



Bureau of Land Management – Critical Incident Stress Management Program

Immediate Stress Management



- Agency politics
- Stress from the firefighter culture: *show no weakness*
- Guilt from taking time off during fire season
- Inadequate salary or compensation
- Station/base relationships and crew personality conflicts
- Perceived lack of support from chain of command
- Long shifts with little time in between
- Lack of sleep, sleep disruption
Startle awakenings
- Environmental stressors: Heat, smoke, snags, deadly environments and other dangers inherent in firefighting
- Exposure to severely injured or dead; human suffering
- Near death experiences – high probability of on-the-job injury
- Search, rescue, and recovery activities
- Family issues including those that arise out of “the job vs. family” loyalty
- Missing birthdays, holidays and other special occasions
- Not being able to manage your schedule because you might be called to a fire – canceling plans
- Poor leadership
- Exposure to camp crud, sinus problems, poison oak and other environmental related illnesses

“Defusing Yourself”

When you are under stress and overwhelmed, you can often feel like you are going to “explode.” Here are some ways you can “defuse” yourself and reduce your stress and frustration in the moment.

1. **Talk to others** – Reaching out to others is the #1 most effective action to reducing stress and frustration. Peer support!
2. **Take deep breaths**—Deep breathing actually slows your heart down and will decrease your body’s stress reaction. However, you need to take at least 10 deep breaths to start the process. Focus on your breathing as you do this.
3. **Relax**—Do you have a place that you can picture in your mind that is calm and relaxing. Look down, close your eyes and picture that place. Picture those support people there that are enjoying that place with you. Focus on the way the air feels, the colors of the surroundings and the calmness of that environment. Breathe deeply. Do this for even just 10 seconds and you will find it can help calm you.
4. **Walk away** - If you are able, take a breather. Take a step away for a minute or two; catch your breath and return.
5. **Remind yourself of the big picture** – In a difficult time, we can often get stuck in the “small stuff” and forget the big picture. Remind yourself of your purpose and bigger goal. Be kind to yourself and take time to remember to take care of yourself.
6. **If it doesn’t work, don’t keep trying it** - If you find yourself getting frustrated and repeating your action, stop. Look to find other solutions or ways to deal with the situation. If needed, ask your peers how they deal.
7. **Humor** – As inappropriate as it may sound or be, try to find the humor in the situation. Maybe you realize that you did something ridiculous in the heat of the moment. Laughter, even if it feels crude or even disrespectful, can be a release of tension. However, be sure you are not laughing at someone else’s expense or bullying.
8. **Accept that Stress responses are adaptive** –The stress you feel is your body telling you that you are facing a challenge. See this stress as positive and don’t try to fight it or ignore it. Appreciate the stress.