

Helping in Complex Emergencies



Reception Centres, Shelters and Family Assistance Centre Operations: Holding Environments in Times of Emergencies

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Topics

- Learning Objectives
- The Holding Environment
- Reception Centres
- Shelters and Sheltering
- Family Assistance Centre Operations
- Common Stress Reactions
- Closing a Holding Environment
- Conclusion

INTRODUCTIONS

Please think about what brought you to this workshop and consider one or two things you would like to get out of participating today...



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Learning Objectives

- Understand how to establish settings for those impacted by emergencies
- Be familiar with the typical holding environments established in relation to the type of precipitating event
- Understand the structure of these environments and the needs of those impacted
- Know when and how to close holding environments appropriately
- Understand the need for self-care for workers in these environments

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The Holding Environment

- Emergencies differ in scope, intensity and duration
- These events are disruptive to those impacted and impair adequate coping
- As a result, a need for holding or recovery environments is created
- These environments differ in levels of services provided

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Holding Environment Case Example: St. Paul's Chapel and "Radical Hospitality"



Definitions: Reception Centre

- A place where distressed people gather to receive information and support
- Most often is not a 24-hour operation
- Shuts down when critical incident ends and no further information will be provided or when the incident requires a Shelter or Family Assistance Centre to be opened

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Definitions: Shelter

- A place of refuge that provides life-sustaining services in a congregate facility for individuals who have been displaced by an emergency or disaster
- 24-hour operation – provides food, sleeping dormitories, and information on the status of the incident
- Shelter operations close when those affected have returned to their primary dwelling or have obtained transitional housing

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Shelter Life



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Definitions: Family Assistance Centre

- Purposes:
 - To provide relatives of victims with information and access to services they may need
 - To protect families from the media and curiosity seekers
 - To allow investigators and the medical examiner/coroner access to families so they can obtain information more easily
- Often run concurrently with rescue/recovery efforts and morgue operations during a mass casualty incident response
- FAC ends operations when identification of remains has been given to families and there are no additional needs

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Reception Centre Components

- Provision of information – briefings
- Food, beverages
- Mental health and spiritual care support
- Child care (if reception center will remain open for more than one operational period)

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Reception Centre Initial Actions

- Determine location using considerations of size needed and daily availability
- Ensure location is a convenient and accessible gathering place for family and friends
- Develop an ongoing staff schedule
- Plan for schedule of meals
- Assign an individual with authority and access to timely information to provide briefings to those affected
- Begin to assess if Reception Centre will transition to a Shelter or Family Assistance Centre, and if so, is the current space adequate

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Shelters

- Provide a safe environment for large groups of individuals/families temporarily displaced from home
- May or may not involve fatalities and lost or missing individuals
- Inherently stressful, so take care to structure well, minimize discomfort

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Shelter Components

- Registration Area
- Sleeping Dormitories
- Feeding Area
- Staff Break Room/Meeting Area
- Recreation Area
- Information Centre - verbal and written guidance
- Security
- Pet Care (in some instances)

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Shelter Planning Considerations

- Determine shelter site(s) considering adequate space and bathroom facilities, safety, accessibility for those mobility impaired, and appropriate distance from the incident site
- Determine shelter management team
- Create logistics plan for transfer of needed materials to shelter(s): cots, telephones, computers, etc.
- Determine a plan for provision of meals and assess for any necessary meal considerations to accommodate religious or cultural needs
- Establish standard shift schedules for staff, usually for 9 to 13 hours

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Shelter Planning Considerations

- Determine identification system for staff and residents
- Determine how shelter will be maintained and cleaned daily
- Determine systems for tracking expenditures and material supplies
- Assess any needs related to special needs populations such as infants, children, seniors, physically or emotionally challenged
- Assess need for health and mental health personnel/spiritual care providers
- Determine if there will be service animals or pets at the shelter(s)
- Establish a plan for providing information to the media as appropriate

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Shelter Activities

- Schedule staff meetings and resident meetings daily to provide timely and accurate information
- Post resident schedules for meals, showering, and quiet times in dormitory area(s)
- Maintain communication with facility representative to ensure residents' needs are being met
- Begin discussion on closing of shelter(s) and plan for residents to return home or relocate to long term housing

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Family Assistance Centres (FACs)

- Activated in mass casualty incidents
- Generally more stressful environments than Reception Centres or Shelters
- Historical Perspective (DVD & Discussion)

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FAC historical background

- Family driven legislation requiring activation of a FAC:
 - AVIATION DISASTER FAMILY ASSISTANCE ACT (1996)
 - FOREIGN AIR CARRIER FAMILY SUPPORT ACT (1997)
 - RAIL PASSENGER DISASTER FAMILY ASSISTANCE ACT (2008)
- NTSB-coordinates and serves as liaison, family briefings, on going family communication
- Transportation carrier- provide manifest to NTSB, secure facilities for family members arriving airport(s), identify and open/maintain incident site (FAC), timely notifications prior to info being released to public,
- American Red Cross –family care and mental health/spiritual care
- WTC FAC opened under this act

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Characteristics of Mass Casualty Incidents

- Mass casualty: Where there are more remains than local resources can handle
 - Leaves lives changed
 - Creates need for teamwork
 - Need for funerals is magnified
 - Requires tremendous sensitivity to needs of those affected



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Characteristics of Mass Casualty Incidents

- Reactions to death are highly personal
 - Reverence for death is based on culture
 - Condition of, and access to, remains shapes reactions
- Honour the deceased and treat their family with utmost respect
- Public is watching you



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FAC Services

Critical Services:

- Victim identification services
- Missing persons operations
- Mental health/Spiritual Care assistance
- Information management

Secondary Services:

- Emergency social services such as financial assistance and emergency benefits

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FAC Mission

- Provide initial information/notifications to family members regarding victims
- Provide psychological and logistical support and services to victims and their family members
- Provide daily briefings to families on the progress of recovery efforts, identification of victims, the investigation, and other areas of concern
- Arrange a memorial service for family members of those who have died
- Provide for the return of personal effects

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The FAC Environment

... should offer

- Organization
 - Calmness
- Professionalism
 - Care
 - Concern

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FAC Planning Considerations

- Quantify definition of mass fatality prior to incident
(# of deceased)
- Pre-identify site(s) in key areas
- Maintain up to date key contact info, internal and external resources
- Expect 5-7 family members/friends per individual affected

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FAC Functional Areas

- Reception/Screening/Registration
- Waiting Area
- Victim Identification Services
 - Death Notification Rooms
- Operations Area/Administrative Offices
- Client Briefing/General Assembly Area
- Social Service Area
- Child Care
- Staff Break Room
- Counseling or Medical Area
- Client Feeding Area
- Reflection Room
- Phone/Computer Area

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FAC Unique Operational Features

- Chaos and confusion, particularly in early stages of operation
- Role ambiguity as operation is established
- Presence of high levels of emotion
- Heightened security and law enforcement
- Media management
- Accurate and timely information to family members before the general public is aware is critical
- Multi-agency coordination
- Presence of language challenges and cultural differences
- Emotional and spiritual impact on families, workers, and community

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Key Roles in FAC Operations

Operations management

- Determines FAC site
- Maintains oversight of the operation
- Determines staff assignments
- Appoints staff member to chair family briefings 1-2x/day
- Liaison to partner groups if present
- Facilitates daily staff briefings
- Ensures policies are enforced
- Maintains communication with chain of command

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Family Care Team Member

- Assigned to a specific family
- Works to meet the needs of that family and their friends
- Receives on going support from mental health and spiritual care personnel

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Family Care Team Tasks

- Provides comfort and compassion
- Helps family connect to support systems (e.g., family, friends, religious affiliations, etc.)
- Demonstrates empathy
- Communicates clearly; uses active listening; validates others thoughts and feelings
- Attends to wishes of family
- Provides accurate and timely information
- Connects family/friends with mental health or spiritual care if assessed to be necessary or helpful and with consent of family

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Family Care Team Tasks

- Assists family with needed tasks
- Aids in problem solving
- Encourages family to make choices
- Allows ventilation of emotions
- Maintains contact with command staff
- Offers family long term aftercare
- Disengages at the appropriate time
- Accepts that family can end the affiliation as desired

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Key Roles in FAC Operations

Mental Health/Spiritual Care

- Provides emotional and spiritual support, crisis intervention
- Assists in connecting family/friends with their support systems
- Attends daily briefings to support family/friends
- Psychoeducation on stress symptoms and coping



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Key Roles in FAC Operations

- Gives information to families regarding supporting children present upon request
- Arranges for appropriate rituals and a memorial in coordination with wishes of family
- Assists with decision making on disposition of remains if applicable
- Supports staff
- Provides guidance to operations management on needs of family/friends

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Key Roles in FAC Operations

Child Care

- Provides a safe holding environment for children
- Scheduled activity periods enables parents to attend briefings and take care of other
- Therapeutic activities to support children's coping



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Key Roles in FAC Operations

Feeding

- Assesses for cultural and religious food needs
- Arranges for timely and ongoing meal delivery
- Sets up meal areas for family/friends
- Determines location of a staff break room

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Key Roles in FAC Operations

Public Affairs

- Sets up area to brief media outside of FAC
- Maintains ongoing communication with media
- Ensures family/friends receive information prior to the public

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Key Roles in FAC Operations

Logistics

- Assesses needs for supplies and equipment
- Ensures timely delivery of necessary items
- Maintains inventory
- Ensures that materials are removed at end of operation

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Key Roles in FAC Operations

Technology

- Works with operations management to determine needs for computers, printers, fax machines, email access and other
- Coordinates arrival of needed equipment with logistics staff
- Provides ongoing technical support to the operation



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Working with Partner Groups

- International Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies
- Healthcare Institutions
- Human Service Organizations
- Faith-Based Organizations
- Government Officials
- Medical Examiners/Coroners
- Law Enforcement
- Military

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Psychosocial Needs in FACs

- Dynamic environment
- Demands on worker are both situational and personal
 - Clients present with a range of needs and reactions
 - Worker also brings his or her own issues and level of well-being: Own losses in relation to the event

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FAC Staffing Considerations

- Chaotic environment, high levels of emotion, need to be very somber for extended periods of time = quicker rates of exhaustion
- Staff must take breaks, have a separate congregating area
- Shifts may need to be shortened
- Staff need mental health/spiritual care consultation available during the assignment
- Optional Debriefings and After Action Reviews
- Staff with particular language skills is a primary consideration

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Victim and Family Categories

- Working definition of victim and family groups should be broad in scope
- Family in these situations is usually defined as anyone whom the primary victim's family considers to be a family member
- Families should determine who they will want with them in these situations

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Key Concerns of Family and Friends

- Where is my loved one's body now?
- How will we will be notified if s/he is recovered?
- When and how will personal effects be returned?
- What is the condition of the body?
- Did s/he suffer?
- How can we get a copy of the Medical Examiner/Coroner's report?
- How will we get remains of our loved ones home?

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Caring for Families and Friends

- Initial needs:
 - Emergency travel if necessary
 - Housing
 - Safety
 - Security
 - Information
 - Physical and emotional comfort
 - Hydration, meals
 - Protection from media
 - Rumour control

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Case Example: Sago Mine Disaster, 2006



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Caring for Families and Friends

- Great emotion not always immediately present
- Many will appear initially dazed or numb and will gradually go through stages of denial, hope, and then grief/despair
- Confusion, difficulty with memory and concentration, and physical symptoms such as headaches, dehydration, elevated blood pressure and gastrointestinal distress are common
- Family members' assumptions and belief systems about the world and their place in it has been shattered

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Caring for Families and Friends

- Irrational beliefs regarding survival of loved ones in face of certain death is common and not abnormal in early stages
- Individuals can experience stress-induced physical or behavioral symptoms of such severity that referral for urgent or immediate care is required

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Caring for Families and Friends

- Acute stress symptoms such as confusion, the presence of intrusive memories, increased anxiety and a sense of disbelief may be present in those who directly experienced or witnessed the incident
- Therapeutic qualities (Hobfoll et al., 2007)
 - Safety
 - Calming
 - Sense of self and community efficacy
 - Connectedness to social support
 - Hope

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Caring for Families and Friends

- Families and friends will forgive any mistakes made if they perceive the care they are receiving is compassionate, sincere and well intentioned
- Do not be fearful of apologizing if you mis-speak or forget a requested action



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Factors Enhancing Resilience in Recovery

- Individuals have been shown care, concern and understanding
- Consistent information was received concerning the event and why current actions have been taken
- Available services and resources have been provided or referred
- Individuals have a strong social network

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AVOID

- Arguing, minimizing problems, providing false assurances or misinformation
- 'I know how you feel'
- References to religious/spiritual comfort that are your own and not the family member's
- Thinking you can make the situation better



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Back Pocket Skills

Know your lines:

- How can I help?
- What can I do for you?
- Have you eaten?
- Do you need water?
- What do you need to do next?
- I hear you...

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Rituals

- Designated area for pictures, messages, mementos, tributes
- Diagrams to identify location where loved ones were lost
- Memorializing those lost – biographies
- Faith-based services as requested by families
- Memorials (1 month) and annual commemorations
- Visits to site where loved ones died escorted by health, mental health and disaster chaplains
- Remnants from the attack site are sometimes requested by families (e.g., rubble that is free of human remains and toxic materials)
- Special considerations for children: drawings, letters, additional support if attending services and memorials

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Best Practice Insights Gained from FAC Operations


- Strong need for continuous flow of information – regularly scheduled family briefings, proactive approach to family issues and requests
- “One stop” support center approach was efficient, provided a safe haven for families and helped facilitate identification process
- Early decisions needed regarding resources for long term emotional, psychological, and financial impact on families

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Best Practice Insights Gained from FAC Operations

- Victims' families must be identified quickly and given access to information and services that are victim-sensitive and easily accessible
- Consistent and equitable support to all victim family groups is a challenge, but important
- Injured survivors required much of the same resource information and access to services as families of deceased - outreach to hospitals is necessary

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Common Stress Reactions

- Emotional: fear; sadness; worry
- Physical: anxiety; headaches; GI distress; fatigue; difficulties with eating, sleeping and concentration
- Behavioral: irritability, increased use of substances (tobacco, alcohol)
- Spiritual: questioning your belief systems; seeking the meaning of the event; anger at a higher power

Reactions are related to one's experiences, culture and belief systems

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Key Factors that Influence Workers

Contributing Factor	Negative Impact	Positive Impact	Uncertain Impact
History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> recent loss/trauma unresolved loss/trauma large number of such life events 		prior professional disaster experience
Coping strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> denial (negative in long-term) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> recollection of pleasurable and soothing experiences (e.g., people, places) support seeking 	
Personality traits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> tendency to overidentify with clients; with difficulty in maintaining healthy boundaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> hardiness (feeling a sense of purpose to one's life and work; belief that one can influence one's own destiny; appreciates challenges and accepts change as normal) sense of internal locus of control tolerance of ambiguity self-awareness 	

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Coping While Under Stress

- Stay connected to support systems
- Take breaks and time off when possible
- Stay hydrated; try to maintain healthy eating habits
- Exercise and engage in hobbies when off duty
- Minimize caffeine, tobacco, alcohol
- Be aware of your stress reactions
- Talk it out if that helps when stress builds
- Embrace tolerance if irritability occurs

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Closing a Holding Environment

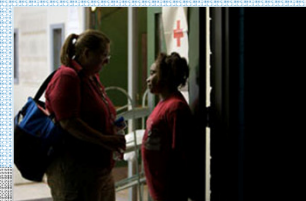
- Tasks include:
 - return of material and supplies
 - transitioning those affected to their next steps toward healing
 - staff out-processing

Often coincides with closing recovery operations:



Closing a Holding Environment

- Clients may resist losing this comfortable and safe haven with known rituals and supports
- Staff also may find return to daily life challenging after intense experience at FAC



Conclusion

- This curriculum has reviewed the basic concepts of operations for Reception Centres, Shelters, and Family Assistance Centres
- Participants should now have an understanding of when these sites are activated, the core components of each site, and the needs of family and friends affected
- This is very tender work – remember to take care of yourself and forgive any mistakes