

## Caring for British Red Cross staff and volunteers responding to the Afghanistan Relocation and Assistance Programme.

In any crisis it is not possible to be prepared for everything that can happen, but **as much preparation as possible is still helpful. Acknowledging together as staff and volunteers what is hard and how it feels is helpful. Knowing that you may have a range of feelings that are all understandable and normal can be helpful. Connecting with your colleagues and using everything that works well for you in looking after yourself and each other is helpful.** The British Red Cross has huge skill and experience in responding to crises and it is helpful to share stories of what is working well. The following are some brief suggestions in response to what may be particularly hard about facing this current crisis.

1. **Feeling overwhelmed.** The extent of distress and trauma for those coming to the UK from Afghanistan currently is severe. Staff and volunteers may feel overwhelmed in their attempts to help. Try to take on what you can, pace your input, take breaks, care for yourselves and support each other, make it ok for people to say no, support each other to keep helpful work boundaries.
2. **Coping with crises on top of other crises.** Staff and volunteers may already be feeling tired, isolated, lacking in confidence, unused in recent times to working face to face and coping with the multiple effects of covid on their own lives. Use resources that are already there to help and relationships that you trust. The Employee Assistance Programme, your Psychosocial practitioners (and the CALMER email if you have other requests- CALMER@redcross.org.uk), the resources on the Psychosocial and Mental Health Redroom page (the “CALMER framework” and “Coping after a traumatic event” guidance) may all be helpful to draw on.
3. **Challenging hopes and expectations.** One of the most stressful aspects of responding in a crisis situation can be that hopes and expectations about how people should be treated might not be met. Staff and volunteers may be distressed if peoples’ basic human needs have not all been met. This can lead to understandable feelings of anger, distress and powerlessness. **Acknowledging this possibility ahead of time can be helpful, as can having clear and honest conversations** together about how the British Red cross is conveying its concerns to the appropriate authorities and engaging in advocacy.
4. **Resonating with own experiences.** Many staff and volunteers may have their own experiences of forced exile and of traumas and memories may be triggered by the current crisis. Some may have experiences that are very closely linked to the current experiences of Afghans caught up in this crisis. Some may have relatives and friends caught up in the situation. This may be hard to speak about so it is important that teams **acknowledge this may be the case** and try to be as flexible as possible in accommodating the needs of individuals in response.
5. **“Coping with exposure to disturbing imagery and listening to harrowing stories”** is guidance on the Redroom that may be very helpful in this situation. Some people arriving from Afghanistan or Dubai will have very recent and raw traumatic experiences and may share these with staff and volunteers, through words or pictures. There are also prevalent images in the news and social media currently. Try to limit your exposure to images, don’t feel you have to look at them, or look for the smallest amount of time and not to the whole image. If you are affected by having seen disturbing imagery this guidance has some very helpful tips.
6. Some workers in crisis services **may not be so experienced in** working with refugees, or used to working with the aftermath of UK involvement in military engagement, or working in a situation where asylum seekers and refugees do not always receive the welcome and the care they deserve. **Colleagues in refugee services may be able to share helpful knowledge, skill and experience.**
7. Some people arriving from Afghanistan will be coping with **overwhelming feelings of grief and loss** linked to multiple traumas. **They may request help with things you are not able to help with** e.g. help to locate family members. Speak to managers ahead of times about how to respond in these situations so that staff and volunteers are not left with feelings of over -responsibility or guilt.