

# Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergencies

## What does MHPSS refer to?

MHPSS is an umbrella term used in humanitarian and emergency contexts for mental health and psychosocial interventions that includes any support which people receive to protect and promote their well-being and prevent and treat mental health conditions.

## Which sectors should include MHPSS?

All sectors of emergency response need to allocate resources and consider integrating mental health and psychosocial support into their programming (e.g. Psychological First Aid training) to ensure the safety of refugees and staff. HOW services are delivered matters most, either promoting recovery or elevating stress reactions.

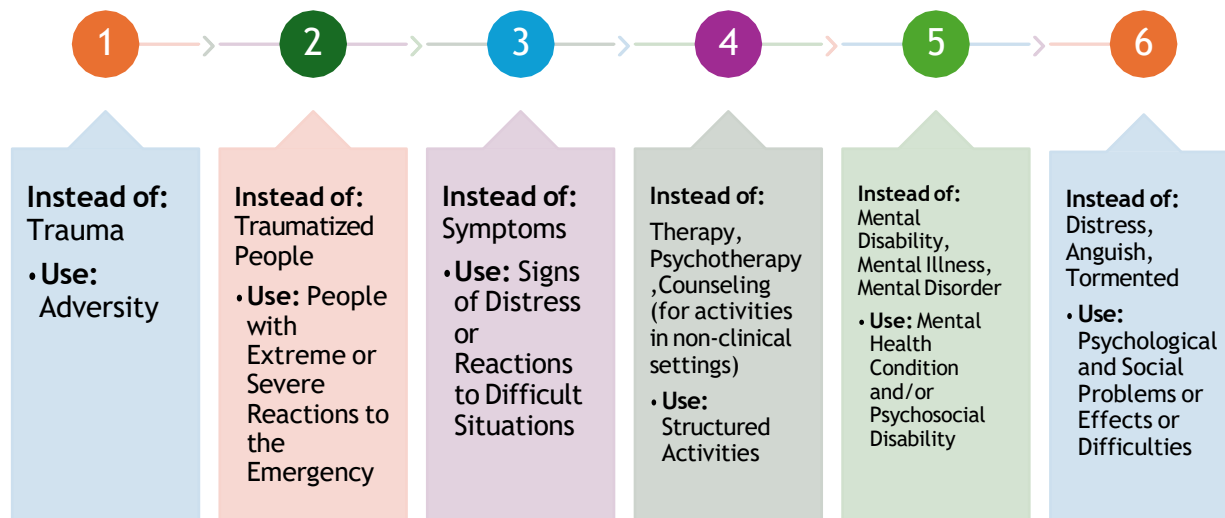


## Guidelines for Describing Stress Reactions and Mental Health:

### 1. Do Not Pathologize Stress Reactions:

- Normalize these reactions and emphasize resilience and coping strategies.
- Refer individuals who need specialized mental health care to appropriate services.

### 2. Terminology Adjustments:



## **Key Facts:**

**Psychological Distress:** Almost all people affected by emergencies will experience psychological distress, which for most individuals will improve over time.

**Prevalence of Mental Conditions:** Among people who have experienced war or other conflict in the previous 10 years, one in five (22%) will have mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia.

**Vulnerability of People with Severe Mental Conditions:** Individuals with severe mental conditions are especially vulnerable during emergencies and need immediate access to mental health care and other basic needs.

**Guidelines for Mental Health Care:** International guidelines recommend a range of services from basic services to clinical care. Mental health care should be made available immediately for specific, urgent mental health problems as part of the overall health response.

**Opportunity for System Building:** Despite the adverse effects of emergencies on mental health, these situations present opportunities to build sustainable mental health systems for all people in need.

Emergencies significantly impact mental health, leading to a wide range of problems. Most people experience psychological distress, which often improves over time. However, the prevalence of mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety can more than double during crises.

Mental health care should be part of emergency responses at multiple levels, from basic needs services to specialized services. This approach helps to address immediate needs and build more resilient, long-term mental health systems. Countries affected by conflicts and natural disasters have successfully used these situations to improve and expand their mental health services. This demonstrates that crises can also catalyze positive changes in mental health care.

## **Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Guidelines**

More guidelines and tools by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Interagency Standing Committee (IASC) are available [here](#) (see the list below for reference).

### **1. Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergencies and Humanitarian Settings**

- Introducing Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) in Emergencies: An online orientation course to strengthen the competencies of health sector actors working in emergencies.
- IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings
- WHO Build Back Better: Sustainable Mental Health Care after Emergencies: Focuses on rebuilding mental health systems post-emergencies.
- IASC Community-Based Approaches to MHPSS Programmes: A Guidance Note: Practical advice on community-based mental health and psychosocial support programs.
- IASC MHPSS Advocacy Package: Tools and resources for advocacy in MHPSS.

### **2. Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Interventions**

- WHO Psychological First Aid (PFA) Guide for Field Workers: Practical advice for providing emergency mental health support.

- WHO Live Life: An Implementation Guide for Suicide Prevention in Countries: Comprehensive approach for implementing suicide prevention strategies.
- WHO Early Adolescent Skills for Emotions (EASE): Group-based intervention for adolescents exposed to adversity.
- WHO Self-Help Plus (SH+): Self-help intervention for reducing psychological distress.
- WHO Problem Management Plus (PM+): Scalable intervention for managing stress and improving psychosocial well-being.
- WHO Interpersonal Therapy for Depression (IPT): Specialized services focused on treating depression by addressing interpersonal issues.
- WHO Thinking Healthy: Cognitive-behavioral intervention for perinatal depression.
- WHO mhGAP Intervention Guide: Interventions for non-specialists to manage mental, neurological, and substance use disorders.

### **3. Mental Health in Vulnerable Populations during Emergencies**

- WHO Mental Health Promotion and Mental Health Care in Refugees and Migrants: Technical Guidance: Strategies for mental health promotion and care in refugees and migrants.
- WHO Mental Health of Refugees and Migrants: Risk and Protective Factors and Access to Care: Highlights mental health challenges and protective factors for refugees and migrants.
- WHO QualityRights: Mental Health and Human Rights: Initiative to improve quality and rights of mental health services for people who has severe mental health conditions
- IASC Addressing Suicide in Humanitarian Settings: Framework for addressing suicide in humanitarian contexts.
- WHO Training Manual for Surveillance of Suicide and Self-Harm in Communities via Key Informants: Guidance for setting up community-based surveillance systems.
- WHO Preventing Suicide: A Community Engagement Toolkit: Strategies for community engagement in suicide prevention.
- IASC Information Note: Disability and Inclusion in MHPSS: Emphasizes the inclusion of people with disabilities in MHPSS programs.
- WHO Framework for Meaningful Engagement of People Living with Noncommunicable Diseases, and Mental Health and Neurological Conditions: Principles for engaging people in policy and program development.
- WHO Mental Health of People with HIV: Recommendations for integrating mental health into HIV care.
- WHO Psychical Health Condition and Mental Health: Guidance on managing physical and mental health comorbidities.
- WHO Mental Health of People with Neglected Tropical Diseases: Towards a Person-Centred Approach: Integrates mental health care with services for neglected tropical diseases.
- IASC Living with the Times: A Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Toolkit for Older Adults during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Toolkit to support older adults during COVID-19.
- WHO Responding to Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Violence against Women: Recommendations for responding effectively to violence in emergencies.
- WHO Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: Guidance on sexual and reproductive health for vulnerable populations.