

CONSIDERING PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS IN DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RECOVERY

Presented by Patti Garsha LMFT on behalf of the Elizabeth
Lofts Emergency Committee ELEC



BENEFITS OF PREPARATION

STRESS INNOCULATION TRAINING SIT

PREPARING IN ADVANCE TO HANDLE
STRESSFUL EVENTS SUCCESSFULLY

Practicing our psychological reactions helps us respond more effectively and smoothly during an emergency.

BONUS: These skills can also help us in our normal day to day functioning and increase our overall resiliency to stress.



THREE STAGES OF INTERVENTION

Preparing

Preparing For A
Disaster:
Psychological
Factors to Consider

Experiencing

Experiencing A
Disaster: How
Psychological
Preparation and
Coping Skills can
Help

Recovering

Recovering From A
Disaster: Tips for
Overcoming Trauma
and Developing
Resiliency

PREPARE

Preparation as Self Care – A New Lens

"It's an investment in yourself to be prepared"

Katie Belfir FEMA

A Readiness Routine builds Resilience

"When we work to acquire the skills and mindset that make us 'ready,' the fear, sense of vulnerability, and divisiveness typically experienced in emergencies are replaced with calm and an eagerness, capability, and desire to help others" Danielle Roberts

MD The Readiness Collective



ANTICIPATE

Understand your Unique Coping Style –

How do you manage stressful situations?

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines a disaster as a “severe disruption, ecological and psychological, which greatly exceeds the coping capacity” of the affected individual or community. WHO1992

~Think back to a time when you were under considerable stress

~ Write down some of your natural responses to stress



IDENTIFY

Body - Identify your physical responses

Mind – Thought Processes

Emotions - Feelings

Thoughts, emotions, and body sensations are not distinct and separate categories. They are intertwined, impacting each other in many ways.

Notice your natural coping style, are you more in your body, mind, emotions?



ADAPT

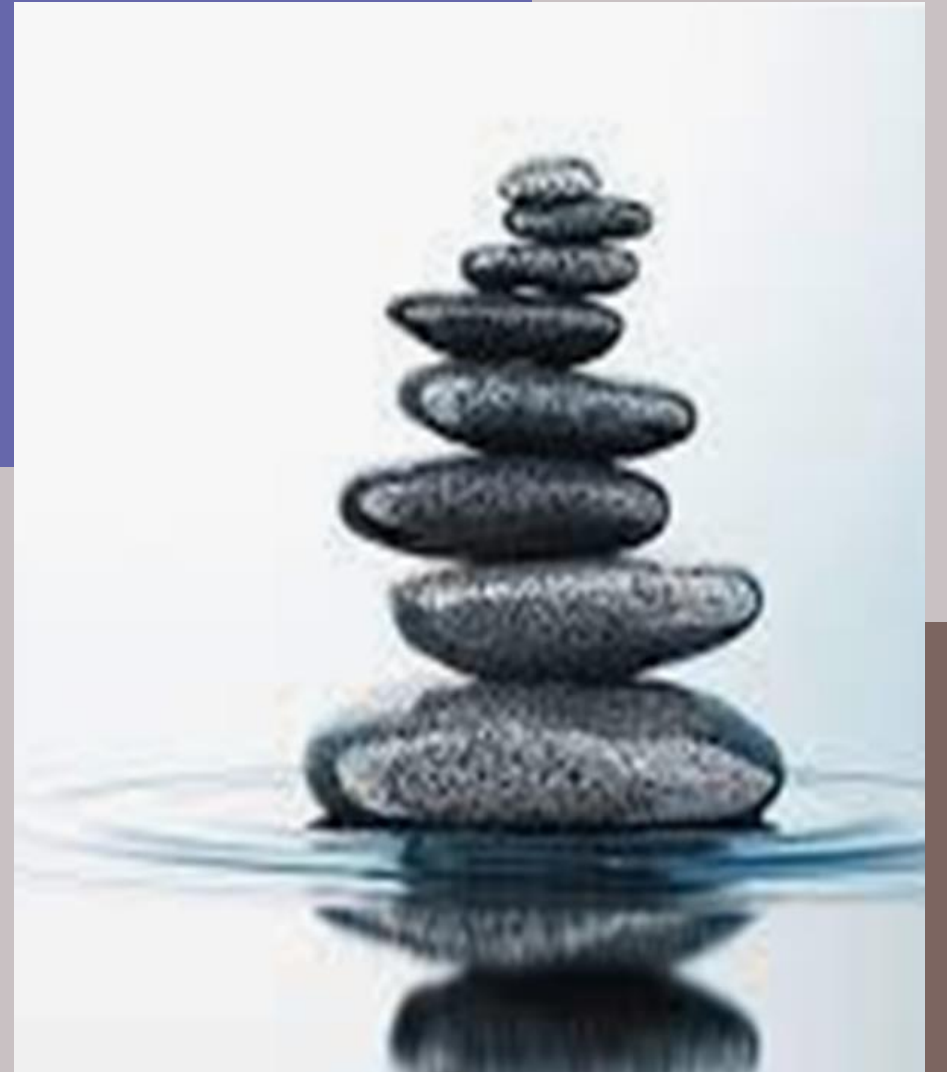
Some ways to adapt our physical, emotional and mental reactions:

Body – Breathwork

Mind – Locus of Control Exercise

Emotions – Mindfulness

~The Three Pillars of Wellness~

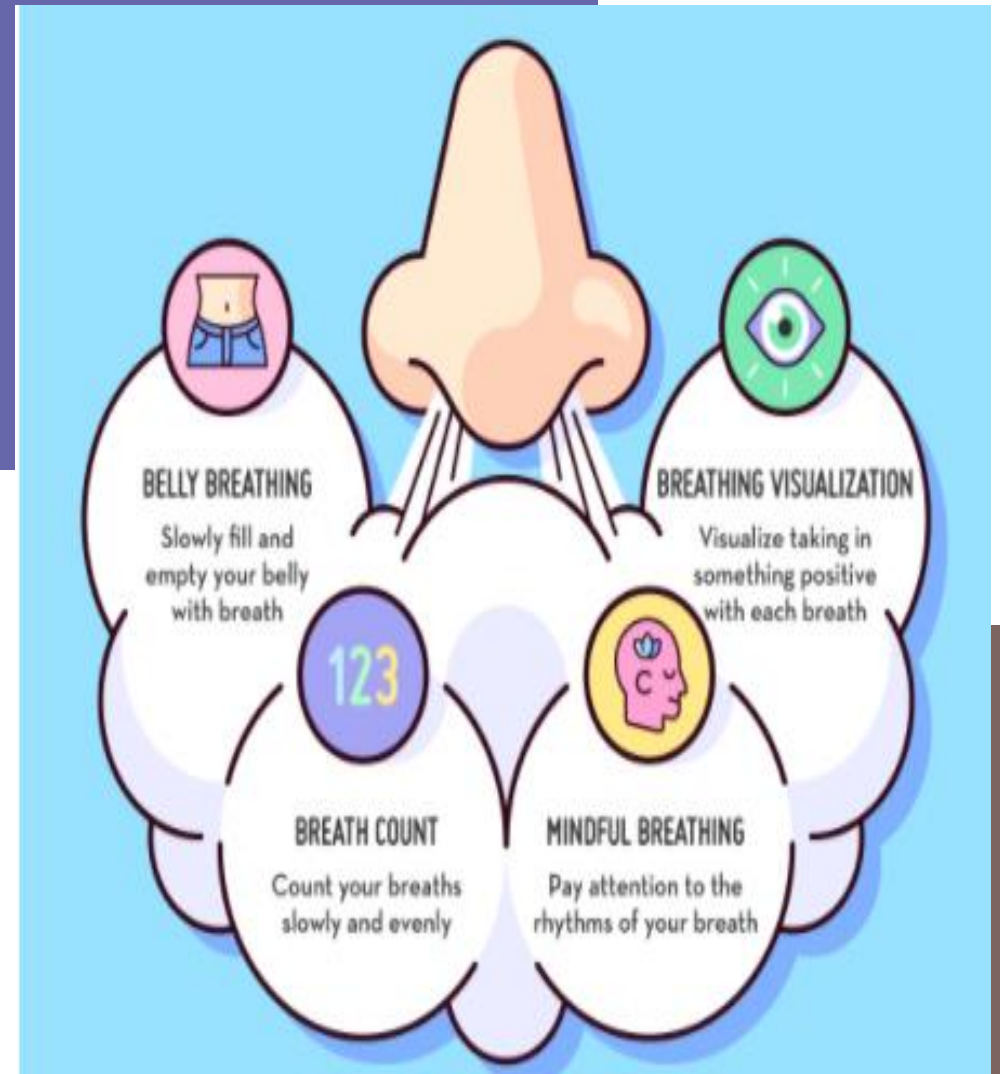


BREATHWORK

3 Deep Breaths: relax your shoulders as you do this

Box Breathing: Inhale 4 counts, Hold air in your lungs 4 counts, Exhale 4 counts emptying all the air from your lungs, hold your lungs empty 4 counts.

Diaphragmatic breathing: place one hand on your chest and one hand below your rib cage to feel the movement of your diaphragm. Inhale through your nose feeling your stomach pressing into your hand. Keep your other hand still. Exhale with pursed lips feeling your stomach deflate.

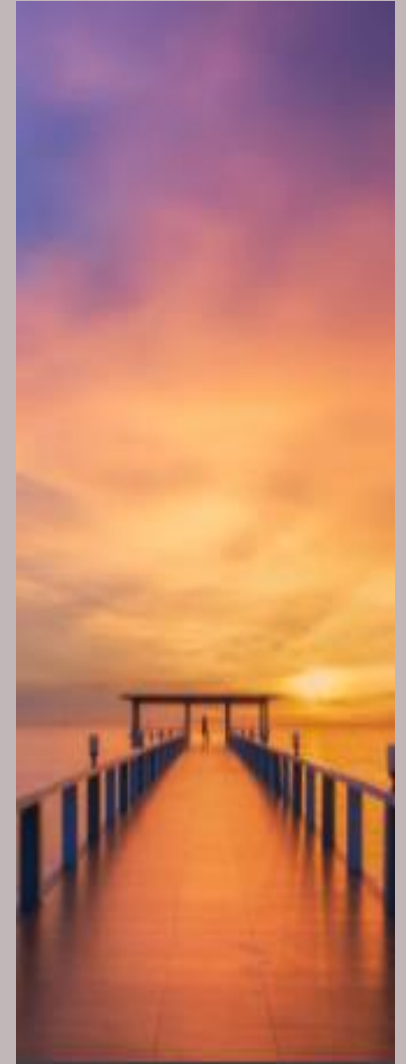




LOCUS OF CONTROL - DRAW A CIRCLE AND WRITE WHAT IS IN YOUR CONTROL INTO THE CENTER CIRCLE AND WHAT IS OUT OF YOUR CONTROL ON THE OUTER CIRCLE

Managing Emotions with Mindfulness Techniques

- Take a few deep breaths.
- Scan your body head to toe and look for the strongest or most uncomfortable sensations the feelings are generating.
- Observe that sensation – describe it to yourself in detail.
- What is the shape? Where is it the most intense? Does the center of that sensation feel different than the edges? Is it light? Is it heavy?
- Take a few more deep breaths and imagine your breath moving around that emotion.
- Just observe the sensation. You don't have to like it or want it, just observe.
- Acknowledge any urge to push this emotion away, to fight with it.
- Thank your mind for any thoughts you have about this sensation and let go of that thought.
- Just observe. Be patient. Remember you are learning a new skill to manage strong feelings.



BUILDING RESILIENCY WITH MINDFULNESS

"Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally." — Jon Kabat-Zinn

Set a time everyday to practice mindfulness ~ link to a positive habit already in place

Breathwork

Body Scan

Three Senses

Moving Mindfulness – Walking Meditation

Free Videos to Practice: [Mindfulness at OHSU | OHSU](#)

EXPERIENCING A DISASTER

Anticipate high amounts of stress.

During an emergency we go into automatic response.

Take DEEP BREATHS ~ breathing tends to get shallow.

Utilize positive SELF Statements ~ *I've got this. I know what to do.*

Follow your EMERGENCY PLAN.

Self Assessment – evaluate how you are functioning before taking action.

Reach out to others around you when it is safe to do so.

Share your psychological resources with others who are struggling.

The more you have prepared for this moment the better the outcome.



RECOVERING FROM A DISASTER

Immediately following the event – remember to drink water, breath, sleep or rest.

Talk to others.

Remind yourself you have gone through a very difficult experience.

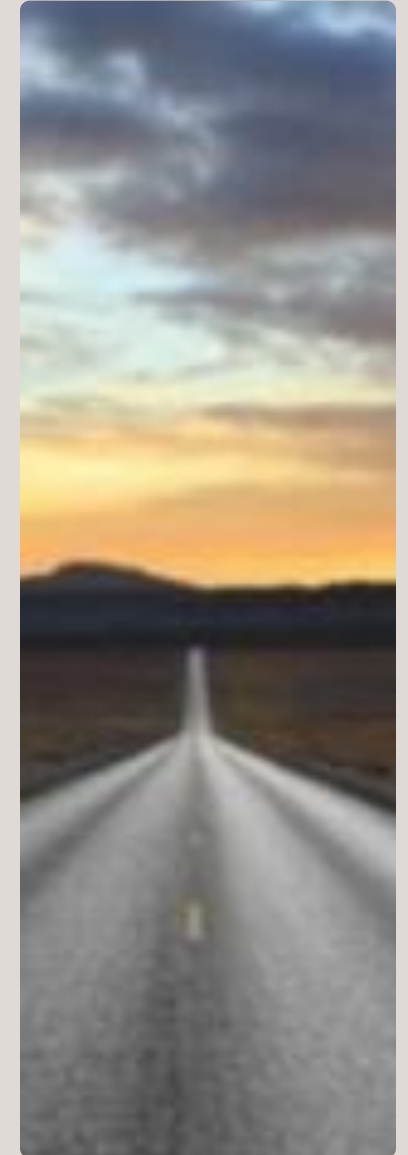
Remind yourself help is coming – you are not alone.

“During and after a disaster, it is natural to experience different and strong emotions. Coping with these feelings and getting help when you need it will help you, your family, and your community recover from a disaster. Connect with family, friends, and others in your community. Take care of yourself and each other and know when and how to seek help.”

People with preexisting mental health conditions should continue with their treatment plans during an emergency and monitor for any new symptoms

CDC

All the same techniques you worked on to prepare for an emergency will help you recover.



THE GOOD NEWS

Most people tend to recover fully emotionally from a disaster, returning to previous level of functioning, or even improved functionality.

Recovery will be dependent on the level of trauma.

Previous trauma or co-existing mental health issue like PTSD will impact your recovery. However, you can recover from previous trauma at the same time you are working on recovery from the current trauma.

Use the personal resiliency tool kit that you have built during recovery phase.

Seek Professional Support as it becomes available. Red Cross, Community Coping Resources

**The larger the emergency the slower the professional response*



Resources For Psychological Preparedness and Recovery in a Disaster

ELEC WEBSITE: [Elizabeth Lofts Emergency Committee \(ELEC\) - The Elizabeth Lofts | Pearl District | Portland, OR](#)

Elec Tip 6 Psychological Impacts of Natural Disasters

Red Cross <https://www.redcross.org/about-us/our-work/disaster-relief/disaster-mental-health.html>

SAMHSA <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline/coping-tips>

CDC <https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/selfcare.asp>

Breathwork <https://www.webmd.com/balance/stressmanagement/stress-relief-breathing-techniques>

The Free Mindfulness Project <https://www.freemindfulness.org/download>

OHSU [Mindfulness at OHSU | OHSU](#)



THANK YOU!

Check in the chat for a downloadable copy of the slides.

Look for a recording of this talk on the Elizabeth Lofts website.

And now I welcome your questions.

