

The Community Resiliency Model (CRM) Guidelines for Working in Disaster Zones©

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Shock trauma refers to events that overwhelm a person's coping abilities. The events occur suddenly. The experience of surviving or witnessing an event can lead to an overwhelming sense of not being safe in one's own body and in one's community.

The Community Resiliency Model (CRM) – A Biological View

The Goal: The goal of the CRM is to help individuals understand basic information about the nervous system and then, to learn specific skills to bring the body and the mind back into balance.

Key CRM points to reinforce:

There is a biological basis for the human experience following a catastrophic event that exists in the human nervous system. Traumatic stress responses can act as constant internal background for many survivors. States of nervous system arousal effect perceptions of the world and thus can drive behavior that can lead to aggression and violence on one end of the spectrum and to disconnection and depression on the other end. The resiliency zone is a state of well being, a state where one can handle the windstorms of life bringing forth the best self. A person can be knocked out of their resiliency zone more easily after a traumatic event. If a person is knocked out of their resiliency zone, there may be a lack of a sense of balance within the person's mind and body.

Psycho-education about the variety of common symptoms that can follow a traumatic event helps survivors reframe their traumatic stress symptoms from what is often a perception of personal weakness ("I'm going crazy") to one of a biological response to an overwhelming event ("I am having a human reaction to extraordinary events.").

Not all survivors develop symptoms of traumatic stress. Resilience is present after traumatic events and in spite of immense suffering, human kindness and generosity is often amplified. Many survivors report a deepening of the meaning of life in powerful ways after catastrophic events. Some people report feelings of strength and courage as they express how they helped others in the immediate aftermath of a traumatic event. There can be strengthening in one's faith. Many survivors express that they have a deeper appreciation for life and for humankind.

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The body has a natural capacity to restore itself. When we are faced with physical and/or psychological danger, the human body automatically goes into instinctual survival responses. The accelerator of the nervous system goes into action. The result is faster breathing and heart rate and the release of stress hormones like adrenalin in order to increase survival. When the threat passes, the brake of the nervous system brings the system back to balance and breathing rate and heart rate slows down. For some people, the traumatic event is too much, too fast and the person becomes overwhelmed and the nervous system does not return to its natural rhythm.

A person can become stuck in the high zone or the low zone. Their symptoms may fluctuate from anxiety, panic, rage, and/or hyperactivity when in the high zone to depression, disconnection, exhaustion and numbness when stuck in the low zone. The skills of CRM help individuals learn to read their nervous system so that they can tell the difference between sensations of distress and well being. Often distressing sensations cannot be “talked away.” Individuals can learn to bring attention to sensations of well being. As this is practiced, sensations of distress become less and in some instances go away all together.

The following Guidelines, outline how to work with individuals following natural or human-made catastrophic events:

CRM GUIDELINES

1. Developing Relationship: Initiate conversation to develop the relationship, asking questions such as:

- ❖ *Who is helping you the most right now?*
- ❖ *How have you managed to get through this under these difficult circumstances?*
- ❖ Asking about the needs of the survivor can also be a way of establishing relationship. Questions like,
 - *“What concerns you the most right now?”*

2. Explain the resiliency zone and stuck in high and low zones.

3. Tracking: Education is shared about the accelerator and brake of the nervous system in simple ways.

- ❖ *“When you are feeling anxious, your heart rate and breathing rate become faster and you may notice muscle tension.”*
- ❖ *“When you are feeling calmer or more balanced, you may notice your breathing and heart rate slowing down and your muscles relaxing.”*

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- ❖ *“Tracking your sensations can help you bring your awareness to sensations that are pleasant or neutral that help you bounce back to your resilient zone more quickly.”*

4. Resourcing after a traumatic event:

Asking questions about ways they have coped with past difficulties can be a way of identifying resources. It may be spiritual beliefs, family members, friends or places in nature, for example.

- ❖ *What or Who has helped you during past difficulties?*

Find out more details about what or who has helped and gently invite the person to be aware of changes on the inside as they talk about these resources.

Some individuals may find it helpful to tell their survival story. It is important to guide the telling of the story in a different way in order to reduce distress and avoid re-traumatizing the survivor. Begin with the end of the story so that the person knows in the present moment that they have survived and the people who are helping them the most now.

- *Can you tell me the moment you knew you were going to survive?*
- *Did anyone else in your family and/or friendship group survived?*
- *Who helped you the most when it was happening?*

If someone close to them died, you can ask:

- *Who is supporting you the most right now?*
- *Would you like to tell me about (the person that died or was hurt)?*
- *What would they want you to do in your life now if they could tell you something based on how much they cared for you?*

The Helper invites the survivor to be aware of what on the inside may feel calmer or neutral.

5. Grounding. Grounding can be a very important skill to share because if people were knocked off their feet because of the traumatic experience, they may feel that the earth is unsafe. Having a sense of being in the present moment can take them out of the sensations connected to traumatic memory into the present moment. Guiding the survivor through grounding exercises can help reduce the shock symptoms, which is one of the first steps in feeling more like oneself and returning the nervous system to balance.

Grounding Exercise:

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- Find a comfortable position
- Notice how the floor, chair, sofa is making contact with your body
- Notice the parts of your body that are making contact with the surface.
- As you bring your attention to how your body is making contact, notice what happens in the inside
- Bring your awareness to your legs and then to your feet, notice how the floor is making contact with your feet.
- Again, notice what is happening on the inside
- If you notice any sensations of discomfort, bring your attention to places in the body that feel neutral or a little more comfortable.
- Bring your attention to your whole body and notice the sensations that feel more comfortable or neutral since starting grounding. Take a few moments to notice those sensations as we end the exercise.

If the person has difficulty with Grounding, you can remind them about Resourcing as some individuals work better with developing an image and then sensing into their body.

6 . Traumatic Flashback

- ❖ Sounds, smells, sensations and/or images can trigger a traumatic memory. If this happens, it is important to bring the person to the present moment by grounding or resourcing. You can share with the survivor the concept of memory capsules. Capsules of memory which carry all the ingredients of the past trauma (sounds, smells, images, rapid heart rate, etc..) can be triggered and can cause distressing sensations.
- ❖ The human body and mind are made for survivals. So there is a part of the brain that is an “alarm system.” This alarm system remembers traumatic experiences and sounds the alarm to warn the person that something is happening that could be life threatening. Using the skills of Tracking, Resourcing and Grounding can help intercept these distressing sensations and help the person bounce back to his resilient zone.

7. As you end your time with the survivor, reinforce their ability to use the skills of Tracking, Resourcing and Grounding during their activities of daily living. The disruption in their lives may continue for weeks, months and for some, even years. The more often the survivor experiences and senses periods of wellbeing within the body,

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the internal capacity to handle the aftermath of the event will expand. There is no magic way to help someone through the grief of the multiple losses that can occur after human-made or natural disasters. However, when we help people understand the natural healing system within the body, the person can learn to read their sensations and more easily bounce back to their resilient zone. When in the resilient zone, a person can handle the demands on one's life with greater discernment. If the person has a phone, the iChill app (available for droids, iPhones and on the internet (www.iChillapp.com)) can be very helpful in reinforcing the skills.