

First Responders and Recovery Workers

Responding to Mass Violence

In the aftermath of a tragedy or act of mass violence, responders from various levels of government and other organizations will immediately deploy. This includes, but is not limited to, fire, police, law enforcement, emergency management, medical services, and others who respond on location at the time of the event. The scene of an act of mass violence is a crime scene and must be protected as such.

Engaging in a response and recovery effort is stressful, even for those who are well-trained. However, actions can be taken to mitigate the long-term impact on those responding. This document provides recommendations based on what Voices Center for Resilience professional staff has learned from working with thousands of responders since 2001.

Considerations for Leaders

It is common for responders to endure intense workloads and long hours with limited resources, often while being separated from their family and support network. Responders may be exposed to scenes of human remains and suffering, mass destruction, and life-and-death decision making, all while in harm's way.

There are limits to how many hours the human body and mind can continue to function under these conditions. Consider the following:

- Immediately set up a chain of command
- Implement policies and procedures for logging workers into and out of the disaster site
- Ensure responders have the proper training for their job assignment
- Impose limits to manage responders' hours so they do not overextend themselves
- Incorporate required breaks into work schedules
- Provide briefings for workers when they enter the site
- Conduct debriefings at the end of each shift
- Offer mental health support services when needed
- Hire outside law enforcement to manage protocols and security
- Educate responders about department policy regarding interacting with the media and politicians



"A lot of the guys didn't even go home. They went to their house and showered, rested for a few minutes, and then went back to the site."

— RESPONDER

From 9/11 to today, VOICES helps families and communities heal after tragedy.

Voices Center for Resilience provides long-term support and resources that promote mental health care and wellness for victims' families, responders and survivors, and assists communities preparing for and recovering from traumatic events.

Voices Center for Resilience, formerly Voices of September 11th, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

For information, resources, or to register for VOICES programs and events, scan or call 203.966.3911.

