

A Call for All Emergency Responders to Receive De-Escalation Training

How do we close gaps in disaster service provision for those most in need?

How can we foster a safer environment for all emergency responders, especially volunteers?

What's missing in our disaster response training programs?

When disaster strikes, an unbelievable breadth and depth of individuals, organizations, and agencies mobilize to establish and delivery emergency response services to those affected. From sheltering operations to emergency food, clothing donation distribution to relief registration, there are a wide range of touch points between responders and communities affected. From my own experience as an emergency responder, and additional research into responder safety trends, I've found a systematic lack of training for responders around behavioral health and de-escalation. This lack of training leaves not only responders vulnerable to escalating situations, but also those in congregate settings such as sheltering and feeding operations.

Three Key Topics to Bring to Disaster Response Operations

1 Understanding Disaster Mental Health
Responders, career and volunteer, must understand the various behavioral health impacts and outcomes for the communities they enter to serve. Communities in the first stages of recovery deserve compassionate and informed responders prepared to treat them with dignity and respect and they navigate an extremely challenge road to recovery.

2 Identifying Behavioral Health Needs
It's extremely challenging for individuals and families to navigate the disaster recovery landscape – where to go, what services to seek, eligibility, processes, etc. This is exasperated when simultaneously experiencing acute trauma responses. Educating responders on identifying behavioral health needs will help integrate mental health services more efficiently.

3 De-escalation Tactics
While all operations strive to avoid safety incidents, they can occur. Responders must be equipped with tactical de-escalation training to recognize when a situation is escalating, and appropriately work to de-escalate it before anyone becomes unsafe. This benefits not only responders and those experiencing a traumatic response, but also those in large congregate settings.

Disaster responder trainings focus on tactical knowledge – operations, incident command, paperwork – **failing to see de-escalation training as a critical capacity and continuity builder.**

Case Study: De-Escalation Training for Law Enforcement

As major violent incidents, such as George Floyd's death, garnered critical media attention, calls for de-escalation training for law enforcement agencies grew in momentum and implementation. In a short period of time, we already see incredible positive impacts on both communities served and law enforcement officials.

- ↑ Increased responses without force
- ↑ Increased job performance
- ↑ Increased integration with mental health service providers

These outcomes serve as a beacon for the disaster response industry, and a clear demonstration of de-escalation trainings' efficacy for both those served and those serving.

Taken together, I believe integrating these three key educational and training steps to the disaster response landscape will increase survivor access to services, integration with mental healthcare and disaster response, and volunteer and career responder safety and performance.

Citations:

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