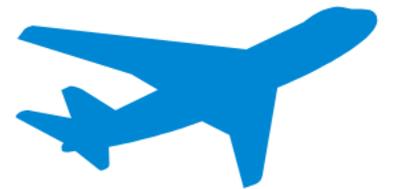


The critical role of effective communication system in assisting victims and their families after an aircraft accident

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Oman Muscat, May 8-9th 2024

«...I've learned that people will forget what you said, will forget what you did but people will never forget how you made them feel»

(Maya Angelou)



A Quick Outlook

Elements of emergency communication

The victims and their needs

Communication in assisting victims and their families

Emergency vs. crisis

Check list and examples



4 ways people process information during an emergency

1. They simplify the message
2. They maintain their convictions and beliefs
3. They seek further information in all possible channels
4. They believe the first message

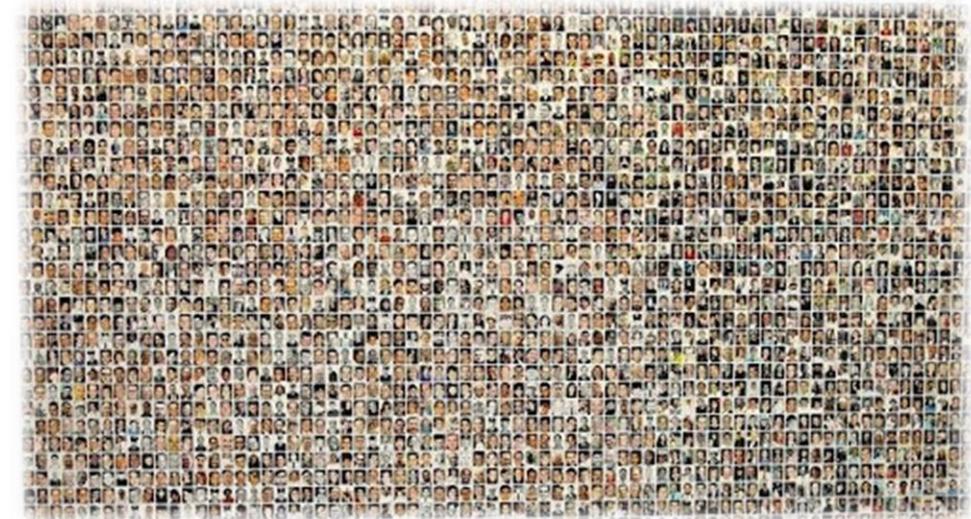


Disasters, catastrophes and mass emergencies are characterized by

Change

High uncertainty
threshold

Complexity



In an emergency...

...the people involved acquire information, process information and act on the basis of the information differently than they would in normal situations

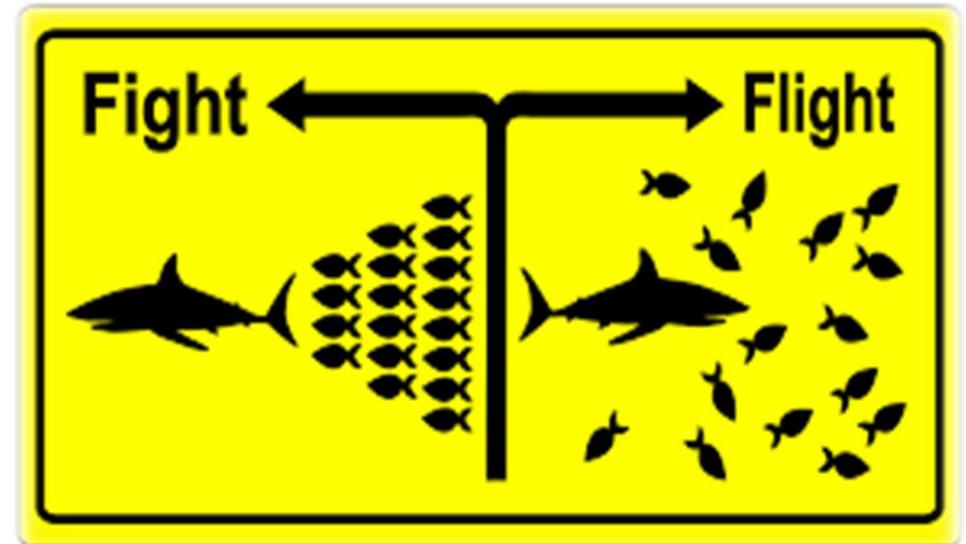
It may happen that people "exaggerate" the response by drawing on basic or instinctive reasoning patterns typical of Fight or Fly or freezing behaviors



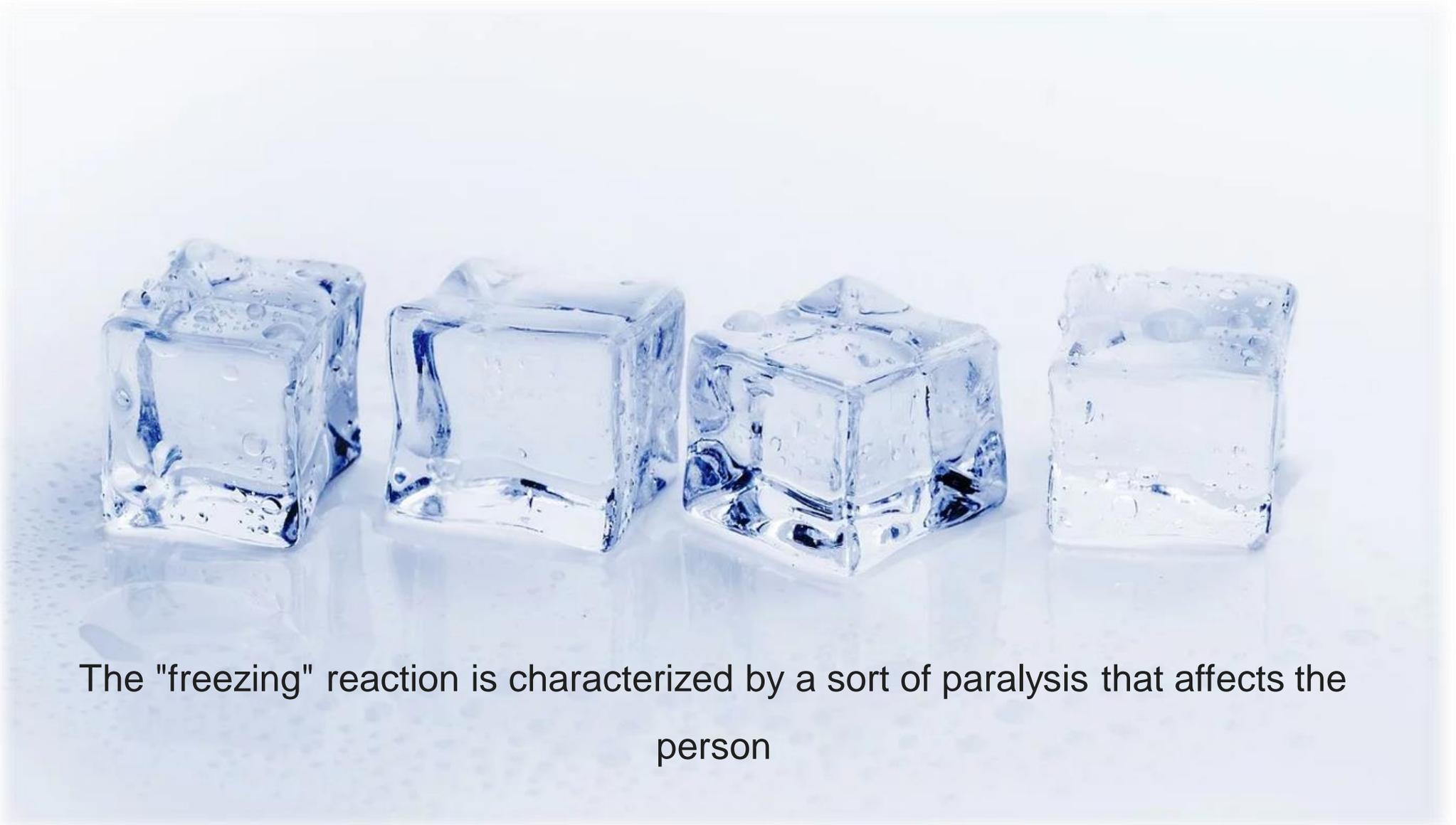
In an emergency...

The fight or flight response is a fundamental response for survival as it activates the neuroendocrine systems that serve to prepare the body to fight or flee.

Following this response, the hypothalamus activates the autonomic nervous system with the release of adrenaline, norepinephrine and other hormones which induce an increase in metabolism, increase in heart rate, respiratory rate and significant changes in the immune system.



In an emergency...



The "freezing" reaction is characterized by a sort of paralysis that affects the person

Effective communication in emergencies

It is not an attempt at mass mental therapy and it is not the magic «pill» that solves all problems



if we want to be able to reduce the psychological impact of an emergency, we must communicate in a way that people feel empowered to act in order to reduce the risk of harm



For an effective communication in emergencies

We have to understand:

How is the information processed?

What mental states and behaviors emerge during a crisis?

What psychological effects occur during each phase of the emergency?

How do you communicate to effectively reach people during these changes in mental states?



Maintain your beliefs

Changing our beliefs during an emergency can be very difficult, we tend not to look for evidence that can call our beliefs into question and we tend to exploit any unclear or conflicting message by interpreting it as consistent with our beliefs



Look for additional information and opinions

Most of us:

- change the TV channel to check if the information is the same
- ask friends or relatives to check that they have received the same information
- look for an opinion leader who we trust and know
- check what your contacts say/think on social media



We believe the first information

Speed of response can be an important factor in reducing harm.

The messages should be:

Simple, credible,
consistent, repeated

Issued from various
sources

Specific to the
emergency we are
experiencing

Propose positive
behaviors to be
implemented



Mental state in emergency

During an emergency people can experience a variety of emotions which is why communication must be able to interact with

Uncertainty

Fear, anxiety,
dread

Disperation
and
impotence

Denial

Panic

....



Immediate reactions to trauma

- Acute anxiety
- Fear
- Agitation
- Memory difficulties
- Marked irritability anger and resentment
- Sensations of unreality and derealization
- Ease of crying
- Sense of desperation and sadness
- Need for protection emotionally inappropriate responses
- Guilt
- Denial reactions
- Freezing reaction



How emergency communication should be managed towards the general public

- Communication must be timely, simple and effective
- Communication must be adapted according to the target it is aimed at
- We must anticipate the spread of fake news
- Consistency between what is declared and what is done is fundamental
- It is important to work preventively
- It is essential to have guidelines and checklists available
- In every communication it is necessary to take into consideration both the emotional and cognitive components
- Put the victims - primary and secondary - and their needs at the forefront



Victims

Direct Victims

- People directly involved in the accident
- People who ~~have to~~ grieve
- People in shock
- People evacuated from the accident site
- Witnesses

Indirect Victims

- The families of the survivors
- The rescuers
- Friends and work colleagues
-



The needs of the victims_1

- Information
- Protection
- Help solving problems
- Repair
- Psychosocial intervention
- Related to the justice system
- Legal or administrative needs
- ...



The needs of the victims_2

NEVER SAY...

- I know how you feel
- (S)He's better now
- (S)He didn't even notice
- Let's talk about something else
- You are strong enough to get through this moment
- You will feel better soon
- Everything happens for a reason, according to a higher plan
- We are not given more than we can handle



Manage the emergency to avoid a crisis

Manage the emergency with Immediate intervention to mitigate damages and contain risks

Testing of the ability to react to avoid reaching a crisis

It is not events that generate the crisis, but how an organization responds to them



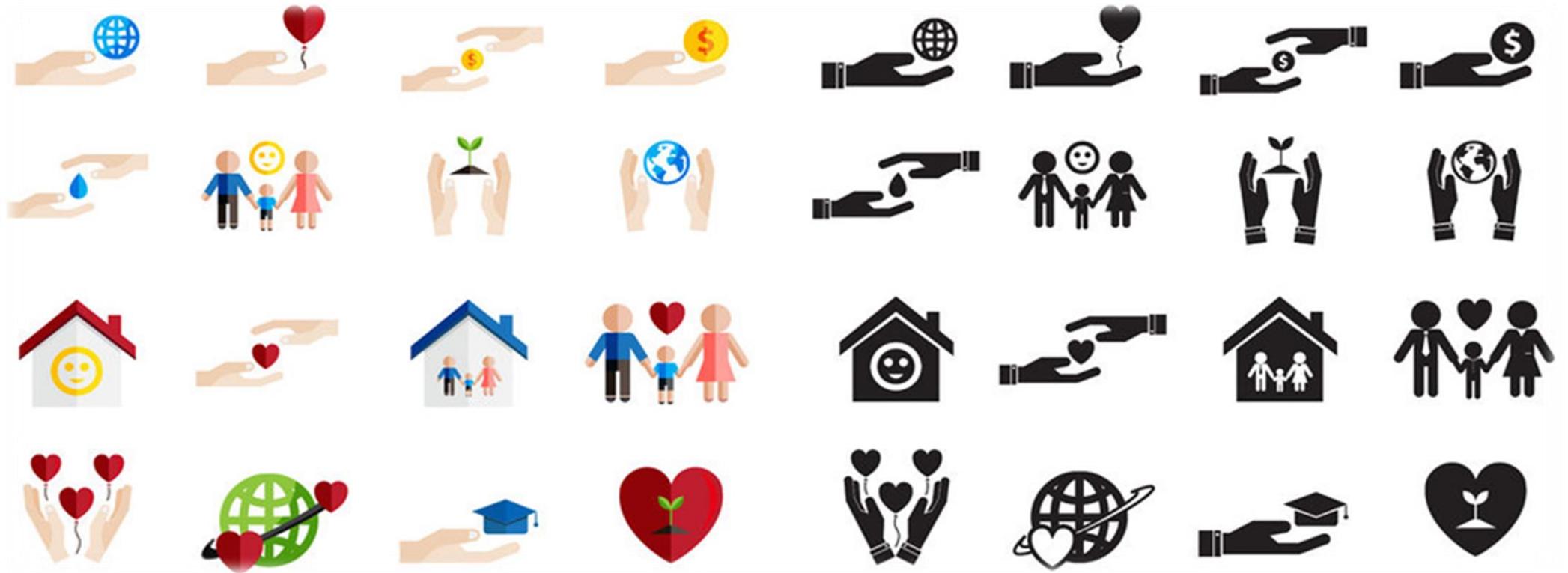
When does an emergency become a crisis?

When the difficulty of responding appropriately to the questions generated by the event compromises the reliability of the organization it leads (external and internal audiences) to inadequate reactions

Even technically efficient management of an emergency accompanied by inadequate communication can generate elements of crisis



Communication system in assisting victims and their families after an aircraft accident



Communicate with affected families, friends and survivors

Examples of questions that might be asked

Initial involvement Notification

- What happened?
- Where did it happen?
- Was my loved one's name on the passenger list?
- Was my loved one on board?

Access to information and resources

- Who can I call for information?
- Who can I contact for psychological, emotional or spiritual support?
- What happens now?
- Can I go to the accident site?

Where is the family member

- Where is my loved one?
- Did he survive? Is alive? How are you?
- Which hospital are you in?
- Can I see it?
- When will they be identified?

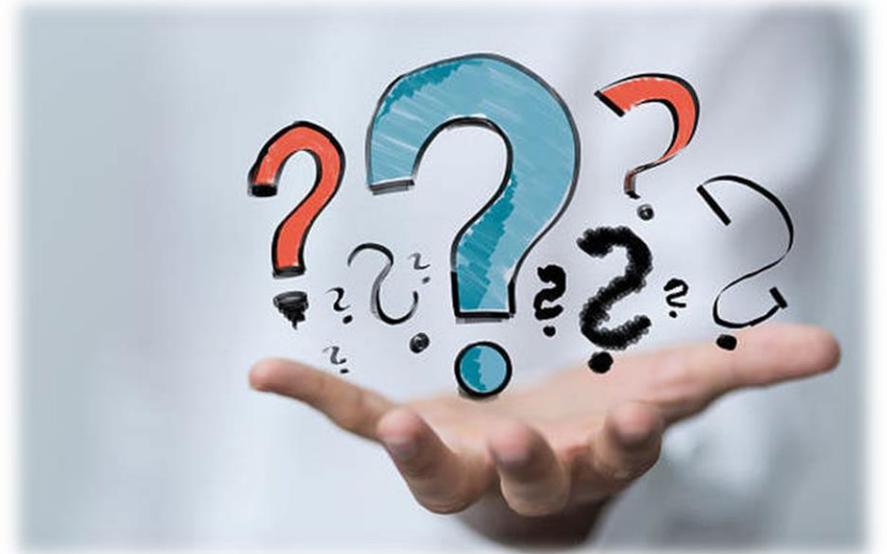
Personal Effects

- Where are my loved one's personal effects?



Survivors have a slightly different set of concerns

- If I leave the airport, who can I call for information?
- How do I get to my final destination?
- Who can arrange a hotel room for me?
- Who can I contact for psychological, emotional or spiritual support?



Personal Effects

- Where are my loved one's personal effects?
- How can I request new identity documents?
- Who will reimburse me for lost personal belongings?



Provide information

Information must be concrete, relevant and provided in the most timely manner possible:

- Avoid jargon and acronyms;
- Follow commitments made to provide information
- Inform affected survivors, families and friends before informing the media and public.
- Provide concrete information on the response process; this is especially important if there is limited information available about the plane crash.



Phone calls



Following an airline disaster, airport telephone systems will be overloaded. The airport family assistance program must indicate the flow of calls, recommended language and follow-up methods

- ❖ **Workflow:** How many employees does the airport manager have available? What information about the caller must be obtained from the telephone switchboard operator(s)?
- ❖ **Language:** Do you answer the phone with a generic greeting? What questions are asked? What words of empathy are used? When can the caller expect updated information? Will the airport manager return the caller and, if not, who should be contacted for further information?
- ❖ **Follow-up:** What does the employee do with the information collected from the caller? Is there a way to track or record calls? Is it part of the duties of the airport manager's switchboard operator(s) to call back the caller? If so, who will make the call and when and how will the airport manager track the callback?

Recommendations

- Avoid the use of voice mail systems. Too often, in fact, recorded phone calls are forgotten and not answered.
- Be prepared to handle a high volume of phone calls. Airport operators with limited resources should consider arrangements to transfer calls to an external partner.
- Telephone numbers dedicated to family information should be different from telephone numbers published for handling journalists' calls.
- If there are waiting messages, these should be reprogrammed to provide family members with their own contact numbers.



Communication guidelines

Working with persons involved in a crisis requires an empathetic and compassionate understanding that the affected person is having a normal reaction to an abnormal situation.

There are some basic principles that enable airport staff to assist a person affected by a plane crash or other incident occurring within the airport perimeter or involving an aircraft en route to or from the airport.



Confidentiality



Airport staff must consider procedures for the correct management, storage and disposal of personal information.

These procedures must include:

- Establish privacy policies for all information obtained as part of emergency management;
- Develop confidentiality statements to incorporate into training for family assistance programs, to ensure that airport staff respect people's right to privacy;
- Instruct staff not to leave documents in an open, accessible area, risking the media or public having access to the information;
- Identify locked cabinets/offices in which to store documents for safekeeping;
- Consult with the airport operator's legal team on how to appropriately retain or dispose of documents once the response has been completed and the air carrier or regulatory bodies no longer need them.

Verbal and non-verbal communication_2

Some phrases and expressions should be avoided.

Survivors and families indicated that the following phrases were not helpful when uttered by airport and airline personnel after an airline disaster:

- “It was the will of the Lord.”
- “Everything happens for a reason.”
- “I know/understand how you feel.”
- “If you do X, you will gain closure” (or the word “closure” generally).
- “They feel better.”
- “They did not suffer.”
- “You're lucky they survived.”
- “You're lucky they didn't survive.”
- “They only reported.... (a fracture, a hematoma, a burn, etc.).”



Verbal and non-verbal communication_3

Following a plane crash you can expect a range of different emotions and behaviors.

Below are key points to consider when faced with a situation that may require de-escalation:

- Remain calm and compassionate,
- Make sure your tone of voice is lower than that of the person you are trying to calm down,
- Make sure your body behavior is open and not perceived as a threat,
- Allow the person space and time to express themselves,
- Don't correct people or tell them that their “feeling” is wrong
- Use silence and non verbal statements, such as nodding your head up and down, to help the conversation.



Be ready to communicate with friends, family and survivors (some examples)_1

- Do you have pre-printed forms that the switchboard can use to collect information? How are completed forms handled (to whom should they be sent)?
- Have you trained the switchboard staff?
- Is it possible to divert calls to an external service partner?
- Have you established agreements with interpreting companies to be able to promptly rely on translators in case of need?
- Have you thought about how to provide assistance to the deaf (sign language) and blind (braille information)?



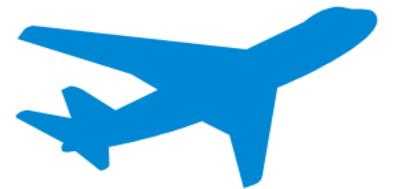
Be ready to communicate with friends, family and survivors (some examples)_2

- Have you planned annual training for the people who are part of the Contact Team and for any "voluntary" collaborators?
- Have you mapped the representatives of the main religions in your area?
- Have you developed a social media policy for your collaborators?
- Have you thought about how to communicate the privacy rules in the rooms designated for welcoming family members?
- If you have prepared forms to be completed by family members, have they been prepared in different languages?





Thank you for your attention



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