

Beyond Panic Prevention: Addressing Emotion in Emergency Communication

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(Based on work done for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

1. **Fear, Panic, and Denial**
 - a. Panic is relatively rare. People usually don't panic in emergencies.
 - b. Denial is much more common. To reduce denial, provide action opportunities, and accept fear as natural and appropriate.
 - c. Over-reassurance is the wrong response to all levels of fear. Be candid – but gently candid for those in denial.

2. **Vigilance, Hypervigilance, and Paranoia**
 - a. Hypervigilance is a normal response to emergencies. Harness it by telling people what “warning signs” to look for.
 - b. To disentangle hypervigilance from paranoia, validate the hypervigilance.

3. **Empathy, Misery, and Depression**
 - a. Empathy for victims causes sadness; extreme or prolonged sadness turns into misery or even depression.
 - b. Treat the misery as legitimate. Expect people to bear it, and help them bear it by offering them ways to aid victims.

4. **Anger, Hurt, and Guilt**
 - a. Validate anger and provide socially acceptable ways to express it.
 - b. Injured self-esteem (hurt) is a natural response to intentional attacks. Validate it and help people bear it.
 - c. People often feel guilty in an emergency – guilty that they survived, that they can't adequately protect their families, that they are still worried about routine hassles. Once again, help them bear it.

5. **Resilience.** Expect people to recover from emergencies, though perhaps not immediately or easily. “Post-traumatic growth” is real.

6. **You Too.** Emergency responders have all these responses also. Take care of yourself and your people.

Handout from: [Crisis Communication: Guidelines for Action](#)
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