**Personal**

**DEALING WITH STRESS**

*BASIC*

**1. Types of Stress**

Stress is a natural reaction, and it can be positive and stimulating. Not all stress is bad. There are different types of stress, both healthy and unhealthy. Healthy stress helps people focus on the task at hand, mobilises energy and prepares them for action. When stress occurs too often, however, or is too intense or lasts too long, it turns from positive to negative.

There are 3 different types of unhealthy stress: chronic, traumatic, and also post-traumatic.

1. *Chronic* *stress* is a combination of stress factors that builds up over time, eroding our resilience and ability to work or function effectively. This type of stress is dealt with below in the beginner’s lesson.
2. *Traumatic* *stress* results from directly experiencing, or being otherwise closely exposed to, traumatic events or incidents that are life- threatening or involve physical and emotional loss. It is dealt with in the Advanced lesson
3. *Post-traumatic stress* is prolonged stress which can occur months or even years after an event. It is dealt with in the Expert lesson.

People who have been trained about stress responses often react better under stress because they understand what is happening to them.

Each person will experience stress differently and therefore must manage their stress in their own way. Stress management varies by culture, gender, personality, identity and many other factors.

**2. Chronic Stress – Causes**

Chronic (or cumulative) stress occurs regularly among aid workers and activists, yet often goes unrecognised or unreported.

With healthy levels of stress, symptoms are generally mild and temporary – people return to normal functioning when the stress factor is removed. If exposure to stress is excessive or long-term however, symptoms can persist and multiply, resulting in chronic or cumulative stress. Not only is this worse for the body physically and mentally, but chronic stress can also erode coping mechanisms.

Chronic stress builds slowly and may be hard to notice in yourself or others. If not properly managed, chronic stress can lead to burnout.

**3. Effects**

There is a wide range of possible symptoms of negative stress, and people differ in terms of the symptoms they exhibit.

* Physical symptoms may include:
  + Exhaustion
  + Hyperactivity
  + Sleeping difficulties or excessive sleep
  + Slight flu-like symptoms
  + Headaches
  + Heightened blood pressure and heart rate
  + Nausea or vomiting
* Behavioural symptoms may include:
  + Avoiding genuine social contact and relationships
  + Substance abuse (caffeine/ alcohol/ drugs)
  + A series of short and casual romantic/sexual relationships
  + Risk-taking
  + Withdrawal
  + Irritability or a constant tendency to pick quarrels
  + Aggression
* Work-related symptoms may include:
  + Working very long hours
  + Lateness/ not coming in to work
  + Lack of concentration
  + Poor work performance
  + Loss of perspective
  + Pre-occupation with an idea, even if it is old or ineffective
  + Deterioration in judgment and logical thinking
  + Reduced creativity
  + Deteriorating communication
* Emotional effects may include:
  + Low morale
  + Pessimism and cynicism
  + Anxiety
  + Guilt
  + Depression
  + Excitement/hyper-activity
  + A feeling of power and invulnerability
  + Intense identification with, OR lack of compassion for those you work with
  + Nightmares or flashbacks
  + Tendency to avoid/repress intense thoughts or feelings
  + Questioning of major life areas

Engaging in some of these types of behaviours are security risks in and of themselves, so it is very important to both the individual affected and your organisation that it is dealt with properly.

**4. Dealing with it – *For Individuals***

Stress management is an individual process. There is no one best set of techniques. For stress management to be effective, it must be consistent and comprise the techniques that work best for each person.

It is important to recognise that it is impossible to take care of others if you do not take care of yourself.

* **Learn about stress.** Be aware of the signs and symptoms of stress.
* **Know yourself.** Learn to observe your feelings and attitudes before trying to control your behavior.
* **Eat well and exercise.** Establish a regular exercise program and stick to it. Beneficial exercise for stress reduction includes deep breathing and muscle relaxation exercises. Keep a healthy diet and eat regularly.
* **Get rest and relaxation.** Get adequate, regular sleep. Maintain your normal routines for relaxation, such as hobbies, reading, etc.
* **Practice belief systems.** Maintain spiritual health consistent with your personal beliefs.
* **Maintain a sense of humour and perspective.** Try to have contact with others outside of the work environment.
* **Be informed.** Knowledge of the work situation and environment provides an effective way of checking rumors and immediately addressing concerns.
* **Talk to people.** Sharing a problem with others may help you find a solution and will make you feel less isolated. If unable to talk to others about your feelings, keep a journal or diary or write letters.
* **Change a stressful environment as much as possible.** Refuse to see yourself as a helpless victim of circumstance. When faced with a difficult situation, identify the problem, think of alternatives, evaluate the alternatives, and finally select and implement the best alternative.
* **Think positive!**

**5. Dealing with it – *For Managers***

In volatile environments, expectations of managers can often be unrealistic – both in terms of the volume of tasks and the level of skill with which they need to be performed. The level of responsibility can be a significant source of stress, especially when it does not stop at night, or on weekends or holidays. All staff need to feel that their managers are strong, solid and reliable and a source of stability. A manager who shows signs of severe stress, or who continues in post although burned out, is likely to demoralise his or her staff. The following tactics can help managers to cope with their own stress and reduce that of their staff.

* **Acknowledge your own limitations**, to yourself and to your staff. Admitting that you too are not immune to stress does not need to undermine your authority if you are managing according to principles and arguments that are defendable.
* **Develop a good relationship with your own manager**. Ask them to come and experience at close hand the realities you are facing, and ask them to protect you from unnecessary pressures from HQ.
* **Delegate**. Share tasks with your staff or try to create a senior management team around you that shares responsibility, although you remain the ultimate decision-maker. Insist on appointing a high-quality person when the post needs to be filled.
* **The ‘buddy system’.** Find a sounding board or possibly a buddy in one of your peers from another agency. Staff members may agree in advance to monitor each other’s reactions to identify signs of excessive stress and fatigue levels.
* **Recognition of individual staff efforts.** Express appreciation on a regular basis. People do better in difficult situations when they feel that other people care about them. Provide constructive feedback to build self-confidence when addressing problem areas.
* **Regular time off for all staff.** During periods of heavy workloads or in times of crisis, it is common for staff to attempt to work all day, every day. This can quickly lead to burnout. Many staff members need to be given permission to take care of themselves. Providing an afternoon off to a staff member who is obviously stressed – and therefore often ineffective - can improve productivity in the long term. In emergency response situations, regular rotation of staff out of the hostile area every three to four weeks can help prevent build-up of excess stress.
* **Provide a good example.** Demonstrate proper stress management by eating properly, resting and taking appropriate time off.

**6. What now?**

**Swipe right for this lesson’s checklist**

**Go to the Advanced Lesson for advice on how to deal with traumatic stress.**

**Go to the Expert Lesson for advice on how to deal with post-traumatic stress.**

*FURTHER READING*

* [*Good Practice Review Number 8: Operational security management in violent environments (Revised Ed.)*](http://www.odihpn.org/download/gpr_8_revised2pdf)
* [*CARE International: Safety & Security Handbook*](http://ngolearning.org/courses/availablecourses/CARE%20Safety%20Course/Shared%20Documents/English_CARE_International_Safety_and_Security_Handbook.pdf)
* [*ECHO Generic Security Guide for Humanitarian Organisations*](https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CCEQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fec.europa.eu%2Fecho%2Ffiles%2Fevaluation%2Fwatsan2005%2Fannex_files%2FECHO%2FECHO12%20-%20echo_generic_security_guide_en.doc&ei=kLxAVc6LOILuUP2SgbAE&usg=AFQjCNEXEOcbLeV24f3WolHmDwLq7KJzlQ&sig2=hbnI7wfdrGIHS7mmikBRWA)

***Dealing With Stress Basic Checklist***

***For individuals***

* ***Learn about stress***
* ***Know yourself***
* ***Eat well and exercise***
* ***Get rest and relaxation***
* ***Practice belief systems***
* ***Maintain humour and perspective***
* ***Be informed***
* ***Talk to people***
* ***Change the stressful environment***
* ***Think positive***

***For managers***

* ***Acknowledge your limitations***
* ***Get support from your manager***
* ***Delegate***
* ***Buddy up***
* ***Recognise staff efforts***
* ***Regular time off***
* ***Provide a good example***

*ADVANCED*

**1. Traumatic Stress – Causes**

Human rights activists do difficult and challenging work, and see a good deal of human misery. We may even be fearful for our lives at times. It is therefore important to know how to react following a traumatic event, and how to recognise the symptoms of traumatic stress. (Post-traumatic stress is dealt with in the Expert Lesson.)

Any event which is very distressing and outside of the realm of normal human experience can result in traumatic stress. Traumatic stress usually produces a very intense response, including fear and/or helplessness, which may overwhelm the individual’s coping mechanisms. Such a response is a **normal reaction to an abnormal situation.**

**2. Effects**

At the time of a traumatic event, the person experiencing the event might feel numb and unable to respond.

Immediately after a traumatic event, it is common for people to feel shocked, or dazed, or unable to process their own feelings.

Over several hours or days, the feelings of shock and denial gradually fade, and other thoughts and feelings take their place.

People react differently and take different amounts of time to come to terms with a traumatic event. Even so, you may be surprised by the strength of your feelings. It is normal to experience a mix of feelings.

You may feel:

* **Frightened …** that the same thing will happen again, or that you might lose control of your feelings and break down.
* **Helpless …** that something really bad happened and you could do nothing about it.
* **Angry …** about what has happened and with whoever was responsible.
* **Guilty …** that you have survived when others have suffered or died.
* **Sad …** particularly if people were injured or killed, especially someone you knew.
* **Ashamed or embarrassed …** that you have these strong feelings you can't control, especially if you need others to support you.
* **Relieved …** that the danger is over and that the danger has gone.
* **Hopeful …** that your life will return to normal. People can start to feel more positive about things quite soon after a trauma.

Strong feelings affect your physical health. In the weeks after a trauma, you may find that you:

* Cannot sleep
* Feel very tired
* Dream a lot and have nightmares
* Have poor concentration
* Have memory problems
* Have difficulty thinking clearly
* Suffer from headaches
* Experience changes in appetite
* Experience changes in sex-drive or libido
* Have aches and pains
* Feel that your heart is beating faster.

It may take weeks for some of these feelings and symptoms to pass. Remember that these are normal reactions to extreme circumstances; they are not signs that you are weak or sick.

**3. How you can help**

What can you do straight after a trauma to help someone heal? Psychological First Aidis an important first step to support a traumatised person. It is **NOT** about encouraging or even forcing people to ‘debrief’ following a traumatic event. There should be no pressure on the affected person to recount what happened to them. It helps to provide a safe and supportive environment for people to feel secure. If they *wish* to share their experiences they can, but there is absolutely no obligation to do so.

* Ask someone if they require assistance. Remove the person from danger and try to keep them safe. If very distressed do not leave alone.
* Ask about people’s needs. Do they need a blanket? Clothes? Medical treatment? Work with them to prioritise what they are most in need of and what is most important to them at this moment.
* Listen to people and help them to feel calm.

**4. Coping strategies**

Everyone has natural ways of coping. Encourage people to use their own positive coping strategies, while avoiding negative strategies. This will help them feel stronger and regain a sense of control. You will need to adapt the following suggestions to take account of the person’s culture and what is possible in the particular crisis situation.

**Encourage Positive Coping Strategies:**

* Get enough rest.
* Eat as regularly as possible and drink water.
* Talk and spend time with family and friends.
* Discuss problems with someone you trust.
* Do activities that help you relax (walk, sing, pray, play with children).
* Do physical exercise.
* Find safe ways to help others in the crisis and get involved in community activities.

**Discourage Negative Coping Strategies:**

* Don’t take drugs, smoke or drink alcohol.
* Don’t sleep all day.
* Don’t work all the time without any rest or relaxation.
* Don’t isolate yourself from friends and loved ones.
* Don’t neglect basic personal hygiene.
* Don’t be violent.

It is crucial in the weeks and months after a traumatic event to keep an eye out for changes in personal attitude (depression, frustration, etc.), as these may be signs of longer-term Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This is dealt with in the **Expert lesson**.

**5. What now?**

**Swipe right for this lesson’s checklist**

**Go to the Beginner Lesson for advice on how to deal with chronic stress.**

**Go to the Expert Lesson for advice on how to deal with post-traumatic stress.**

*FURTHER READING*

* [*Good Practice Review Number 8: Operational security management in violent environments (Revised Ed.)*](http://www.odihpn.org/download/gpr_8_revised2pdf)
* [*CARE International: Safety & Security Handbook*](http://ngolearning.org/courses/availablecourses/CARE%20Safety%20Course/Shared%20Documents/English_CARE_International_Safety_and_Security_Handbook.pdf)
* [*ECHO Generic Security Guide for Humanitarian Organisations*](https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CCEQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fec.europa.eu%2Fecho%2Ffiles%2Fevaluation%2Fwatsan2005%2Fannex_files%2FECHO%2FECHO12%20-%20echo_generic_security_guide_en.doc&ei=kLxAVc6LOILuUP2SgbAE&usg=AFQjCNEXEOcbLeV24f3WolHmDwLq7KJzlQ&sig2=hbnI7wfdrGIHS7mmikBRWA)

***Dealing With Stress Advanced Checklist***

* ***Get enough rest***
* ***Eat as regularly as possible and drink water***
* ***Talk and spend time with family and friends***
* ***Discuss problems with someone you trust***
* ***Do activities that help you relax***
* ***Do physical exercise***
* ***Find safe ways to help others***
* ***Don’t take drugs, smoke or drink alcohol***
* ***Don’t sleep all day***
* ***Don’t work all the time without any rest or relaxation***
* ***Don’t isolate yourself from friends and loved ones***
* ***Don’t neglect basic personal hygiene***
* ***Don’t be violent***
* ***Do not***

*EXPERT*

**1. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder – Causes**

What happens if people don’t heal within the weeks following the trauma?

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) develops in about 1 in 3 people who experience severe trauma. Certain factors such as if you or your family have had depression or anxiety in the past, or you don't receive much support from family or friends, can make you more susceptible to developing PTSD after a traumatic event.

In most cases, PTSD develops during the first month after a traumatic event. However, in a minority of cases, there may be a delay of months or even years before symptoms start to appear.

**2. Effects**

The specific symptoms of PTSD can vary widely between individuals, but they generally fall into the categories described below. These symptoms are often severe and persistent enough to have a significant impact on the person’s day-to-day life.

**Re-experiencing**

Re-experiencing is the most typical symptom of PTSD. This is when a person involuntarily and vividly re-lives the traumatic event in the form of flashbacks, nightmares or repetitive and distressing images or sensations. This can even include physical sensations such as pain, sweating and trembling or negative thoughts about their experience.

**Avoidance**

Trying to avoid being reminded of the traumatic event is another key symptom of PTSD. This usually means avoiding certain people or places that remind you of the trauma, or avoiding talking to anyone about your experience. Many people with PTSD try distracting themselves with work or hobbies. Some people attempt to deal with their feelings by trying not to feel anything at all, which can lead to the person becoming isolated and withdrawn.

**Feeling 'on edge'**

Someone with PTSD may be very anxious and find it difficult to relax. They may be constantly aware of threats and easily startled. This state of mind is known as hyper-arousal. Hyper-arousal often leads to irritability, angry outbursts, sleeping problems (insomnia) and difficulty concentrating.

**Other problems**

Many people with PTSD also have a number of other problems, including:

* depression, anxiety and phobias
* drug misuse or alcohol misuse
* headaches, dizziness, chest pains and stomach aches
* PTSD sometimes leads to work-related problems and the breakdown of relationships.

**3. Dealing with it**

It is normal to experience upsetting and confusing thoughts after a traumatic event, but in most people these will improve naturally over a few weeks. However you should visit your doctor if you are still having problems about four weeks after the traumatic experience, or if the symptoms are particularly troublesome. Your doctor may refer you to mental health specialists if they feel you would benefit from treatment.

PTSD can be successfully treated, even when it develops many years after a traumatic event. Treatment depends on the severity of symptoms and how soon they occur after the traumatic event. Any of the following treatment options may be recommended:

* Watchful waiting - waiting to see whether the symptoms improve without treatment
* Psychological treatment - such as psychotherapy or trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)
* Antidepressant medication

**5. What now?**

**Swipe right for this lesson’s checklist**

**Go to the Beginner Lesson for advice on how to deal with chronic stress.**

**Go to the Advanced Lesson for advice on how to deal with traumatic stress.**

*FURTHER READING*

* [*Good Practice Review Number 8: Operational security management in violent environments (Revised Ed.)*](http://www.odihpn.org/download/gpr_8_revised2pdf)
* [*CARE International: Safety & Security Handbook*](http://ngolearning.org/courses/availablecourses/CARE%20Safety%20Course/Shared%20Documents/English_CARE_International_Safety_and_Security_Handbook.pdf)
* [*ECHO Generic Security Guide for Humanitarian Organisations*](https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CCEQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fec.europa.eu%2Fecho%2Ffiles%2Fevaluation%2Fwatsan2005%2Fannex_files%2FECHO%2FECHO12%20-%20echo_generic_security_guide_en.doc&ei=kLxAVc6LOILuUP2SgbAE&usg=AFQjCNEXEOcbLeV24f3WolHmDwLq7KJzlQ&sig2=hbnI7wfdrGIHS7mmikBRWA)

***Dealing With Stress Expert Checklist***

* ***Monitor symptoms***
* ***Consult a doctor***

**PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT**

*BASIC*

**1. Grab Bags**

Grab bags are bags filled with an individual’s survival essentials in case they need to move rapidly. They should be prepared for high-risk activists, journalists and humanitarians at times of heightened risk and kept close to an exit in their residence – somewhere easy to grab and run.

You should plan out several potential escape routes in case of emergency. Remember that the best escape route may vary depending on the time of day (e.g. across the roof at night-time, via a garden fence in the day time) so it is important to move the location of the grab bags as necessary.

**2. What to Pack**

A grab bag might include:

* Passport/ID – with multi-entry visas
* Copies of other key personal and travel documents (e.g. driving licence)
* List of emergency contacts and addresses
* First aid kit including prescription medicines and medical prescriptions
* Swiss army knife
* Spare clothes (ensure appropriate for the context)
* Map/compass (if appropriate to carry maps)
* Water bottle (with water filter/ water purification tablets)
* High-energy food (nuts/ snack bars/ chocolate etc.)
* Mobile phone, charger and pre-paid scratch cards if necessary
* Torch and batteries
* Candle
* Strong string/wire
* Money (local currency and US dollars; credit cards)
* Travelling tooth brush/paste and soap
* Waterproof clothing
* Insect repellent/Sun-cream
* Pen and paper
* Prescription glasses (if needed) and sun glasses
* Matches
* Condoms – can be useful for keeping things dry
* Phrase book (for foreign language speakers)
* A head covering
* Hand-held mirror
* Radio
* Satellite phone and charger (if issued)

**3. Limitations**

If involved in an emergency evacuation by air remember that you may be weight-limited to 15 kilograms or even less. Ensure you prioritise carefully what you decide to take or you will be forced to leave items at the airstrip.

See the **Evacuation lesson** for details on what to do in cases of hibernation, relocation or evacuation.

**4. What now?**

**Swipe right for this lesson’s checklist**

**Go to the Advanced lesson for advice on what protective gear to wear in combat zones or civil unrest.**

*RELATED LESSONS/TOOLS*

* *Evacuation lesson*

***Protective Equipment Basic Checklist***

* ***Pack grab bag in time of heightened risk***
* ***Plan day/night escape routes***
* ***Leave grab bag next to planned escape route***
* ***Try to keep under 15kg***

***To Pack***

* ***Passport/ID – with multi-entry visas***
* ***Copies of other key personal and travel documents (e.g. driving licence)***
* ***List of emergency contacts and addresses***
* ***First aid kit including prescription medicines and medical prescriptions***
* ***Swiss army knife***
* ***Spare clothes (ensure appropriate for the context)***
* ***Map/compass (if appropriate to carry maps)***
* ***Water bottle (with water filter/ water purification tablets)***
* ***High-energy food (nuts/ snack bars/ chocolate etc.)***
* ***Mobile phone, charger and pre-paid scratch cards if necessary***
* ***Torch and batteries***
* ***Candle***
* ***Strong string/wire***
* ***Money (local currency and US dollars; credit cards)***
* ***Travelling tooth brush/paste and soap***
* ***Waterproof clothing***
* ***Insect repellent/Sun-cream***
* ***Pen and paper***
* ***Prescription glasses (if needed) and sun glasses***
* ***Matches***
* ***Condoms – can be useful for keeping things dry***
* ***Phrase book***
* ***A head covering***
* ***Hand-held mirror***
* ***Radio***
* ***Satellite phone and charger***

*ADVANCED*

**1. Protective Gear**

Journalists and humanitarian workers should be fully equipped with gear appropriate to the situation they are operating in. In extreme circumstances, this could involve wearing hazmat suits, carrying detectors, or ingesting oral tablets to block or act against possible biological, chemical, or nuclear agents. In combat zones, it would involve wearing body armor rated to withstand shrapnel and high-powered bullets. In cases of street clashes or violence, it could mean wearing an inconspicuous anti-stab vest.

**2. Operating in Warzones**

Human rights defenders requiring body armor should choose a vest according to the expected threat. The U.S. National Institute of Justice has developed a six-tier rating system used by most manufacturers around the world. If you are covering armed conflict, you should choose a vest rated to stop high-velocity bullets fired by military rifles. Be aware, however, that no vest is completely bulletproof. One may still be severely injured or die from the trauma of blunt impact, even if the body armor does stop the projectile. Consider gender-specific designs and whether you require options such as side or groin protectors.

Helmets are also recommended for journalists or humanitarian workers in war zones. Recognise, however, that even a top- rated helmet mainly provides protection against shrapnel, and is likely to be penetrated by any direct hit from a bullet fired by an assault or sniper rifle.

**3. Embedded With Military**

Wear body armor whenever you are embedded with military forces. Body armor products are periodically updated as newer, lighter, and more reliable materials are developed. You will need to be mindful that different products may require different care. Ceramic plates may crack or break if they are dropped. Kevlar can deteriorate if it gets wet. Human sweat can degrade Kevlar and other products. Used body armor must be examined very carefully for signs of wear or weakening of fiber. All body armor must be properly stored and periodically inspected.

**4. Civil Unrest**

Protective gear is also available in situations of civil unrest. Lightweight and relatively thin anti-stab vests can provide protection against knife attacks, rubber bullets, and other hazards. Baseball-style caps with metal plates are also available. Gas masks may also be worn, although in doing so journalists or humanitarian workers incur the risk that they could be mistaken for either riot police or demonstrators.

**5. What now?**

**Swipe right for this lesson’s checklist**

**Go to the Beginner lesson for advice on what to pack in a grab bag.**

*RELATED LESSONS/TOOLS*

* *Checkpoints lesson*

*FURTHER READING*

* [*Committee to Protect Journalists*](https://cpj.org/reports/2012/04/armed-conflict.php)

***Protective Equipment Advanced Checklist***

* ***Choose a vest rated according to your expected threat***
* ***Get a helmet if operating in a war zone***
* ***Wear body armor if embedded***
* ***Take proper care of armor according to instructions***
* ***Wear stab vest if needed in areas of civil unrest***
* ***Have access to gas mask but be cautious of being mistaken for protester***