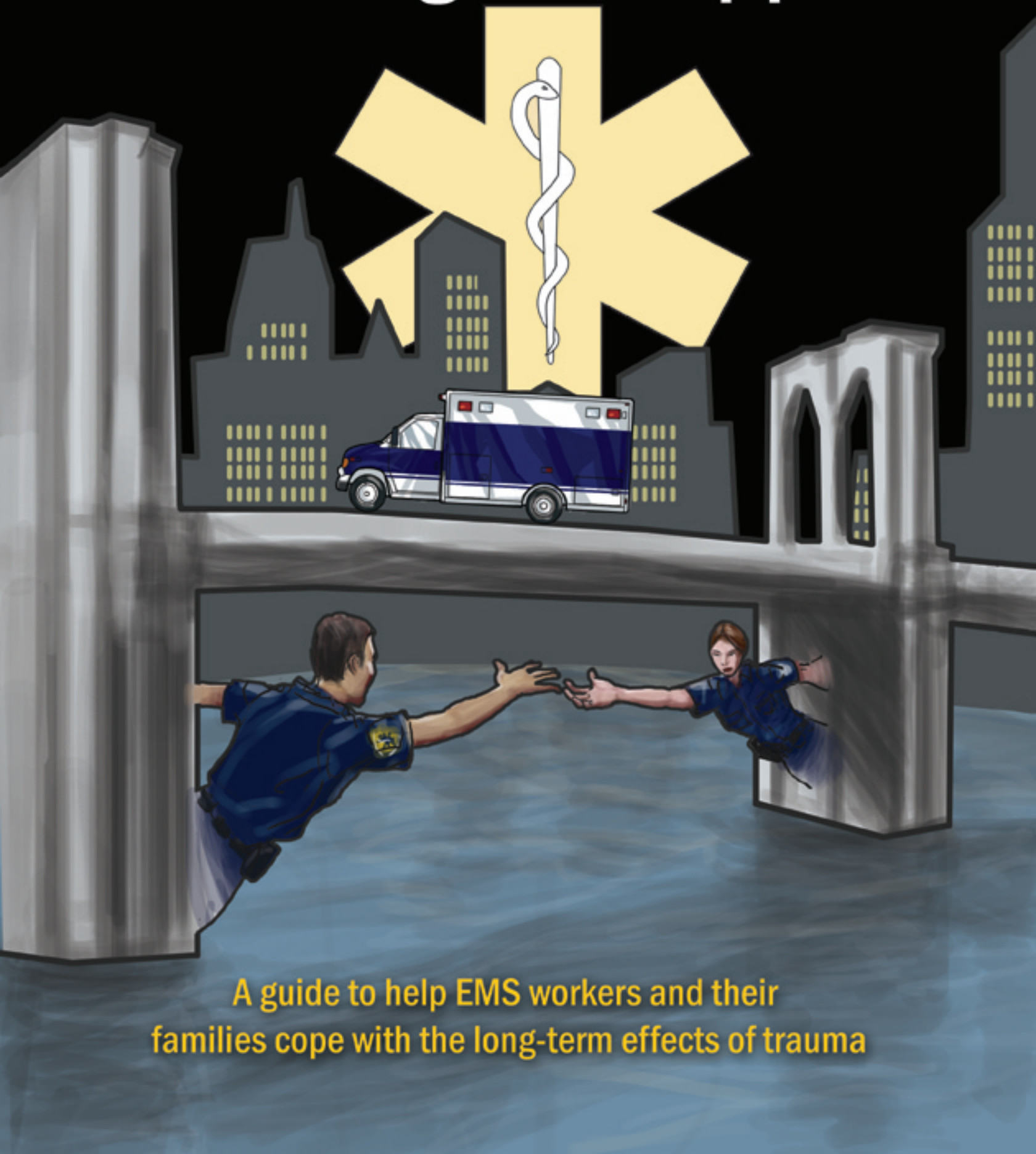


# Reaching For Support



A guide to help EMS workers and their families cope with the long-term effects of trauma

# REACHING FOR SUPPORT

## Thank you

A special thank you to the EMS personnel who participated in the interviews for this project. Your valuable thoughts and insight will help EMS personnel and their families for years to come.

Thank you to Nancy Benedetto, Marie Diglio and everyone at the Regional Emergency Medical Services Council of New York City (REMSCO) for your assistance.

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## FOREWARD

The purpose of this booklet is to assist you in helping a coworker, friend or family member who may be having difficulty coping with the long-term effects of the September 11 terrorist attacks or other trauma. It may also help you better understand and cope with any stress you may have as a result of your job or from everyday life.

In early 2004, interviews were conducted with members from numerous EMS divisions. This book is a compilation of the information taken from those interviews. This is NOT a book of theories from people who weren't at the World Trade Center disaster or who are unfamiliar with EMS. The "experts" are your coworkers who work in the emergency medical services field: those who have experienced disaster firsthand and who are dealing with similar stresses both on the job and at home. These are their stories and advice, in their own words.

In each section there are reflective activities that you can work on alone or with a family member or coworker. These reflections were inspired by the responses in the interviews and are based on proven coping strategies and techniques. Keep in mind that everyone is an individual, and the strategies that work for one person may not work for you or your family. Because people react differently to a situation, some may find this material more useful than others.

Traumatic incidents can affect individuals for many years after the event. It is our hope that by spreading a few of the "lessons learned," you will be able to help take care of your own and provide assistance to those who may need it. We encourage you to take this book home to your families and go over it with them.

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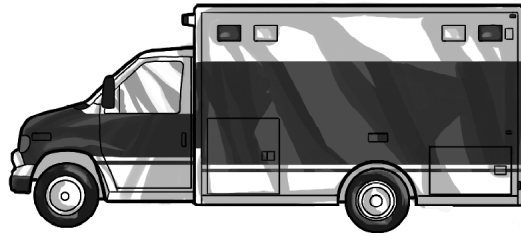
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## THE JOB

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### What is it like being part of EMS?

*"I think you have to be a certain type of person to do [this job]. It is very rewarding."*

*"There is no such thing as a normal day."*

*"You have your busy days; you have your slow days."*

*"Sitting around talking, eating and then all of a sudden the radio cracks and the adrenaline rushes and it is a whole new ball game."*

*"Every day is a unique challenge. You never know what you are gonna do. Where you are gonna go... what is gonna happen... everything changes, every single day. Every call is different. You meet so many kinds of people."*

### What do you like most about your job?

*"The people that I work with... interacting with all of them."*

*"I've always liked the individual patient contact."*

*"I enjoy the stimulation of the variety of the job and the satisfaction from helping people in their time of need."*

*"Dealing with something that is unpredictable, instead of the same boring routine."*

*"I love the quickness of it. The energy in it. The constant changing and helping people."*

*"I like the excitement of going some place and just being able to help somebody."*

*"Being able to help families calm a little bit in stressful situations, especially when they don't know what is going on. Being able to explain to them what is going on or why we are doing certain things, and the opportunity to give them assistance in something that they are not able to handle."*

***"I actually believe we make a difference. You are there for somebody. You could do the most minor thing... but for that person, you changed the world for them. You make them look up to you. They feel a lot better about themselves."***

**EMS INSIGHT**  
**Cultural Differences**

*"The language differences are just tremendous, but also the cultural differences, especially in New York. You have to respect the fact that in [some] cultures, certain things are just not done. It doesn't matter if the patient is dying, you just don't do it. You know, you have a Muslim woman that is dying, she is in cardiac arrest, and the first thing a male [does] is cut her clothes off, and the whole family pushes him and body-slams him against the wall, no, no, you can't do that... It is not that they don't care, it is that the culture doesn't allow for this. So you have to respect, and know a little bit about where you are working and who you are working with, who you are serving."*

*- Paramedic, 4 years*

*"Geriatrics is special to me. I think they are a very needy part of the community who [don't] receive the attention that they should get, and they are very lonely. I feel very special being a part of a corps that I can help one of them."*

**What challenges do you face as a result of your profession?**

*"Being able to adapt to your environment, being that you can have a pediatric one minute and two hours later be dealing with a 99-year-old woman, and the next minute go into a middle-aged person or someone your own age. That is probably the biggest challenge: is being able to adapt to your situation."*

*"Making sure I am up on all the current procedures to give the patient the best possible shot that they can have."*

*"I think one of the unique challenges is coming upon different situations in areas, especially trauma, regarding pediatrics, regarding sudden deaths. Having to communicate with family members prior to any physician being available."*

*"Dealing with a lot of different cultures. There are a lot of ethnic groups that live, especially in this area... a lot of people don't speak English. It is very hard to communicate with somebody."*

## COPING WITH STRESS

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Stress is a part of life; everyone has to deal with stress. Stress can originate from many sources, including your job. EMS work at times can be very stressful. Although stress is common and normal, it can affect your relationships with coworkers, family and friends. It can also affect how well you perform your job. There are many ways to cope positively with stress.

### How do you cope with stress from your job?

*"I try to make sure that I always have times that I relax by myself or even go out with some friends and just relax and talk with them. One way to get around that is not to hang out with people that are EMS-related."*

*"I try to leave [my stress] at work. It doesn't always happen. There is always a job that is gonna get to you. Anything with kids is my weak spot...that usually upsets me."*

*"I think everybody has their own personal hobbies. I like to ski. I like to run. I love to garden. Going out in my garden by myself is my favorite. To be by myself for a while."*

*"I play racquetball once a week."*

*"I go to the golf range, the driving range, and...just swat at the balls. Or I go to the batting cage and just release tension that way."*

*"I tend to just turn my radio up nice and loud on my way home and sing so I could calm down before I get home."*

*"I listen to music in my truck...my truck is my church...I listen to gospel."*

*"We unwind. Sometimes we come out of work and we sit in the parking lot and just B.S. and laugh...it is just something to unwind and maintain a level head."*



### EMS INSIGHT Coping With A Call

*"I have a certain procedure that I do after every single call on my ambulance. When the call is over, the junior man on the team has to discuss the entire call, what do you think we did right and what do you think we did wrong. How can we do it better and how can we correct it. It is sort of like a debriefing that we do to talk it out and if we made a mistake, make it better the next time. So that we don't carry it with us." - EMT, 27 years*

*"I share [things] with my coworkers, crews, supervisors, management. We all talk. We talk about the job, how it went, how it made me feel."*

*"I have two very good partners that [I] can talk [to]. We have very common interests, and if we have problems on a call or something that we did... we can kind of work out that level of stress, as far as performing your job the way it is suppose to be done."*

*"I have my husband to talk to because he has been doing this longer than I have and he has seen a lot more than me."*

Stress can often be exacerbated by traumatic or distressing events. All emergency medical services personnel and their families must cope with the additional stresses that the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks have had on their job and at home.

### EMS REFLECTIONS

Everybody has hobbies they like to do such as reading, writing, gardening or playing sports. Hobbies are a great way to cope with stress from a job or other sources. Think about the ways you cope with stress. Now think about how some of your coworkers or family members cope with theirs. In what ways do you cope the same? In what ways do you cope differently? If you think a coworker or family member could use an idea for a hobby or other coping strategy to better deal with stress, suggest one that works for you. Keep in mind that no two individuals are alike, and what works for you may not necessarily work for your coworker or family member.

As an EMS provider, you may have to respond to large-scale casualty disasters or other distressing events. These traumatic incidents can be very stressful, not only for the victims who experience the event firsthand, but for those who respond to the tragedy or its aftermath. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 are an example of a traumatic event that deeply affected many EMS personnel.

The memories of 9/11 will live in our hearts and minds forever. Some people have been able to talk about their experiences, for others it has been more difficult. Sometimes it helps to know that we are not alone in our thoughts and feelings. This is why we have included this section, which contains some of the thoughts and experiences of EMS personnel on September 11, 2001. If you do not wish to be reminded of the events of 9/11, please skip to the next page (bottom).

*"My brother woke me up with a phone call and said, 'Turn on the TV, any channel.'"*

*"One of my partners was actually Downtown in her private vehicle coming from a doctor's appointment, telling me that debris was falling on her car."*

*"I literally ran out of my house with the baby, arms fully extended, handing [my husband] the child, ran to my car and hauled back. We all had been told to meet at the station...we were gonna divide and find out what we were gonna do."*

*"Everybody that was off-duty showed up at the base...It wasn't nuts. The questions were there, but we just went to our supervisors, let [them] guide us, and we just fell in step. It wasn't hysteria...everybody fell into place."*

*"They emptied out our emergency room...I had to stay there...the rest of the day, which I was very, very upset about. I felt that I should have been [at the Twin Towers]. Had I been down there, I probably wouldn't be here, so I should be thankful."*

*"I was out on the east end of Long Island, watching on television, and from there they called us in to Manhattan to stand by for patients who never came. That's as close as I got to Ground Zero."*

*"I got there, and the person that I had driven with, I turned to her and said, 'I can't do this...I know what is there...I saw them come down'...the last thing I did was watch both buildings fall...And she turned to me and goes... 'You are gonna see a lot worse...you are going through medic school, you are gonna be a medic, you need to man up and realize this is what your job is about.' And that actually woke me up, because I was really having a moment of 'Oh, my God!' I was frozen."*

*"It was horrendous...All I could do is picture those people, thousands of people in distress."*

*"I am across the Bay on the other side and I couldn't do anything. They refused to let me go. It was the most frustrating day in my life...they wouldn't let me leave the route I was on to go, although we called numerous times there."*

*"We went in around 7:00 p.m....to the Financial Center...and ran a triage station...[Instead of] a triage, [it was like] a morgue. The only thing we did the whole night was run an eyewash station. I still remember saying to everybody, we are gonna find somebody... Nothing came out."*



*"[I was] wondering the whole time, where are all the patients?"*

*"I worked an overnight tour [at] Ground Zero... I got to really appreciate the damage. When I stepped*

*out of the ambulance and took a deep breath without my mask on, you knew just exactly what happened there. We lost a lot of people from this department who used to work here and went on to other careers as paramedics and firemen."*

### EMS REFLECTIONS

By understanding the different experiences of your family and friends, you will have a better appreciation of how those close to you have been coping with the events of 9/11 and why. Think about the 9/11 experiences of your friends and family. How were their experiences different from yours? How were they the same? Do you think your relationship with anyone has changed because of your different experiences and, consequently, your different reactions? If so, has this change been negative or positive? If the change has been negative, think together of ways to repair the relationship.

EMS personnel are often asked about their 9/11 experiences. Do you find it easy or difficult to tell your story? Some days may be easier than others depending upon how you feel. Below are some strategies to help you respond to questions about a traumatic event you experienced. If you are reluctant to talk, use one of the techniques below next time someone asks you a question.

*"Sometimes I think you have to explain why you don't want to talk about it."*

#### Tips for discussing a distressing story

Give a brief explanation and change the subject – Talk briefly (a few sentences) about what you experienced and what effects the event has had on you, then change the subject. If the person keeps pressing for details, explain that you do not wish to discuss it further.

Talk in detail with a few – Save detailed discussions about your experience for the rare times when you are talking to someone who is truly interested and is a good listener. Make sure you both have enough time and, most important, that you feel up to it.

Don't discuss it – If you don't feel up to talking about your 9/11 experiences, do not feel pressured to talk about it when asked. Simply tell the person that you do not wish to talk about it at this time.

## MIXED FEELINGS AFTER TRAUMA

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Traumatic events and their aftermath affect people in different ways. Life history, personality, and a person's experience during and after an event all play a role in shaping a person's response to an incident. For some, the impact of 9/11 was immediate. For others, the magnitude of the disaster hit them at a later time.

Sooner or later, the impact of a traumatic event or events in its aftermath affect everybody. When this happens, a person may experience very strong feelings and mixed emotions. In the days and weeks following 9/11, many EMS personnel reported having strong or mixed feelings about the disaster and its aftermath, even if they did not respond to the Twin Towers on the day of the attacks or assist in the subsequent recovery efforts.

**How did you feel when 9/11 first occurred?**

*"I was floored. I didn't know what to think at first."*

*"Shock. Dismay. I was very upset about it."*

*"Crushed and scared. Not knowing what to expect next. I couldn't believe what I was seeing and what happened."*

***"Pretty overwhelmed...as many jobs that you do, you are never really prepared for anything of [that] scale. We have done a lot of multi-casualty incidents, but, of course, nothing like [9/11]."***

*"It was horrendous."*

*"In the beginning it was like shock and awe ...When I was a little girl, I remember watching the news and seeing...pictures of Beirut. I was down there and going, 'This looks exactly like Beirut, but it is not on TV, it is here.'"*

Over time, some of your feelings about a traumatic event may change. This is common for many who experience a distressing event such as a terrorist attack. As time passes, your feelings about 9/11 may continue to change. Keep in mind that there will be days and times when you will feel better than others.

**Do you feel differently today?**

*"I think because it didn't affect [my] immediate family...or my immediate friends...as far as death goes, I got over it pretty quickly."*

*"I still take it to heart. I lost some good friends. Not any family, but still people that were somewhat close to me."*

*"I am still amazed that it happened. It is still like, it is almost like a dream – like you wish we are gonna wake up. My feelings really haven't changed too much since the day this happened. I am still in shock."*

*"Pretty much the same. That I am sorry I wasn't there to help, but I am glad I wasn't there to help."*

*"I don't really think I feel differently today and I don't know if I am just that odd case or a small percent or part of the normal."*

## MIXED FEELINGS AFTER TRAUMA

*"Even to this day, I probably don't know how I feel about [9/11]. It is probably the one thing that scares me the most."*

Reminders of the past are often stored in our subconscious minds. For example, a certain scent may remind you of your mother's home cooking when you were a child. Occasionally you may come across a reminder associated with a traumatic event you previously experienced, such as a certain noise, scent, sight or object. Sometimes these reminders can "trigger" a response such as a strong emotion. Keep in mind that some stressful events you may deal with as part of your day-to-day life may bring back emotions similar to what you experienced on 9/11.

*"Just driving the other day, I heard a song, and it was one of the songs from one of the*

*funerals I was at, and I just got depressed, I got sad. At first, I didn't realize that it was one of the songs."*

Although the feelings may be temporary, they can still be very stressful and upsetting. It is difficult to determine what, if any, triggers will affect an individual. What's important is that you are able to identify the triggers causing your reactions and learn to cope with them properly. If a trigger response does not calm or begin to fade after a few weeks, seek professional assistance.

Some ways of coping with triggers are trying to reduce your exposure to the triggers that upset you and learning relaxation techniques to help reduce your body's response to the trigger, such as meditations and breathing exercises.

### EMS REFLECTIONS

Think about 9/11 and your mind-set about the attacks. What emotions or thoughts were you experiencing in the first few days and weeks after 9/11 first happened? Now that time has passed, have any of your feelings changed since that period? What thoughts or feelings have changed and what have stayed the same? If there are any strong emotions you still have that you feel uncomfortable with (such as extreme anger or an overwhelming sadness), it may help to talk to someone about them.



## 9/11 AND FAMILIES

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The psychological effects of a large-scale disaster are not always limited to people who experience or witness an event firsthand. The 9/11 terrorist attacks, for example, affected both responders and their family members. In many instances, EMS personnel were left to cope with the emotions and reactions of their loved ones as well as their own. For some this has been very difficult.

*"My stepsister, she watched the planes crash into the buildings...so it has affected her."*

*"My oldest is 24 and my youngest is 10. The older ones, I think, were much more affected than the younger ones. They had a lot of anger."*

*"My wife is a medic, but she works in Jersey. She was working that day, saw it, and knew I was going in. She had to deal with that."*

*"My mom...knew that I was working that day and that I usually work Manhattan and I was supposed to be working in the World Trade Center. So she was a bit of a basket case until they found me."*

Traumatic events and their aftermath can take a toll on relationships. 9/11 tore some families apart; it also helped some families become closer. While a number of families have overcome the difficulties that 9/11 has brought, for many it is an ongoing process.

*"I pushed my husband away...It was something like, 'Do you understand what just happened? Don't kiss me, don't touch me, I don't want to hold your hand. I just went to 120 funerals, leave me alone.' [I] didn't want to be around anyone."*

*"If anything it improved our relationship. Because, I guess reality could hit that anything could happen on a day-to-basis, so cherish the time that we have now. I would have to say it has drawn us closer."*

***"It did have an effect...a negative impact. It took me away from my wife for long periods of time. It changed my personality...it is always in the back of your mind, that event, and what is gonna happen next. So it can't not affect your family."***

One of the challenges many responders have faced is that reactions of loved ones to the terrorist attacks have been different from their own. Part of the reason for this is that the 9/11 experiences of many EMS personnel were very different from that of their family and friends.

*"It was, like, you can't possibly understand what it is like to get off a truck and say goodnight to somebody, that they got home safe, and then turn around the next week and have to bury him... You can't understand that. You know?"*

*"I don't think, unless you were physically there, you have any idea of how much impact working that event on day one and day 100 has had on emergency service workers."*

***"We went to a lot of funerals. Funerals of people I didn't even know. I had to explain to my children that I didn't know the [deceased], but we were showing our respect to the [EMS] family. Showing that...our presence was there and that they were loved by all and that their sacrifice was appreciated."***

*"It affected me more [than the rest of my family] because I lost two good friends and I lost a couple of associates that I know."*

Even though you and your family may react and feel differently about a distressing event, families can better support each other if they understand how each member copes with his or her feelings. In order to understand how EMS personnel cope with things, it is helpful that your family has some understanding of EMS culture. It is also important that EMS personnel understand how their loved ones cope with distressing events.

*"I think my family, by having an understanding of what I do, [had] an understanding of why I was down there."*

**How did your family cope with the terrorist attacks?**

*"Both my wife and I...looked for the rational [explanation] of why this happened, I guess to try and understand it. You never understand*

*the philosophical concept of why someone would hate this country as much as they do...so it is very tough to understand, tough to cope."*

*"My wife actually made ribbons and she sold them on the street corner by our house, and we raised over \$1,000, just selling ribbons to people in the neighborhood and then donated it to the Victims' Fund."*

*"I talked with my folks. I talked to my brothers a little bit about it."*

Communication is key in helping families get through difficult periods. It may help to occasionally hold a family discussion and have each member discuss how he or she is feeling about 9/11 or other difficult events that have recently occurred. Keep in mind that if you haven't yet discussed 9/11 in detail with your family, it's not too late. Some EMS personnel have been unable to discuss the event because of the added workload and stress in the aftermath of the disaster.

If you feel you and your family could use additional support, it may help to visit a counselor together. You can go to a private practitioner that specializes in marital or family issues, or you can attend programs available through a mental health provider. See Page 30 for some resources.

## THE ANNIVERSARY

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*"I feel it is important because we can't let these people be forgotten...you see, it is not that [the deceased] is a cop or a firefighter: he is emergency services, and that is what I am...no matter what uniform you are wearing...what really got me about 9/11 was the fact that we came together as one. We weren't cops or firefighters or EMS people...we were emergency services personnel going there to help people that needed us."*

The anniversary of a distressing event can often be a difficult time. Emotions that were originally felt during the event may be re-experienced around an anniversary, or new reactions may arise. Even for people who have been "feeling better," it will be common for many to experience a range of emotions and reactions around the anniversary of 9/11, especially if you lost loved ones or friends on that day.

How do you feel about the anniversary of 9/11?

*"Overwhelmed. Sometimes I feel it is too much. I don't want to watch it over and over and over*

*again. This last time that it came on, that is all they had for days and so I didn't even turn on the TV."*

*"The second year was more difficult...I think I was still numb the first year and then the second year [had] more impact."*

*"I believe it should be recognized. [But] I think at some point it goes to an extreme. I mean, I definitely believe it should never be forgotten, but I think we need to move on somewhat."*

*"I am not a memorial kind of guy. I would just rather go on with life and make sure we don't try to let it happen again."*

### EMS INSIGHT Limit Images Related To 9/11

*"There is so much in the media, it is tough to ignore. The first year, I remember shutting all of the media off. No turning the television on, no radio. Just trying to work through the day without paying any attention to it. That worked pretty well." - Chief, 26 years*



Because an anniversary of a traumatic event can be difficult, it is a good idea to pay extra attention to how your coworkers and family are feeling, as well as to your own emotions. For some, an anniversary can bring about strong feelings; others will not be as affected. Either way, limiting your exposure to television programs and other media events surrounding the anniversary of 9/11 may help you cope during this period. Visual images are ways of "re-experiencing" the event and can lead to increased fears, nightmares and trouble sleeping. Programs to limit include the news and stories about the attacks, the victims or their families, homeland security, war and terrorism.

### How do you cope with the anniversary?

*"I work. A lot of people take off on that day...[at work] we have moments of silence. We all line up outside, they do it all week. We hang our banners. We do what we can."*

*"I did my own little commemorative thing with my 6 year old. We started a patch board for all the Brooklyn firehouses. They have donated*

*patches to us and sent us letters, and we put up patch boards. And the Cyclones, which is the Mets organization, has a commemorative wall that they put up, and they had a fireman's day and we walked around the whole stadium – for three hours, showing off the patches to all the firemen. We also had the widows and their families coming up to us and thank us for showing it."*

*"I went around to a couple of the candle lighting vigils and I went to the church services and that is always a big help."*

*"We lost a family member. He was part of FDNY...we had memorial services...we just sat together as a family and thanked God for all of us being around and being together."*

*"Every year since, we have had a memorial. Up at Forest Park, we hold a little vigil. A priest comes and the local Vietnam vets and the posts come down and we pay tribute."*

*"I sat in front of the TV...my own little ceremony. I was sitting there and just thinking about it, because I knew at least one person that was killed, so I was teary-eyed."*

### EMS REFLECTIONS

Often times a traumatic event can cause a change in perspective. For example, some people who experienced or witnessed the World Trade Center disaster developed a closer relationship with their family and friends. On a sheet of paper, write down a list of friends or family members you do not regularly speak to whom you would like to have more contact with. Use the anniversary of 9/11 or another distressing event you experienced as a time to contact the people on the list, if only just to say hello and to let them know you care.

Name

Telephone Number

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

## CHANGES SINCE 9/11

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Like others who have faced disasters, you and your family have lived through the aftermath of 9/11. Some people feel that they were not as impacted by the events.

*"No. I don't see any changes. Everybody is back to normal."*

*"As far as my life changing, it hasn't really changed my life. Maybe just the way I think, or maybe the way I see certain things, but it hasn't really changed my way of living."*

**For others, September 11 brought about significant changes. Changes may have come at home...**

*"My entire life has shifted since 9/11...I am divorced now. I am back at work. I am back at school. I am running a house by myself."*

*"[My family] is much closer now, believe it or not. It brought us much closer. I think they realized that you can go at any time and you don't really know. Which is something we have always talked about, but I think it is more obvious for them now."*

*"All my values have changed. I appreciate my family more and I try to express that to my friends as well."*

### **At work...**

*"My eyes are open more. I look around before I get out of the ambulance. I look around to see who is around. I pay more attention to things that are around me."*

*"We started making sure our security measures were stepped up on the ambulances. That they*

***"I think it made us all a little bit closer. Because when you see an ambulance come by or pull into the hospital with the 9-1-1 sign on it, it makes you feel proud that you are one of them."***

*were locked constantly on jobs and off jobs. Hazmat awareness training – we took classes. We put disaster plans together for how to deal with something [should] it happen again."*

*"It made me want to be an EMT more and it also helped me be an instructor and to push people to know at least basic CPR so they can help somebody in the street. Just so people know what to do if, God forbid, something happens."*

### **Or in other parts of your life.**

*"You look at things differently. You look at airplanes differently, you look at tractor-trailers differently and you look at tunnels differently. People are more suspicious. They are more on edge. Life is very different post-9/11."*

*"[Even] if you are a positive, outgoing person and you are involved in something like this, it changes your personality. You are not the same person you were pre-9/11."*

*"I think it has changed dramatically. The United States is no longer safe. We always thought we were safe. I mean, walking on a dark alley you might get robbed, but that was, you know, the most severe thing that you*

***"I lost a lot of friends...as far as non-EMS ...[some] are still in my life, but it is not as close, the bond...they don't realize how small EMS is; they don't realize that maybe the cop that walked into that building, you answered calls with him a million times...you may not even know his name...he was a pain in the butt, whatever it was, but when you see his picture you go, 'Oh, my God! I have had to call for backup and he is the one to show up.' I don't think [my friends] realize that we are so inter-connected. They [say], 'You didn't work there – you worked here, so why would that affect you?' So it was hard. I distanced myself from friends that were non-EMS."***

*would be afraid of. Now you can't get on a train, on a plane, you really can't do anything without thinking first. They make you take your shoes off when you get on a plane to go to Florida. It is craziness. You can't bring a backpack to Yankee Stadium anymore. It is the little things that we really took for granted that are not gonna be there anymore."*

*"I am a little more suspicious. I guess a little more aware of my surroundings."*

*"I think everybody – especially if they were involved [in 9/11] – it is not gonna be the same world it used to be. You know, like the official saying is not 'if' they attack again, it's 'when.' So everybody is stressed about it I'm sure. I know I am."*

People who live through a disaster or other traumatic event commonly experience changes. For some, these may be dramatic, such as a change in their way of life (e.g., a physical change to a person's body, a move to a new city, a new job or changes brought on by the loss of a loved one). Others may experience more subtle changes, such as a change in thought (e.g., a change in perspective or feelings about a person, place or thing). Still, some people may experience little or no change. How you cope with changes, and your attitude toward them, will ultimately determine how these changes impact you. It helps to look at the positive side of things, no matter what changes occur. Will you let changes in your life define you or will you adapt and make the most out of them? It is up to you.

### EMS REFLECTIONS

Think about changes that have occurred since 9/11. What changes have happened in your personal life? How have things shifted at work? What has taken place in the country or around the world that has affected you? Do you think 9/11 was a cause for any of these changes? Have changes been for the better or worse? How have you dealt with these changes?

## STRESS REACTIONS TO 9/11

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It is common to experience a number of different reactions after a traumatic event. Feelings of anxiety, upset, anger, fear and shock are normal reactions to a terrorist attack. It is also common for people to have a variety of reactions and to have some days when they are more upset than others. Hundreds of thousands of people reported suffering from stress reactions in the wake of 9/11.

*"I kept having these depressions... I just felt so off-key, shaky and jittery, and didn't want to talk to anybody."*

*"I didn't want to leave my house for like a month. I would lock myself in the house and barely did the daily duties."*

*"Lack of sleep and a lot of stress."*

*"It was very stressful for the first couple of months. Especially between my husband and I. We were not married yet, but we were living together... we fought a little bit more... but all in all, it wasn't horrible."*

*"I notice I am still very edgy. A low-flying plane comes over and, you know, I think about that. Everything comes back instantly."*

*"I was under the train trestle on the bridge on Brooklyn and the sun was rising... and when the train came over with this thunderous noise, I ducked. I thought it was a plane coming down on the top of my head. That would never of happened to me in the past. Scary."*

*"Every time I pass... where the Twin Towers stood... I get this little flutter."*

***"A partner that I had worked with the week before... was working on the fire side and he died... And every time I walked into the ER... they had a color picture of this person, a poster, and I remember walking into St. Luke's and going, 'Oh, my God, I got to get out of here.' The walls are closing in on me, the shortness of breath, you know, just having to get out."***

*"When I came home after coming down from the World Trade Center, I drove into my parking lot and this song by Bette Midler, ('Wind Beneath My Wings') [was playing]. It came on as I opened the gate... and I sat in my car for like an hour after that, crying... the music had just like reached out, grabbed me... and I couldn't leave, I couldn't get out of the car until I just finished having my cry."*

Although stress reactions are normal, they can create problems. For example, difficulty sleeping may make you more tired, affecting your work performance. Trouble concentrating can hurt a child's performance in school. Usually stress reactions will lessen or go away after a few weeks or months.

Sometimes reactions are more severe and can signal a person is suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD is a set of trauma symptoms that occur in response to a traumatic event, such as the ones listed in this section's Signs of Distress Test. While stress reactions are common after trauma, if reactions last longer than a couple of months or interfere with everyday activities, a person may be suffering from PTSD and need professional assistance in dealing with them.

### EMS INSIGHT Coping With PTSD

*"I witnessed it fall apart. I watched the crash. I called it in. We were the first emergency unit there, and I have been dealing with post-traumatic stress. [I've been ] talking to a Counseling Unit once a week, and it has helped tremendously." -EMT, 14 years*

### Signs of Stress Test

Are you or anyone you know suffering from stress reactions related to September 11 or another distressing event? If you feel someone may be having difficulty, go over the activity below. Which feelings or reactions are severe or have lasted for more than several months?\*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nightmares/flashbacks                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Feelings of anger              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty sleeping                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Fears                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Obsessing about 9/11 (or terrorism)   | <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty concentrating       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Memory problems                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Irritable (change from before) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Isolated; withdrawn; unable to fit in | <input type="checkbox"/> Angry outbursts                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eating problems/disorder              | <input type="checkbox"/> Constant worrying              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nervous, overly anxious               | <input type="checkbox"/> Depression, sadness            |

\* If any of these symptoms have been frequently occurring since 9/11, a person should seek professional assistance. See Page 30 for ideas on whom to call.

Because stress reactions to 9/11 or other distressing events can surface from time to time, it will be important that you cope positively with any reactions you may have in the days, months and years ahead.

## COPING WITH 9/11

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Good coping skills will help you deal with your reactions to traumatic or distressing events. People cope in many ways – what works for one person may not work for another. You have to find ways that work best for you. The following coping strategies helped EMS personnel cope with 9/11 and events that occurred in the aftermath. These strategies can be used for other traumatic situations.

*"I think everybody has different coping skills. It is hard to say, what works for me may or may not work for somebody else."*

### How did you initially cope with 9/11?

*"I was down there for a month straight – twelve-hour shifts...from day one, I talked openly and freely with family...and my coworkers about what was going on down there. I think talking about it and not making like this hasn't happened or that all of these people haven't died [helped me]. I didn't keep anything bottled in."*

*"I dug for a few nights. We came down for a few nights and I thought [that] got rid of a lot of stress...that got me through the beginning. It felt like you were doing something...[I] couldn't just sit. So I did that and that seemed to help."*

*"Two of my neighbors, one is a cop, one is a firefighter...we did a lot of talking in that time period. Right over the fence. Sort of decompressing. One had been at Ground Zero on September 11<sup>th</sup>, working on duty, and the other one spent a lot of time out at the landfill. So we were able to talk a lot about our impressions, you know, from three different perspectives. So that helped."*

***"Talking about it...talking to people, friends that were there... Working in the hospital, I saw 20 to 25 people that were injured there that had come in...by talking to them, I guess I was helping them and I was helping [myself] because I was getting a better feel of what was really going on."***

*"There was a group of us, we used to have Thursday night specials and we would share our experiences, we would talk about it [and] you would cry."*

*"We went to a lot of memorial services, and you just pretty much got up every day, because God gives us the ability to do that...to stand on our own two feet and breathe...and hopefully as time goes by, that pain eases a bit. It will never go away, we all know that, but that is how I coped – I got up every day and I tried to be grateful."*

*"Staying busy...everybody...needed to do something."*

*"I baked a couple of pies and stuff and I brought it to the firehouse, just to thank them."*

*"I cope differently than most people. It is easier for me to move on than quite a few other people. Some people are just [more] affected by it...they have to change careers completely. If I could just say, move on, you know, that would be easy, but not everybody is the same."*



*"I always basically faced the fact that there was nothing we could have done different to prevent it. You know, everybody did what they wanted to do. If I was a fireman, I would have done the same thing and I would've ran up the stairs just as fast as the rest of them. If I was a cop, I would have went there. Everybody did what they wanted to do. Not because they had to do it, it's 'cause they wanted to do it and by knowing that and keeping that in mind, I feel a lot more calm about it."*

**How do you cope with 9/11 today?**

*"Working, keeping busy enough so that you really don't have time to think about [9/11]."*

*"Try to get back into a routine."*

*"I have...creative outlets that don't involve EMS so [I] don't have to be reminded of it."*

*"[On] my jacket, I [have] the PD and the Fire patches that commemorated the event. But then I said, 'Wait a minute, I am not a cop, I'm not a fireman, I'm an EMT. I can commemorate*

*my people that got hurt and died'...if you look at the back of [my] jacket, there is a huge patch...it says 'Emergency Medical Technicians – We Will Not Forget.'"*

*"I try to find some sort of good out of it. I mean, maybe this sounds morbid...but there could have been a lot more [killed]. So I try to pull some good, somewhere out of it."*

*"I make a call and speak to somebody who I know is positive. Might be my mother or my friends. It might be a lover. Somebody who can talk to me about what is real today and, you know, bring me back."*

**EMS INSIGHT**  
**How To Cope With A Traumatic Event**

*"Talk. Don't hold it in. Holding it in accomplishes nothing...what I've learned through the years is one incident may not be the killer. One incident may be the trigger. All these incidents that we [go through] are building blocks. And all of a sudden, and I hate to use a cliché – the straw that broke the camel's back – but that next brick might be the one that brings the house down. You never know when that brick is gonna come." - EMT, 27 years*

### EMS INSIGHT How To Cope With A Traumatic Event

*"I definitely recommend not bottling it up. Don't hold your feelings in... have a cry with your friends. Go talk to your good friends. If you have to, go to your religion – talk to someone there. They are always there to listen. Being able to talk about it is always a big thing. Being able to handle it is a big thing. Find a hobby that you like doing and just take it on a little bit more. Find something that is relaxing for you." - EMT, 3 years*

EMS responders have had their own special circumstances to cope with after the terrorist attacks. The mission of EMS, being the care of human beings and preservation of life, is different than the mission of other workers who responded to the tragedy at the Twin Towers. Unlike a lot of other responders who could at least work off some of their frustration by digging, many EMS personnel had to stand at the ready, watch, and wait to tend to anyone found alive or injured during the search.

*"EMS folks are there to help preserve life, and you weren't really able to do that post-collapse and it is extremely frustrating. You are looking to preserve a life, and all you are really doing is removing body parts and helping to organize that effort."*

*"Very sad. It is an overwhelming sadness... the feeling of helplessness is also associated in there because I waited and waited to help, like so many others, and there was nothing to do."*

It is no wonder that EMS personnel on the scene during and after 9/11 reported suffering

a unique and tremendous weight of bearing witness to the tragedy.

*"I think that is where a lot of rescue workers had problems. Throughout my career I have had many coworkers die from natural causes, traumatic causes. I have attended more funerals of people under the age of 40 than over the age of 60. But in our minds, and again even in our line of work, a bus gets into an accident we can fathom 40 people hurt, maybe two or three killed, but for the mind to fathom at one time, 3,000 people dead... it is so large, you shut down... it is a [huge] number to try to comprehend at one time, it almost makes it unreal."*

For some EMS personnel, recovering from 9/11 has involved a process of acknowledging the blessings in their life in order to balance out the devastation they experienced. On the job, this can mean focusing more on the every day calls that are handled, and feeling better about the people that are able to receive care. Off the job, EMS personnel have balanced out their pain and suffering with thankfulness for support received from family, friends and community members.

Keep in mind that some ways of coping are not helpful and can actually create more problems, delay recovery or sometimes worsen reactions. It is important to recognize when you are doing something unhelpful and find a better way to deal with things.

**Is there anything you did that was not helpful?**

*"Maybe I didn't talk about it enough. But at that time, that is all there was to talk about. I mean, how could I talk to another person who may have been feeling the same thing? All I am doing, I felt, was putting my stress on them."*

Many people believe they will be placing additional stress on their friends or family by talking about a distressing subject. Children, in particular, may not discuss a distressing event like 9/11 with their parents because they see that their parents are distressed and they do not wish to upset them. Because of this, a parent may assume that their

child is "okay" about an event, when the child may be having some difficulty dealing with it.

Talking about your experience and how you feel about it is a helpful way to cope with a distressing or disturbing event. However, if you are worried about upsetting your friends or family, talk to a person you trust outside those circles, such as a counselor or member of the clergy. They can assist you with difficulties you may be having as a result of 9/11 or in other parts of your life.

*"I guess [I was] short-tempered. There was a lot of that... There were a lot of unnecessary fights."*

Anger is a natural response to a terrorist attack, particularly when friends or family members are killed in a violent and unwarranted manner. It is okay to feel angry, but how you channel that anger is important. Yelling or lashing out at others is not a good way to cope with angry feelings. Instead, find positive ways, such as calming down by counting backward slowly

### **EMS INSIGHT Talk Things Out**

*"Definitely talk about anything that is bothering you. I have learned to keep myself pretty much open. If something is bothering [you], talk about it, because if you bottle it up inside, you don't know what is gonna happen." - EMT, 5 years*

*"Talk, talk, talk. Talk to whoever is willing to listen... 'Can you spare me a minute?' you know? I have addressed friends and told them, 'Listen, I don't need your advice, I just need to spew. Let me vent.'" - Paramedic, 4 years*

### EMS INSIGHT

#### Anger and Your Family

*"Make sure your family knows what you are going through. If you have your bad days because you are angry... make sure your family understands that that is what you are going through, that is what you are feeling." - EMT, 16 years*

#### Avoid Substance Abuse

*"Don't turn to artificial means to get by. You know, alcohol or drugs, or smoking or eating. Try to talk with whoever makes you feel comfortable. It doesn't have to be your family. It could be a coworker. It could be your doctor. It could be anybody. Whoever makes you feel less stressed." - Paramedic, 14 years*

from 10 to 1 when you feel upset, or writing your thoughts down on a sheet of paper. Talk to a counselor for some more ideas.

*"A lot of my friends...like when we did get together, there was a lot of alcohol."*

*"There was a lot of alcohol...a lot of trouble."*

Drinking is not a helpful way to cope with reactions to a distressing event. Alcohol and other drugs only mask or add to problems; they never make the problems go away. In fact, they often create new problems with

family members. These substances change the way a person thinks, helping someone believe that things are better or worse than they really are. A person may feel better for a little while, but then the effects wear off and depression sets in.

Sometimes it can be difficult for a person to realize that their ways of coping are not helpful. As a caring coworker, friend or family member, you may have to help that person recognize that what they are doing is unhelpful and steer them in the right direction by having them talk with a counselor.

### EMS REFLECTION

Think of all the individuals you have helped recently and of everyone who has provided support to you in the aftermath of 9/11 or with your everyday work. Create two "gratitude" lists. The first list should answer the following question: "In the last month, which calls have I run that involved a citizen that really needed my care or was really appreciative of the care I was able to offer?" The second list should answer the question: "What neighbors, friends, family and community members have supported me in the aftermath of 9/11 or supported me with the difficult everyday job that I do?" If the second list isn't as long as you would like, think about what you can do to reach out to people close to you and tell them that you need more support.

In life, everyone experiences everyday events that may leave a person feeling sad or upset. Usually these feelings are temporary and can be reversed with a few simple coping strategies.

In general, some things that can help when you feel sad are:

- Focusing on the positive things you still have
- Talking to a friend or family member when feeling “blue”
- Doing activities you normally enjoy (hobbies, sports, etc.)
- Doing things to help others (volunteering, etc.)

Sometimes a distressing event such as a terrorist attack or shooting can trigger depression, a more serious reaction. Many responders and their families have reported suffering from depression in the wake of 9/11. Although a person may feel sad or “blue,” that does not mean he or she is depressed. Depression is a serious medical condition that affects a person's body, mood and thoughts. It interferes with a person's everyday functioning and personal relationships.

Below are some warning signs of depression. If anyone you know has been experiencing at least five of the following symptoms for two or more weeks, they may be suffering from depression.

### Signs of Depression

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed.  | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling sad or blue.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty remembering, concentrating or making decisions.  | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling worthless or hopeless; extreme guilt. Has a negative outlook on life.        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much.  | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of energy. Feels tired all the time. Lack of sex drive or sexual difficulties.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Persistent headaches, chronic pain or digestive problems.   | <input type="checkbox"/> Restless or irritable. Overly worried or anxious.                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Changes in appetite and/or weight (gain or loss).   | <input type="checkbox"/> Anger or sadness at the loss of a friend or loved one that doesn't lessen over time. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Change in work performance or style (missing deadlines, calling in sick, decreased involvement with coworkers). | <input type="checkbox"/> Thoughts of suicide or death.  |

### SURVIVOR GUILT

One sign of depression that responders have reported suffering from is “survivor guilt.” Survivor guilt means feeling guilty that you lived when others did not survive. It can cause a person to feel a lot of pressure about the way that they live or work, and even cause them to feel that they should die themselves. Survivor guilt is often difficult to explain to family and friends, and many who suffer with it keep it to themselves. It is a symptom of depression that can be helped with counseling.

## DEPRESSION

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If someone you know is suffering from depression, the most important thing you can do is to assist that person in getting appropriate help. Like other diseases such as diabetes or heart disease, depression often requires medical attention and treatment. Encourage the person to see a health professional as soon as possible. If that person doesn't seek help quickly, talk to someone you trust about the potential problem. Don't assume that someone else is taking care of the problem.

Depression can be treated with medication, counseling or a combination of both. Counseling usually involves talk therapy or psychotherapy, which is a process that helps people become more aware of their own thoughts, feelings, motives, actions and perceptions. It can also teach a person how to cope better with stressful events. With the assistance of a health care professional such

as a psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker or counselor, individuals become more aware of themselves and the issues that are affecting them. Talk therapy can be effective in just a few sessions.

Keep in mind, however, that not all therapies involve traditional methods. There are many non-traditional therapies that can assist in the healing and relaxation of rescue workers. They include licensed massage therapy, acupuncture, yoga and guided imagery. Body work therapists, specific to trauma, can assist in releasing tension and un-discharged energy in a controlled and safe environment. Some examples of body work include Trauma Touch, Shiatsu, and Swedish massage. It is important that nutrition, physical fitness and general wellness are also a focus of the treatment in order to maintain a balance of healing.

### EMS INSIGHT Coping With Depression

*"Lack of sleep, sexual dysfunction, eating changes...not getting along with people, clamming up, becoming reclusive. I had some of those feelings, not from 9/11, but from work...changed my whole lifestyle for a while...so I just went to my doctor and said, 'I am not thinking properly. I am not making good decisions. I need some time off.' He gave me some time off...I think the most important thing that somebody could do is not hold it in, but to verbalize it. Talk. Get it out...with the depression from work, talking to people about work, talking to family, talking to my doctor, definitely got it off my chest and opened me a lot more." - EMT, 27 years*

Emergency medical service personnel are at risk of depression because of the nature of their job. However, EMS and other responders can be at a higher risk of suffering from depression in the wake of a traumatic event such as the September 11 attacks.



Depression is a common long-term reaction to trauma, and one of the most dangerous. If left untreated, depression can cause long-term difficulties, and in severe cases can be fatal. Approximately 15% of people with severe clinical depression commit suicide (source: Wellness Council of America). This number can be higher in the aftermath of a disaster like 9/11. In the United States, suicide is the ninth leading cause of death and the third leading cause of death among youth.

Often, people in need of assistance may not openly ask for help. Because of this, it is important that you become familiar with suicide risk factors, learn to recognize suicidal behavior and warning signs and know what to do if a friend, coworker or family member needs help.

*"I think the family members should learn the signs and the symptoms of stress, of suicide... They don't have to be competent at it, just know what the signs are."*

### Suicide Risk Factors

People who experience any of the following are at an increased risk of suicide:

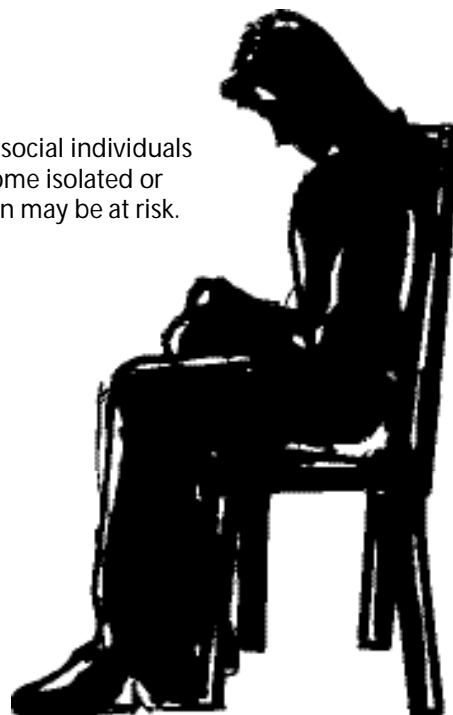
- A traumatic event, such as 9/11.
- Severe depression.
- A life-changing stressor (e.g., loss of job, relationship, finances).
- Death of a loved one, especially if by suicide.
- Previous suicide attempts.
- Exhibiting rage, anger and severe irritability.
- Excess use of drugs or alcohol.

Since you spend a lot of time with your coworkers and family, you are in a position to look for signs that someone you know is or may be becoming a risk for suicide. Look for the following suicide risk signals (source: American Association of Suicidology):

### Signs that someone may be becoming a risk for suicide

- Social isolation and withdrawal.
- Increased use of drugs or alcohol.
- Change in mood, especially increases in anger/irritability.
- Feeling hopeless and depressed.
- Increases in impulsive and risk-taking behavior.
- Rigid thinking, believing there are no solutions and nothing will help (feeling trapped).

Normally social individuals who become isolated or withdrawn may be at risk.



## SUICIDE

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### Additional signs for youth:

- A stressor that feels very important to the child/adolescent (e.g., failing a test, a breakup, an argument with parents).
- An increase in risky behavior, especially with other peers.
- Breaking rules, leaving school, running away from home.
- Focusing on death, death-related music and art.
- Extreme anger, irritability, increasing opposition with adults.



An increase in drug and alcohol use may signal depression and heighten risk for suicide.

If you suspect someone may be suicidal, here are some things you can do to help:

**ASK QUESTIONS:** Ask the person if something is bothering them. If the person is evasive, continue asking questions that will help reveal what's troubling him or her.

*"First, I would speak with them and try to help them plan out a way to get help."*

**LISTEN:** If someone close to you is suicidal, you need to let that person talk. Let that

person express how he or she is feeling. Listen for clues as to their intentions in how they speak. See the activity on Page 27 for some phrases a suicidal person may use.

*"When I went to college...we always had an outlook on...looking out for key words... 'It is not worth it no more. I am better off dead. You guys would be better off without me here. It would be nice to end it all.' [Phrases] like that."*

**DON'T BE AFRAID:** Do not be afraid to ask the person directly if he or she is planning on committing suicide. Using the word "suicide" will not increase the chances that someone will take their own life.

*"Talk to them about it. Tell them straight out... 'You are talking and it sounds like you want to kill yourself. What is going on? What is bothering you?'"*

**ENCOURAGE THE PERSON TO SEEK HELP:** All suicidal thoughts are serious and must be treated as such. Encourage the person to seek help immediately from a counselor or other health professional.

*"I would sit with them and speak to them and then I would start making some plans [to get help] because that is definitely out of my scope and I feel that person would need [professional] intervention."*

**SAFEGUARD THE AREA:** Remove and encourage the person to give up anything they could use to hurt themselves, such as guns, knives or other sharp objects, pills, etc. Removing these items may reduce the possibility of an impulsive suicide and shows your concern and ability to intervene on the person's behalf.

Often, people contemplating suicide provide clues as to their intentions. Look for signs of suicidal behavior. Remember, suicidal behavior does not only include attempts to end one's life. There are many forms, and all must be taken seriously.

### Suicidal Behavior

**Suicidal thoughts** involves thinking about committing suicide, preoccupations with death or secretly wishing for death.

**Self-mutilation** involves injuring one's body on purpose, such as self-cutting, burning the skin or hitting oneself.

**Suicidal threats** involves talking about wanting to commit suicide, threatening to commit suicide or even "just stopping short" of committing suicide in the presence of others (e.g., holding a gun to one's head without pulling the trigger).

**Suicidal gestures** involves acts that may be designed to look like a suicide attempt, even

when the person does not mean to actually commit suicide. Gestures are more frequently observed among children and adolescents.

**Suicidal attempts** include deliberate acts meant to end one's life, even if the means used are not actually life-threatening.

*"I would report it immediately...  
I would go to my manager,  
initially, and I would make sure  
that something was done  
immediately.  
I would not let it go."*

Many suicidal gestures or threats and acts of self-mutilation can lead to accidental death. If someone you know has exhibited any of these behaviors, they must be evaluated by a professional **IMMEDIATELY!**

### **Recognizing Suicidal Statements**

Below are some common statements that people at risk for suicide may say. Next time you talk to someone who may be suffering from depression or is at risk for suicide, listen for statements like the following:

"I feel trapped."

"There is no way out."

"I can't take the pain anymore."

"Nothing will ever get any better."

"There is no reason to live."

"I can't make myself feel better."

"I can't get rid of this depression."

"Nothing will ever be the same anymore."

"No one loves me."

"No one would care if I wasn't around."

"No one even notices that I am here."

"Pretty soon it won't matter anymore."

### EMS INSIGHT

#### What To Do If You Suspect Someone Is Suicidal

*"If [you] see the signs and symptoms, make a phone call. I don't care how pissed off the person gets. Make the phone call. Whether it be to the boss, to the lieutenant, to a fellow worker, and notify them that there might be a problem and this is why...I would rather somebody pull a false alarm than not pull the alarm and lose somebody." - EMT, 27 years*

Sometimes a situation may occur where someone you know is intent on harming himself or herself in the immediate future. Below are some warning signs that signal someone may be preparing to commit suicide soon.

#### Imminent Suicide Warning Signs

- Talking about death.
- Making threats about suicide or statements about death and dying.
- Making a plan for how to attempt suicide.
- Obtaining materials, tools, weapons necessary to attempt suicide.
- Making plans/arrangements for death (changing will, saying goodbye, etc.)
- Giving away belongings.

If someone you know is at risk of imminent suicide, you can still help.

#### What to do in a crisis

**FIND HELP IMMEDIATELY:** Take the person to a local Emergency Room, a local community mental health agency, a family physician or a crisis center. If the person is in treatment, have him/her contact their mental health care provider immediately.

*"I would try to get them to talk to a suicide hotline. If not, I would try to get them to go with me to the hospital...I would break that trust and I would tell the hospital, because that is more important...to get them seen."*

If the crisis is acute, call 9-1-1 immediately or a suicide prevention hotline

**1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433).**

**CLOSELY MONITOR THE PERSON:** Do not leave the person alone. Stay with him or her until help arrives.

**REMOVE MEANS OF SUICIDE:** Remove any objects or items that the person can use to harm himself or herself such as guns, knives, weapons or pills.

September 11-related stressors may make some responders or their family members more vulnerable to depression, and possibly suicide, for years after the attacks. If someone you know is having difficulty dealing with stress, is depressed or shows signs of suicidal behavior, it is important to find help. Seeking assistance from a professional is the best way to help someone in need.

## SEEKING COUNSELING

The decision to seek counseling is never easy for anyone. But for emergency responders who are used to rescuing others, it can be difficult to admit that they need help themselves. However, due to traumatic incidents, both everyday events and large casualty disasters, EMS personnel and their families are finding it helpful to have many types of assistance available to them.

*"It's smart [to seek counseling]. There is too much pressure and strains, with the bosses and the job itself – plus the trauma of the job – anybody who is smart enough to [will] seek help."*

*"I am glad that [coworkers] are seeking [assistance]. Obviously they felt they had a need to seek professional help, and I would encourage them to continue to do so."*

Over the years, many EMS personnel have sought advice from a counselor, especially after 9/11. Most interviewed for this book were very open that they have used counseling. Once you've been in counseling and it helps you and your family, then you have a tendency to want to tell others to go ahead and get help.

*"Most of us do see a therapist or counselor. That is how we get through this... I think that everybody [knows] now... when you are not feeling well, you are not happy anymore, there is a reason for it... you take care of it right away."*

*"I go to a stress debriefer [who is a peer counselor] and I just find that that helps me... I find that discussing with my peers or people who actually are out there and can relate to me - [who] have more compassion and empathy - we can work it out [better] that way."*

Recently, many emergency responders or their family members have reported suffering from PTSD, depression or other health-related issues. While some have sought assistance from a counselor, others have not.

*"[For] a lot of people, [seeing a counselor] is a tough thing to swallow. People don't want to admit to stuff like that. I would do whatever I could to help them and encourage them to keep going."*

*"I am not gonna look down upon someone because they are looking to talk to a therapist. If you need to do it, you need to do it... you need to make yourself better."*

***"I had a case where I lost a kid... we worked our [tails] off and we lost him... [I] went into Coney Island Hospital, and I walked over to Psych and I knocked on the door. I said, 'I gotta speak with a psychiatrist'... They brought him out and he said, 'What's the problem?' I said, 'Listen, I just... lost a kid. I don't know if I screwed up, I don't know if it was just his time or what, but I need to talk.' He took me in the office, we spoke for 15 or 20 minutes. I walked out, I thought I was a new person. I didn't own it anymore."***



## SEEKING COUNSELING

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For those who have not sought help, now may be the time. If you or someone you know needs assistance or may benefit from talking with a mental health professional, contact REMSCO's Critical Incident Response Team or one of the other resources listed below. There are numerous programs and services available to EMS personnel and their families.

### [Regional EMS Council Critical Incident Response Team](#)

The program provides educational and informational programs, resource and referral information, confidential individual and family support and critical incident response services. The NYC REMSCO Critical Incident Response Team helps EMS providers deal with the effects of traumatic stress caused by a critical incident. The Team consists of mental health professionals, EMS peers and clergy. Services are available to all EMS agencies and individual providers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

**1-866-392-3572      [www.nycremsco.org](http://www.nycremsco.org)**

### [Additional Resources](#)

#### **NEW YORK DISASTER COUNSELING COALITION (NYDCC)**

Types of Services: Confidential mental health services for uniformed service personnel and families.

Phone Number: (212) 582-8208

#### **ST. VINCENT'S HOSPITAL – WTC HEALING SERVICES PUBLIC SAFETY WORKER PROGRAM**

Type of Services: Staffed by clinicians who provide confidential mental health counseling support, education and outreach to uniformed and civilian public service workers and their families.

Phone Number: (718) 818-5052

#### **COLUMBIA CARES**

Types of Services: Staffed by senior clinicians who will assess needs and make necessary referrals.

Phone Number: 1-800-845-8965

#### **FDNY COUNSELING SERVICES UNIT (CSU)**

Types of Services: Staffed by licensed clinicians and peer counselors who provide referral services and individual, couples and family counseling on a variety of issues.

Phone Number: (212) 570-1693

#### **SAFE HORIZON/PROJECT RESCUE AND RECOVERY**

Types of Services: Individual and couples therapy for all public safety workers.

Phone Number: (347) 328-8110 or call the 9/11 Support Hotline at 1-866-689-4357

**SUICIDE HOTLINE - 1-800-784-2433**



***"We learned that the plans, the training that we did prior to 9/11 worked. That, that was all validated by the actions of the individual EMTs and medics on the scene."***

It can be difficult to find something positive in a tragedy like September 11. Yet in every disaster, there are some positive outcomes to hold on to. Looking at the positives can help keep a tragedy in perspective and help you cope with feelings of sadness and loss.

What are some of the positives that came out of the attacks?

*"There are positives after every disaster. If we look at what went on, how we reacted and the things we did and we grow from it and move on from it, then as bad as the disaster was, maybe it was necessary. Maybe it was time for us to stop and take another look at what we are doing and how we are doing things."*

*"I think in light of the fact that so many people did die, I think there was a sort of patriotism that came out that was very positive. I believe that the [terrorists] tried to separate people... I think that the way the United States responded, by everybody coming together and supporting New York and Washington and all these places that were directly affected, made a very big impact on the world... I thought there was a real show of patriotism and I was very impressed."*

*"We learned that the plans, the training that we did prior to 9/11 worked. That, that was all validated by the actions of the individual EMTs and medics on the scene. They did an exceptional*

*job of pre- and post-collapse. Give them credit, give their instructors credit and their supervisors credit for making sure that pretty much all of them went home that day. That is fabulous."*

*"I started to get a little more respect from some of my close friends... My best friend in particular, actually got a clue as to why I do what I do and she even said to me, 'You know, you are right; people don't understand what you guys do.' It was like a little bit of an eye-opening experience."*

*"So many more people are now aware that the United States is not all there is. There is a whole world out there and we are all a part of the whole world. We cannot ignore what happens in Israel or Madrid or Germany. We have to understand."*

*"People in New York City got more courteous. People actually let me into the left-hand lane... I think people realized that life is a valuable asset. People also realized that the guy that is standing next to you may have sustained a major loss, something more than you can even fathom."*

*"That is [where 9/11] helped a lot, it helped me prepare my family for unexpected events."*

*"When I wake up in the morning... and I get my kids ready and [I'm] rushing them out the door, I stop for 10 or 15 seconds and realize, wow, it is a beautiful day, it is great!"*

## REFLECTIONS AND FINAL THOUGHTS

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***“As far as EMS goes, I feel it is growing. I am very proud to be an instructor and to teach these people what to do and how to save lives. I think the field is only getting better.”***

*“It is still hard to believe that it happened. I didn’t grow up in Manhattan or the City, but... I always saw the Trade Center. Now, we don’t see it. It is really hard to believe.”*

*“I think even to this day the people that walked across that bridge and the people that ended up finally walking home and getting home, learned to appreciate the fact that they made it home. I know I did personally.”*

*“It hit me hard because my father used to work in the Trade Center for 20 years before he retired a couple years back and I used to visit it all the time and I knew one of the Towers like the back of my hand.”*

*“I guess having been through [9/11], you feel like you can handle pretty much anything that comes along. But that was, in some senses, a conventional incident. It was a fire and a building collapse. We haven’t dealt with chemical or biological, and it is all very unsettling.”*

*“You have a whole life... do your best not only [in] this job, but any job. Don’t let [the stress] consume you and pile up. Get out, smell the flowers, go on vacation, leave the job at the job.”*

*“Just make sure you do everything within your limits... I have always told people, ‘Be honest with yourself. Be honest with the people that you are around, especially if you are working with them.’ If you have a problem, EMS workers are there to*

*talk to you. It doesn’t matter if you gotta go and talk to St. John’s or the fire department units... If you need someone to talk to... find someone. Make sure you talk your things out.”*

*“Treat people as you would want them to treat you. Respect them. Show compassion toward their personal needs... when I do that I get very positive feedback and more help when I need it.”*

*“[Sometimes] there is a lot of... rivalry between your EMS family and your family at home... I think [both families] need to learn how to work hand in hand [to help those we care about]... I think EMS riders and their families should remember that we are not separate—we are equal and we share the load.”*

*“Be open. Understand your loved one [who is part of EMS]. Don’t shrug [them] off... if they are trying to tell you about a particular job, maybe it is not because they want to gross you out, but maybe it is because they need to talk about it. So... just step back and listen. Maybe that is all they need. Or every once in a while call them up and ask how is work today. You know. We don’t have a normal job, we don’t work normal hours, but it is nice that your family can check in once in a while.”*

*“As far as EMS goes, I feel it is growing. I am very proud to be an instructor and to teach these people what to do and how to save lives. I think the field is only getting better.”*



TWIN  
TOWERS  
FUND™

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