resource allocation within the operational area. |
| | – Keep the EOC Director informed of all significant issues relating to the Logistics Section. |
| | – Ensure critical resources are allocated according to EOC Action Plan policy, priorities and direction. |
| | – Coordinate with ESS Branch Coordinator on the provision of food and lodging for EOC and Site Personnel. |
| | – Supervise the Logistics Section. |

| MEMBER FUNCTION | RESPONSIBILITIES |
|---|---|
| General Command Staff (cont'd) | |
| Finance & Administration Section Chief | - Ensure that all financial records are maintained throughout the event or disaster.<br>- Ensure that all on-duty time is recorded and collected for all personnel.<br>- Ensure there is a continuum of the payroll process for all employees responding to the event or disaster.<br>- In consultation with EOC Director determine spending limits, if any, for Logistics, Operations, and Management Staff.<br>- Ensure that workers' compensation claims, resulting from the response are processed within a reasonable time, given the nature of the situation.<br>- Ensure that all travel and expense claims are processed within a reasonable time, given the nature of the situation.<br>- Activate units within the Finance / Administration Section as required; monitor section activities continuously and modify the organization as needed.<br>- Ensure that all recovery documentation and Disaster Financial Assistance paperwork is accurately maintained and submitted to PEP.<br>- Supervise the Finance / Administration Section. |

Source: JIBC, Emergency Operations Centre, Operational Guidelines, 2nd edition[18]

# APPENDIX B: GLOSSARY

**Acute Stress Disorder (ASD)**: ASD is defined when specific symptoms occur within the first 30 days following an exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violation in one or more of the following ways:

- by directly experiencing the traumatic event(s);
- witnessing the event(s) in person;
- learning that the event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend; or
- experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s).[19]

**Burn out**: is described as "a syndrome emotional of exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment".[20] Burn out is often related to the work situation of an individual (e.g., high workload).

**Crisis intervention**: an evaluation and assessment of the immediacy of the crisis situation, along with an assessment of person's ability to cope with the crisis, followed by generating options for problem-solving to deal with the crisis.

**Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)**: an integrated multi-component strategic plan for emergency personnel dealing with exposure to traumatic events. The plan encompasses support services before and after an event for individual and for group support.[21]

**DOC**: Department Operations Centre.

**Emotional Intelligence**: a component of intelligence related to a person's experience and expression of emotions. Emotional Intelligence focusses on awareness of oneself and on our relationships with others.

**Motivational Interviewing**: a collaborative, person-centered style of communication utilized to stimulate motivation for behaviour change.

**Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**: PTSD is diagnosed in adults, adolescents and children older than 6 years when exposed to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways:

- Directly experiencing the traumatic event(s);
- Witnessing, in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others;
- Learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend;
- Experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s).

PTSD is characterized by experiencing one or all of the following intrusion symptoms associated with the traumatic event(s), beginning after the event(s) occurred:

- Recurrent, involuntary, and intrusive distressing memories of the traumatic event(s).[14]

**Psychological first aid**: a humane, supportive response to a distressed person who has recently been exposed to a serious crisis event, is suffering, and may need support.

**Vicarious trauma**: the cumulative transformative effect on the helper working with survivors of traumatic life events. Indirect exposure to traumatic events may have impacts on the personal and professional life of the helper involved.

# APPENDIX C: RESOURCES

## Mental Health Resources

- Academy of Cognitive Therapy: http://www.academyofct.org/
- Anxiety and Depression Association of America – Screening Tools: http://www.adaa.org/living-with-anxiety/ask-and-learn/screenings
- BC Association of Clinical Counsellors: http://bc-counsellors.org/
- BC Psychological Association: http://www.psychologists.bc.ca/
- Canadian Mental Health Association – BC Division: http://www.cmha.bc.ca/
- CISM – Canadian Critical Incident Stress Foundation: http://www.ccisf.info/
- Cognitive Behaviour Therapy Self-help Resources (including information on anxiety) STOPP: fast self-help for dealing with difficult situations: http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/stopp.htm
- Counselling BC: http://counsellingbc.com/
- Critical Incident Stress Management Services (CISM): http://www.efap.ca/services/critical-incident.htm
- EMDR Canada: http://emdrcanada.org/
- Government of British Columbia, Disaster Worker Care Committee. Self-assessment: Prior to Disaster Assignment: http://www.ess.bc.ca/pubs/workercare.htm
- Government of British Columbia, Disaster Worker Care Committee. Stress Tips Cards: http://www.ess.bc.ca/pubs/workercare.htm
- Here to Help BC (mental health, vicarious trauma): http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/visions/trauma-and-victimization-vol3/vicarious-traumatization

- Headington Institute – "The Headington Institute strengthens humanitarian and emergency response organizations by promoting the well-being of their staff": a great resource for research, online training, practical information and experiences of first responders (blog) on many aspects of mental health in relation to traumatic events: http://www.headington-institute.org/ and http://www.headington-institute.org/blog-home/search/first-responders (blog)
- International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies: http://www.istss.org/home.aspx
- Play Therapy – BCPTA: http://bcplaytherapy.ca/
- Psychological First Aid Field Guidelines (for adults/parents): http://www.nctsn.org/content/psychological-first-aid
- The Tema Conter Memorial Trust – A hub of education, research, scholarships, and training in the fields of Operational Stress Injuries and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: http://www.tema.ca/
- Thought Field Therapy Practitioner Guide: http://www.tftpractitioners.net/
- Vicarious Trauma Institute: http://www.vicarioustrauma.com/

## Materials, Tools and Tests

- Acute Stress Disorder Interview (ASDI): http://www.istss.org/assessing-trauma/acute-stress-disorder-structured-interview-(asdi).aspx
- Emergency Social Services, Worker Care Materials and Tools: http://www.ess.bc.ca/pubs/workercare.htm
- EOC Leadership Poster: available by calling the ESS Manager at EMBC Headquarters: http://www.embc.gov.bc.ca/em/about_embc/offices.html

- Impact of Event Scale (IES): http://getcbt.org/the-impact-of-events-scale-revised/
- PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5): http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/assessment/adult-sr/ptsd-checklist.asp
- Stanford Acute Stress Reaction Questionnaire (SASRQ): http://stresshealthcenter.stanford.edu/research/documents/StanfordAcuteStressReactionQuestionnaire-Flood.pdf

## Social Networks

- #PTSD: http://www.symplur.com/healthcare-hashtags/ptsd/
- PsychCentral Forums: http://forums.psychcentral.com/index.php
- PTSD Chatroom: http://www.healthfulchat.org/ptsd-chat-room.html
- PTSD United: http://www.ptsdunited.org/

## Phone Apps

- ECBT Trauma (iPhone): https://itunes.apple.com/ca/app/ecbt-trauma/id355437454?mt=8
- PTSD Coach: http://www.ptsd.va.gov/PTSD/public/materials/apps/PTSDCoach.asp
- PTSD Eraser (iPhone): https://itunes.apple.com/hk/app/ptsd-eraser/id480699807?mt=8
- T2 Mood Tracker: http://t2health.dcoe.mil/

## Training Resources

- Crisis Intervention training: https://catalogue.jibc.ca/Lists/Courses/CustomDispForm.aspx?ID=1191&InitialTabId=Ribbon.Read
- The Justice Institute of British Columbia offers an introductory EOC course: https://catalogue.jibc.ca/Lists/Courses/CustomDispForm.aspx?ID=924&InitialTabId=Ribbon.Read
- Motivational Interviewing training: https://catalogue.jibc.ca/Lists/Courses/CustomDispForm.aspx?ID=776&InitialTabId=Ribbon.Read
- Psychological First Aid training: https://catalogue.jibc.ca/Lists/Courses/CustomDispForm.aspx?ID=1101&InitialTabId=Ribbon.Read

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