

## coming home

*Someone very important to you and your family has just left on a disaster assignment.*

*It is natural for you to be worried about the experiences and possible hardships he or she may face.*

*We want you to know that the safety and well being of your family member is as important to us as it is to you.*

Disaster workers, even when they are serving in a location that's not far from home, need the constant and caring support of families and friends. When they return, they may have some difficulty readjusting to home life. This can create some conflicts and misunderstandings. By sharing this information with you, we hope that your reunion will be a happy one.

If you wish to talk to someone about your family member's assignment, please feel free to call the Emergency Social Services Program Office at:

1-800-585-9559  
(Monday - Friday  
8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.)  
or through

PEP 1-800-663-3456  
(evenings and weekends).

Local ESS contact:



Emergency Preparedness

Emergency Social Services Program  
Ministry of Human Resources

Phone toll free within B.C. 1-800-585-9559



Information provided courtesy of American Red Cross

COPING  
WITH DISASTER

Emotional health issues  
for

# FAMILIES & FRIENDS OF DISASTER WORKERS



The Heart of  
Disaster Response

# Emotional health issues for FAMILIES & FRIENDS OF DISASTER WORKERS

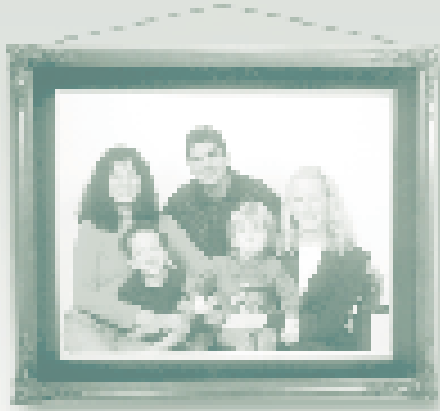
## DEALING WITH STRESS

Your family member has probably told you all the information available when he or she left. It may seem very scanty to you. That's because in the beginning stages of any operation we don't know very much about where the need is the greatest and where we will require the particular skills your family member has to share. We often don't know what accommodations are available, or even whether the telephones work.

This can be a time of great confusion and frustration, as we begin to meet the needs of disaster victims and affected communities. Each disaster relief worker reports as quickly as possible to a headquarters (which may move as additional damage reports come in).

What each relief worker does will change as the needs of the operation change. Relief workers may be reassigned to different locations during the assignment. But one thing we can guarantee is that disaster relief is an opportunity for individuals to find the satisfaction that accompanies helping others and stretching their own limits and potential.

Disaster workers usually work long hours with little time off. They are constantly exposed to scenes of destruction and the strong emotions of victims.



The pace on an operation is accelerated to provide the most assistance to the largest number of people in the shortest possible time, so the lives of victims are back to normal as soon as possible.

We know that you will make contact with your family member as often as possible, and continue to make him or her feel like a part of the family at home. Friendships are formed quickly on disaster assignments, and workers look out for the welfare of each other as if they had been lifelong friends. But even with this camaraderie, it is not the same as news and expressions of caring from home.

Should an emergency arise at home, the Emergency Social Services Program Office can contact the operation. We can provide work numbers for your family member, pass messages, or facilitate a compassionate release from the operation and provide travel home.

## RETURNING HOME

When your family member returns home, he or she may need a little additional time to adjust to the normal pace of everyday life, and may require a few days rest before again picking up the load of responsibilities. It will be important for your family member to talk to you about what happened on the operation and the emotions that accompanied the work. He or she may be proud, frustrated, angry, sad, tearful, and happy all at the same time. It will take a little time for these conflicting emotions to sort themselves out.

He or she may seem preoccupied with the disaster experience, and may not seem to share your excitement, disappointment, or frustration about events at home. Please be assured that what has happened at home is as important as it always was; your family member has just been through an experience that tends to overshadow everyday events and put them in a different perspective when viewed against the enormity of the disaster.

All disaster workers return home with a need to reassure themselves of the safety of their environment. And all workers feel they left something undone on the disaster operation. So it is important that you greet your family member with love and understanding.

