Providing support in the immediate aftermath of crisis can be an enriching professional and personal experience that enhances satisfaction through helping others. It can also be physically and emotionally exhausting. The following provides information to consider when responding to an emergency at a school.

**Common Stress Reactions**

You may experience a number of stress responses, which are considered common when working with survivors:

- Increase or decrease in activity level
- Difficulties sleeping
- Substance use
- Disconnection and numbing
- Irritability, anger, and frustration
- Vicarious traumatization in the form of shock, fearfulness, horror, helplessness
- Confusion, lack of attention, and difficulty making decisions
- Physical reactions (headaches, stomachaches, easily startled)
- Depressive or anxiety reactions
- Decreased social activities
- Diminished self-care

**Extreme Stress Reactions**

You may experience more serious stress responses that warrant seeking professional support or monitoring by a supervisor. These include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sense of helplessness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupation or compulsive re-experiencing of trauma experienced either directly or indirectly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempts to over-control in professional or personal situations, or act out a “rescuer complex”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social withdrawal and isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic exhaustion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survival coping strategies like relying on substances, overly preoccupied by work, or drastic changes in sleeping or eating patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious difficulties in interpersonal relationships, including domestic violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression accompanied by hopelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicidal ideation or attempts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unnecessary risk-taking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illness or an increase in levels of pain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in memory and perception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruption in your perceptions of safety, trust, and independence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
School administration and leadership can help support providers by reducing the risk of extreme stress through implementing procedures and policies. Consider:

- Encouraging work breaks
- Rotating of providers from the most highly exposed assignments to lesser levels of exposure
- Identifying enough supports to meet the needs of administration, staff, students, and families
- Encouraging peer partners and peer consultation
- Monitoring providers who meet certain high risk criteria, such as: those who have been directly exposed to the event, those having regular exposure to severely affected individuals or families, those with multiple stresses (e.g., family changes, health problems)
- Ensuring regular supervision, case conferencing, staff appreciation events
- Conducting trainings on stress management practices and encourage the use of such practices
- Supporting open communication

**Self-Care**

Self-care is the ability to engage in helping others without sacrificing other important parts of one’s life. It’s taking responsibility for job functions you have control over, the ability to maintain a positive attitude towards the work despite challenges, and your right to be well, safe, and fulfilled.

It’s important to remember that self-care is not an emergency response plan to be activated when stress becomes overwhelming or that having a good self-care plan means you are acting selfishly. Healthy self-care can renew our spirits and help us become more resilient.

Think of self-care as having three basic aspects:

| Awareness | The first step is to seek awareness. This requires you to slow down and focus inwardly to determine how you are feeling, what your stress level is, what types of thoughts are going through your head, and whether your behaviors and actions are consistent with the who you want to be. |
| Balance   | The second step is to seek balance in all areas of your life including work, personal and family life, rest, and leisure. You will be more productive when you’ve had opportunities to rest and relax. Becoming aware of when you are losing balance in your life gives you an opportunity to change. |
| Connection| The final step is connection. It involves building connections and supportive relationships with your co-workers, friends, family, and community. One of the most powerful stress reducers is social connection. |
Self-Care Checklist

There are several ways you can find balance, be aware of your needs, and make connections. Use this list to help you decide which self-care strategies will work for you.

Make every effort to:

- Seek out and give social support
- Check in with other colleagues to discuss the response to the emergency
- 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 if extreme stress persists for greater than two to three weeks
- Increase leisure activities, stress management, and exercise
- Pay extra attention to health and nutrition
- Self-monitor and pace your efforts
- Maintain boundaries: delegate, say “no,” and avoid getting overloaded with work
- Pay extra attention to rekindling close interpersonal relationships
- Practice good sleep routines
- Make time for self-reflection
- Find things that you enjoy or make you laugh
- Try at times not to be in charge or the “expert”
- Increase experiences that have spiritual or philosophical meaning to you
- Access supervision routinely to share concerns, identify difficult experiences and strategize to solve problems
- Anticipate that you will experience recurring thoughts or dreams, and that they will decrease over time
- Keep a journal to get worries off your mind
- Ask for help in parenting, if you feel irritable or are having difficulties adjusting back to your routine
- Plan for family/home safety, including making child care and pet care plans
- Practice brief relaxation techniques during the workday
- Use a buddy system to share upsetting emotional responses
- Stay aware of limitations and needs
- Recognize when one is Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired (HALT), and take the appropriate self-care measures
- Increase activities that are positive
- Practice religious faith, philosophy, spirituality
- Spend time with family and friends
- Learn how to “put stress away”
- Write, draw, paint
- Limit caffeine, cigarettes, and substance use

Be careful of engaging in activities that can hinder your attempts at good self-care. Avoid:

- Extended periods of solo work without colleagues or working “round the clock” with few breaks
- Negative self-talk that reinforces feelings of inadequacy or incompetency
- Common attitudinal obstacles to self-care (e.g., “It would be selfish to take time to rest.”)
- Negatively assessing your contribution
- Use of excessive use of alcohol, illicit drugs, or excessive amounts of prescription drugs