

Beyond Panic Prevention: Addressing Emotion in Emergency Communication

Copyright © 2002 by Peter M. Sandman. All Rights Reserved.
(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.