

## **PROVIDER SELF-CARE**

### **DURING RELIEF WORK**

Disaster mental health work seems to override normal self-care, and extra care is needed to preserve energy for the long-term.

#### **Make every effort to engage in the following:**

- Self-monitoring and pacing
- Regular check-ins with colleagues, family, and friends
- Working with partners or in teams
- Brief relaxation / stress management breaks
- Regular peer consultation and supervision
- Time-out for basic bodily care and refreshment
- Acceptance that you cannot change everything
- Fostering of flexibility, patience, and tolerance

#### **Make every effort to avoid engaging in:**

- Working too long by yourself without checking in with colleagues
- Working “round the clock” with few breaks
- Feeling like you are not doing enough
- Excessive intake of sweets and caffeine
- Common attitudinal obstacles to self-care:
  - “It would be selfish to take time to rest.”
  - “Others are working around the clock, so should I.”
  - “The needs of survivors are more important than the needs of helpers.”
  - “I can contribute the most by working all the time.”
  - “Only I can do x, y, z.”

### **AFTER RELIEF WORK**

Expect a readjustment period upon returning home. You may need to make personal reintegration a priority for a while.

#### **Make every effort to engage in the following activities:**

- Seek out and share social support
- Check in with other relief colleagues to discuss disaster experiences
- Increase supervision, consultation, and collegial support
- Schedule time for a vacation or gradual reintegration into your normal life

- Prepare for worldview changes that may not be mirrored by others in your life
- Participate in formal help to address your response to relief work if stress persists for greater than two to three weeks
- Increase leisure activities, stress management, and exercise
- Pay extra attention to health and nutrition
- Pay extra attention to rekindling close interpersonal relationships
- Practice good sleep routines
- Make time for self-reflection
- Practice receiving from others
- Find things to make you laugh
- Try at times not to be in charge or the “expert”
- Increase experiences that have spiritual or philosophical meaning to you
- Anticipate that you will experience recurring thoughts or dreams, and that they’ll decrease over time
- Keep a journal to get worries off your mind
- Ask help in parenting, if you feel irritable or are having difficulties adjusting to being back at home

**Make every effort to avoid engaging in:**

- Use of alcohol, illicit drugs or excessive amounts of prescription drugs, which all interfere with sleep cycles and prolong recovery
- Making any big life changes for at least a month
- Negatively assessing your contribution to relief work
- Worrying about having trouble readjusting for at least a month
- Engaging in personal obstacles to better self-care:
  - Keeping too busy
  - Making helping others more important than self-care
  - Not wanting to talk about relief work experiences with others