

Caring For One Another During and After Deployments

Preparing for deployment

Field or remote deployment in the face of a natural disaster or mass tragedy is often stressful and chaotic. There are usually many moving parts involved in the situation, and much that has to be done quickly. Working in a fast-paced, emotionally-charged environment is not for everyone. Being as prepared as possible is essential. Many organizations deploy too soon without having the proper information and adequate resources in place. How can organizations support those that deploy?

- Be thoughtful about the timing of a deployment and think through how the timing makes sense.
- Make sure that the individuals deploying are equipped to deal with the situation they will face, logistically, psychologically, and otherwise.
- Ask if an individual is comfortable with the deployment instead of simply assigning it, and listen to their opinion. Sending an individual into a disaster or mass tragedy response when they are not ready for it, (mentally, emotionally, physically), could end up traumatizing them and cause undue burden to the overall situation instead of helping it.

During deployment

Deployments typically require individuals to work longer, more intensely and under demanding conditions. It can be taxing. There are a number of techniques and strategies that can support the resilience of those that deploy.

- Ensure that each individual has the time to eat meals and take breaks every 3-4 hours. While some may believe that there is no time for breaks or meals, this “time off” - albeit brief - can help workers to be more effective and capable than they would be without breaks or meals. When we don’t eat or rest, our focus and concentration suffer. During deployments, it is especially important to eat and have moments of rest.
- In the most urgent situations/moments on-site, it may not be possible to adhere to this regimen strictly, but it should be strived for as a general rule over the duration of a deployment. Workers deployed to help following a disaster need to take care of themselves and each other in order to best affect their mission. Otherwise they risk adding more casualties to an existing crisis, or at best reducing the overall impact of the aid mission.
- At the end of each day, it can be useful for deployed teams to check-in with one another. One way of doing this is to come together in a circle in which each individual can opt to share what the day was like. Participation by team members should be voluntary, and should not be forced. It may feel triggering for some to listen to other’s stories. For many, it is a relief to be tended to and cared for.
- For those working together from remote to field locations, it can be helpful to ask one

another how each person is faring. Building caring communities and workforces can help to inoculate one other from trauma responses.

Returning from deployment

How can organizations support individuals returning from a deployment?

- Immediately following a deployment, an individual should be offered time off to recover. Taking a half-day or day to rest can help to restore a sense of normalcy after being in a devastated environment. There is often work to be done after a deployment so perhaps an individual may opt to take time off once the essential work is completed.
- If an individual has returned from an especially distressing or taxing scene, don't take a "business as usual" approach. Find a way to help that person wind down and decompress.
- Ask about their experience. Acknowledge what they have been through. Inquire about what they need and would feel helpful.

One month post-deployment and beyond

It can take time to digest and metabolize what one has seen and witnessed during a deployment.

Check in with the individual one-month later and ask how they are doing. See if they might like to talk about their experience. Perhaps they feel differently about life after having witnessed serious human suffering – seeing, experiencing or being exposed to mass trauma can impact people in ways they may not have expected going into the deployment, and may result in an altering of one's values/beliefs/psyche afterwards.

Remain connected and check in as needed in the months to follow. Deployments that expose workers to dire conditions and deep human suffering can leave a lasting impression and may take months and even years to fully come to terms and making meaning of it all.