

Manual for

**Maximizing Stress
Resilience: Questions**

*British Columbia
Disaster Worker Care Committee*



Introduction

Please read through carefully

Thank you for volunteering to assist in a disaster response. As you are no doubt aware, assisting to help others in time of disaster can be very stressful. Before accepting you as a volunteer we have selected 13 key areas which have been assessed as factors which have a determinant in assessing people's ability to cope during a disaster. It is our intention to ensure that as much as possible our volunteers are prepared and able to cope with the inevitable stresses that arise as part of being involved in a disaster response. Please note that there are no right and wrong answers to these questions. Your responses will assist us in making sure that you are offered the opportunity to volunteer in the most appropriate role based on your strengths.

Prior to the interview, we would like you to read:

1. The Questions that you will be asked which are included in this Manual.
2. The Handout entitled "Your Health and Disasters" (attached at the back of this manual).
3. The Handout entitled "Trauma and Disaster Work: A Self Assessment" (attached at the back of this Manual).

It is important for you to carefully consider the questions and issues raised in the Handout. If you have any questions or concerns please consider contacting any persons listed at the end of the Handout.

As you read through the questions, some may seem very personal and you may be uncomfortable responding to these questions. All of your responses will be kept confidential by your interviewer. In order to provide you with some degree of comfort around the confidentiality aspects of collecting such information, you should read the relevant sections of the *British Columbia Personal Information Protection Act* and the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, at www.oipcbc.org/.

As you read through the questions, and before the interviewer asks you the questions, you will be given time to ask any questions you may have about these areas.

The 13 key areas include:

1. Questions on Team Work
2. Questions on Health
3. Questions on Communication Skills
4. Questions on Written Skills
5. Questions on Setting Boundaries
6. Questions on Trauma History
7. Questions on Supportive Networks
8. Questions on Problem Solving
9. Questions on Working in a Stressful Environment
10. Questions on Values
11. Questions on Training
12. Questions on Working in an Unstructured Setting
13. Questions on Cultural Awareness

In all there are 35 questions.

1. Questions on Team Work

1. What experience have you had working as part of a team?
2. How was the experience?
 - What were the challenges
 - What were the positive aspects of the experience?
3. What qualities did you bring to the team?
4. If you were choosing members of a team, what characteristics would you look for?
5. Do you prefer working in a team environment, working alone, or in a combination?

2. Questions on Health

6. How would you rate your overall physical health on a scale of 1-10 (with 1 being poor health and 10 being excellent health)? Explain your rating.
7. Tell us what you do to stay healthy?
8. Would your doctor and family agree that you would physically be able to cope with the demands of disaster work?

Please read the Handout "Your Health and Disasters."

3. Questions on Communication Skills

9. How have you reacted in the past when someone has criticized your work?
10. How would you go about asking someone else to correct his or her work?
11. If you felt that your supervisor was wrong or making unreasonable requests of you and your team, how would you respond?
12. How would you go about confronting a difficult person or situation when others who were in a position to speak out have not done so?

4. Question on Written Skills

13. What experience have you had in writing reports?

5. Questions on Setting Boundaries

14. In a major forest fire you are faced with a young family, who has little money, has no insurance and has lost everything. Clearly they have had a tough life. The affected area is devastated.

Which of the following two statements would you be comfortable with and discuss your reasons for choosing your response?

- A. My role is a helper/solver
 - B. My role is to help people help themselves
-
- A. As much as possible I want to fix their problems
 - B. As much as possible I want to show them how to solve their problems
-
- A. I am a good listener
 - B. I am a good talker
-
- A. I am most concerned with the solutions
 - B. I am most concerned with the person
-
- A. I expect the person to be responsible for their own actions
 - B. I expect the person to live up to my expectations

15. It is extremely busy in the Reception Centre with everyone working flat out and long line-ups for service. As you are looking at options for the family described above, one colleague approaches you and says she feels badly for the family and that she would like to invite the family to stay at her home until things are stabilized. Another colleague interrupts to say that she would never do such a thing. What would you see as the relevant issues?

6. Questions on Trauma History

16. Did you read the Handout "Trauma and Disaster Work: A Self-Assessment?"
17. Are you still comfortable with your application to apply to provide disaster-related services?

7. Questions on Supportive Networks

18. During the past few weeks, how often did you get together with friends, family and relatives (such as going out together or visiting in each other's homes)?
➤ Thinking of these people, how would they support you in times of stress?
19. About how many neighbours do you know well enough to visit with?
20. What about organizations such as church and school groups, labour unions, or social, civic, and fraternal clubs – do you take an active role in or participate in their activities?
21. In an average day, how many people would you say “hello” to, either on the phone or in person?
22. Thinking of the best friend you now have, how close are you to that friend in being able to share your innermost thoughts, worries, and feelings?

8. Questions on Problem Solving

23. Think of a frustrating or awkward problem that you recently encountered (could be at work, with family or friends, etc.) and describe how you responded to it.

9. Questions on Working in a Stressful Environment

24. What sorts of things happen in your work situation that you experience as stressful?
25. What is it about those situations that made them stressful for you?
26. How do you experience stress?
27. What sort of things do you do to manage or cope with your stress in those situations?

10. Questions on Values

28. What in your life do you feel gives it meaning?
29. When something painful has happened in your life, how did you view it?
➤ And how did you deal with it?

11. Questions on Training

30. What would you do to make sure that you receive adequate training prior to a disaster occurring?
31. If during a disaster your supervisor asks you to take on a task for which you feel you have not received adequate training, how would you handle the situation?

12. Questions on Working in an Unstructured Setting

32. Would your friends and/or family describe you as an easy-going/ "go with the flow" type of person
or
would they describe you as the type of person that does best when there a more formalized structure in place?

Explain your answer.

33. How about your co-workers at the office - would they describe you as an easy-going/ "go with the flow" type of person
or
would they describe you as the type of person that does best when there a more formalized structure in place?

Explain your answer.

13. Questions on Cultural Awareness

34. Communities today, are very diverse culturally and socially. Disaster workers need to be culturally aware and sensitive in order to provide assistance that will be accepted by the various cultures.

- What experience have you had working with people from different cultural and social groups (e.g., poor, visible minorities, gay and lesbian)?
- What were the challenges and positive aspects of the experience?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, rate your comfort level re: working with the following groups of people:

Elderly people

1	3	5	7	10
not at all	somewhat comfortable		very comfortable	

Very Young Children and Babies

1	3	5	7	10
not at all	somewhat comfortable		very comfortable	

Teenagers

1	3	5	7	10
not at all	somewhat comfortable		very comfortable	

People from a different social background (e.g., better or less educated, higher or lower income)

1	3	5	7	10
not at all	somewhat comfortable		very comfortable	

Women

1	3	5	7	10
not at all	somewhat comfortable		very comfortable	

Men

1	3	5	7	10
not at all	somewhat comfortable		very comfortable	

People from various ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Asian, Aboriginal, East-Indian, Afro-Canadian,)

1	3	5	7	10
not at all	somewhat comfortable		very comfortable	

People from various religious backgrounds (e.g., Muslim, Hindu)

1	3	5	7	10
not at all	somewhat comfortable		very comfortable	

Lesbians, Gay Men, and Transgendered

1	3	5	7	10
not at all	somewhat comfortable		very comfortable	

People whose skin is a different colour

1	3	5	7	10
not at all	somewhat comfortable		very comfortable	

People with physical disabilities (handicaps)

1	3	5	7	10
not at all	somewhat comfortable		very comfortable	

People who are developmentally delayed (mentally handicapped)

1	3	5	7	10
not at all	somewhat comfortable		very comfortable	

People who are mentally ill

1	3	5	7	10
not at all	somewhat comfortable		very comfortable	

35. What issues, either social, political or religious do you have strong feelings about?

Trauma and Disaster Work: A Self-Assessment

Disaster work can be a challenging mix of positive and negative experiences involving a range of feelings from a renewed sense of purpose and meaning and the profound satisfaction of helping others to grief, despair and helplessness, exhaustion and distress. The environments in which disaster responders work are demanding. Typically there are long hours of responding to high levels of need with minimal resources. Most disaster responders bring high standards, energy, empathy and a strong commitment to helping the victims. These qualities contribute to workers' ability to be effective during a response, but they can also make workers vulnerable to stress reactions, and burnout.

During a response, workers may be exposed to heart-breaking devastation and loss and to the stress and trauma of those direct victims of the disaster. How workers respond to these demands depends on several variables including circumstances of the disaster, the nature of the response environment and their role, their level of preparedness, and any pre-existing personal stressors or traumas. Even experienced disaster workers may at times feel overwhelmed and experience difficult stress reactions during or after the response.

One of the key variables that can influence an individual's response to the stress of disaster-work is their history of trauma, particularly in childhood, and the current level of stress in their lives. If workers begin an assignment already depleted by the circumstances of their own lives, or carrying unresolved feelings from previous traumatic experiences, they may quickly become fatigued, irritable and ineffective. In some cases, the disaster may have personal significance to workers because of their own history of traumatization, resulting in intense emotions and distress.

While research has shown that long-lasting traumatic stress symptoms are the exception rather than the rule for both disaster victims and responders, it is important for each individual to consider their own readiness to go on a disaster assignment. This involves considering your own life story, your current levels of stress, and an honest assessment of your own emotional health prior to going on assignment.

The following questions might be helpful in completing your self-assessment and reflection on these issues:

1. If you have been in a previous disaster or emergency situation, what was that experience like for you? How did you respond to the stressors you encountered and what, if any, long lasting impacts did it have on you - positive and negative?
2. What has been going on in your life recently that you have found distressing? And how are you managing that distress?
3. Does your life feel in balance currently?
4. What are the issues in your life that cause immediate emotional reactions and how do you handle these?
5. Do you feel emotionally healthy? Physically healthy? Mentally healthy?

If this information raises questions you would like to discuss with an experienced disaster worker or with a specialist in disaster mental health please refer to the attached list, or contact the ESS Program Office at 1 800 585-9559 for a referral.

Your Health and Disasters

Many disasters can negatively impact upon your health, especially if you are prone to certain health related problems. Before volunteering to assist in a disaster response, you should be aware of them:

Earthquakes: Following an earthquake there is the potential for aftershocks - many of which may be quite strong and capable of causing damage to buildings and contents. Individuals who have trouble with maintaining balance may be more prone to falls during these aftershocks. As well, there may be considerable amounts of dust and smoke for some time after an earthquake and thus persons with heart or respiratory conditions may experience a worsening of symptoms. (see Forest Fires).

Floods: A major health concern after flooding or other water damage is the growth of mold, mildew, rusts, and yeasts. Most of these are harmless, but some can cause respiratory and other disorders when workers inhale or come into contact with fungi, bacteria, and other biological contaminants. This is often associated with a musty mildew odour, as well as visible evidence of mold growth on walls, floors, carpeting, or other water damaged items. Inhalation is the route of exposure of most concern and some persons may be allergic to or develop allergies or asthma-like symptoms from exposure to these contaminants. Individual who are sensitive to molds may have signs and symptoms of allergic reactions such as nasal stuffiness, eye irritation, and wheezing. These individuals should minimize fungal exposure by wearing respirators, gloves, and eye protection.

Forest Fires/Urban Wildland Fires: Smoke from wildfires is a mixture of gases and fine particles from burning trees and other plant materials. Smoke can hurt your eyes, irritate your respiratory system, and worsen chronic heart and lung diseases. Smoke can cause: coughing, a scratchy throat, irritated sinuses, shortness of breath, chest pain, headaches, stinging eyes, and a runny nose. If you have heart or lung disease, smoke might make your symptoms worse. People who have heart disease might experience: chest pain, rapid heartbeat, shortness of breath, and fatigue. Smoke may worsen symptoms for people who have pre-existing respiratory conditions, such as respiratory allergies, asthma, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), in the following ways: inability to breathe normally; cough with or without mucus; chest discomfort; and wheezing and shortness of breath. When smoke levels are high enough, even healthy people may experience some of these symptoms.

Hazardous Materials: These can be chemical substances, which if released or misused can pose a threat to the environment or health. These chemicals are used in industry, agriculture, medicine, research, and consumer goods. Hazardous materials come in the form of explosives, flammable and combustible substances, poisons, and radioactive materials. These substances are most often released as a result of transportation accidents or because of chemical accidents in plants; but they can be released as a result of terrorist activity

Heat Waves: Temperatures in excess of 32 C (90°F) pose a risk of heat-related illness and death, especially when humidity levels exceed 35%. The risk is highest for individuals who are suffering from chronic illnesses and for those who are not acclimated to these conditions. Most heat-related illnesses involve elderly residents. However, children, athletes and outdoor workers are also at risk. Symptoms of heat exhaustion include fainting, rash, fatigue, and nausea. Skin may become clammy and moist, or hot and dry.

Severe Weather (Ice Storms, Snowstorms, Blizzards,

Extended Cold Weather: Power failures may result in inadequate heat and thus increase the likelihood of hypothermia, a condition of abnormally low body temperature. Exposed to cold temperatures, your body begins to lose heat faster than it can be produced. Prolonged exposure to cold will eventually use up your body's stored energy. Body temperature that is too low affects the brain, causing unclear thinking and inhibiting body movement. This could cause a person to not know what is happening and he or she won't be able to respond normally. Hypothermia is most likely at very cold temperatures, but can occur at temperatures above 4 C (40° F) if a person becomes chilled from rain, sweat, or submersion in cold water.

Volcanoes: Volcanic ash is actually fine, glassy rock fragments and particles and can affect people and equipment hundreds of miles away from the cone of the volcano. Volcanic ash can contaminate water supplies, cause electrical storms, disrupt the operation of all machinery, and collapse roofs. Volcanic ash can cause severe injury to breathing passages, eyes, and open wounds, and irritation to skin. The fine, glassy particles of volcanic ash can increase the health risk to children and people with existing respiratory conditions such as asthma, chronic bronchitis, or emphysema. Stay indoors, wear face masks designed to protect against lung damage from small particles, use eyeglasses instead of contacts, and protective goggles to protect eyes.

References:

- <http://www.fema.gov/hazards/hazardousmaterials/hazmat.shtml>
- <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/health/injuryprevention/disaster/>