

HOW TO SUPPORT VOLUNTEER TEAMS

LEADERSHIP SKILLS

- Create a sense of belonging and 'togetherness' through regular team meetings.
- Talk openly about stress, the demands of the work and psychosocial support so volunteers feel safe in expressing their feelings and concerns without fearing adverse consequences.
- Lead by example by being a good role model. Your aim is to create a trusting and supportive culture within your team of volunteers.
- Respect confidentiality to create a safe environment for others to seek support.
- Make yourself available for supervision or private conversations with individual staff members.
- Proactively reach out and approach volunteers who you feel may be in distress and in need of additional support.

TEAM MEETINGS AND VOLUNTEER TEAM MANAGEMENT

- Start each shift with a short meeting to gather all the volunteers in your team.
- Rotate volunteers working in more frontline positions where they directly engage with affected individuals and families, with volunteers covering more support functions (e.g., warehouse). The rotation shift system can help minimise volunteers feeling overwhelmed or confronted with distressed persons, and also exposes new volunteers to a wider variety of tasks.
- Pair more experienced volunteers with new volunteers (also known as spontaneous volunteers). If all volunteers in one team are new, then consider creating smaller teams as their supervision and support needs are often higher than more experienced volunteers.
- Inform volunteers that they can decline any task if for any reason they do not feel capable of carrying it out (e.g., lack the knowledge, skills or personal capacity).
- Prepare volunteers for the difficult and challenging tasks of witnessing death, distress and providing support for bereaved and separated families.

CHECK-INS AMONGST VOLUNTEERS

- Pair volunteers together, either they spontaneously pair up, or pairs are allocated by the Volunteer Team Leader. All volunteers are given a 'Buddy'. Buddies support each other on a daily basis. Each buddy checks in, by calling or in person, with the other at the beginning and end of each day or shift.



- The buddy is the first person a volunteer contacts in case of problems (e.g., sick, struggling to access branch office, safety needs etc). This is empowering and will enhance their responsibility as team members.
- Ask how volunteers have managed difficult experiences in previous emergencies they may have responded to.

PEER SUPPORT

- Volunteers or staff members who are trained in Psychological First Aid, may like to become a 'Peer supporter' – where they formally support other volunteers who may be struggling. Peer supporters are trained to assess the needs of another person in distress, to supportively listen and to refer.
- Regularly discuss basic self-care tips and positive coping strategies.

TEAM COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

- Create instant messaging groups (e.g., Telegram, Signal or WhatsApp groups) to enable volunteer teams to easily communicate with each other.
- Insist that communication platforms should be for information sharing, communication purposes and for positive messages only. The sharing of distressing images on social media and instant messaging groups by volunteers should be discouraged.
- Discuss with volunteers how to handle interest from the media and communications teams to maintain the dignity of individuals and families being portrayed.

APPRECIATION OF VOLUNTEERS AND STAFF MEMBERS

- Show appreciation and thank the volunteers for services to humanity at team meetings and at the end of the day or shift.
- Send volunteers an e-mail, message on communication channels, or a letter of appreciation for their work and time.
- Arrange a small gathering, perhaps at the end of a week for volunteer teams.
- Consider creating a 'Volunteer of the Week' profile on a notice board in a Branch Office.
- Celebrate team and individual successes however small.

