

GUIDANCE NOTE: STAFF AND VOLUNTEER TEAM LEADERS IN THE EU4HEALTH PROJECT

Recognizing that the mental health and psychosocial well-being of volunteers and staff responding to the needs of those who are vulnerable is often affected as they are exposed to risks and potentially traumatic events and work under stressful conditions and that the safety, security, health, and well-being of staff and volunteers are vital to the provision of sustainable quality services. It is the duty and obligation of each National Society (NS) to care for the well-being of staff and volunteers as described in the resolution addressing mental health and psychosocial needs of people affected by armed conflicts, natural disasters, and other emergencies and the adopted International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement policy on addressing mental health and psychosocial needs where the needs of volunteers are explicitly mentioned¹.

National Societies must establish robust care systems to enhance the safety and psychosocial well-being of both staff and volunteers. If not adequately supported, staff and volunteers may experience stress responses that could have a long-term negative impact on their psychological well-being. How staff and volunteers cope with the impact of stressors will depend on 1) their personal resources and resilience and 2) the support at home, in the community, and organization. Without adequate support for well-being, poor performance, high turnover and disillusionment among staff and volunteers are to be expected.

Team level support is an important component of a staff and volunteer care system. Team Leaders play a crucial role in organizing and managing this support. However, there can also be challenges in managing the tasks or workload, expectations of staff and volunteers, their well-being, and team dynamics. This short guidance note is written for all Team Leaders to help them better support their staff and volunteer teams to improve efficiency, prevent burnout, and decrease turnover.

The guidance note is structured in three sections followed by further recommended resources:

- Key expectations of Team Leaders (in here a brief explanation of who this is for)
- Supportive leadership skills
- Practical tips for establishing care system or mechanisms explicitly for Team Leaders

1 [IC resolution template \(ifrc.org\)](https://www.ifrc.org/publications/IC-resolution-template)



KEY EXPECTATIONS OF TEAM LEADERS ARE THE FOLLOWING:

- Makes a conscious effort to model and promote healthy work/volunteer time and life balance, including self-care practices.
- Promotes an environment with time for breaks and decent working hours.
- Have been trained in basic emotional support, such as Psychological First Aid (PFA) or *It Starts With You*.
- Is informed about stress reactions, stress management and helpful coping strategies.
- Stays informed of the staff and volunteer care resources available within the National Societies and relevant policies for duty of care for staff and volunteers.

SUPPORTIVE LEADERSHIP SKILLS

- Creates a sense of belonging and 'togetherness' through regular, informal and formal team meetings with volunteers and staff.
- Talks openly about stress, the demands of the work and psychosocial support so volunteers feel safe in expressing their feelings and concerns without fearing judgment and promote help-seeking behaviour.
- Identifies and address risks to psychological safety in the team and foster a sense of belonging and inclusion.
- Respects confidentiality and boundaries to ensure a safe environment for others to seek support.
- Makes yourself available for supervision or private conversations with individual staff members.
- Proactively reaches out and approach volunteers who may be in distress and in need of additional support.
- Has ability to provide supportive feedback on performance of volunteering tasks/activities.
- Has conflict resolution and problem-solving skills.

GENERAL SKILLS RELEVANT TO CARE FOR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

- Time management and structure
- Information management: i.e. Makes written notes of any key points made during the meetings as follow up
- Prioritisation of tasks
- Monitoring of staff and volunteer workloads.



MONITORING TEAM LEVEL WELL-BEING

Actionable practices for establishing a care system within the scope of a Team Leader's control or area of responsibility, establish systems to monitor individual and team wellbeing regularly and lean on tools such as the wellbeing flower exercise, feedback, and whistle-blowing mechanisms.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STAFF AND VOLUNTEER TEAM MANAGEMENT

- Start each shift with a short meeting to gather all the volunteers in your team.
- Rotate frontline volunteers directly engaged with affected individuals and families, with volunteers covering more support functions (e.g., warehouse). The rotation shift system can help minimize volunteers feeling overwhelmed or confronted with distressed persons and exposes new volunteers to a wider variety of tasks.
- Pair more experienced volunteers with new volunteers (also spontaneous volunteers). If all volunteers in one team are new, then consider creating smaller teams as their supervision and support needs are often higher than more experienced volunteers.
- Inform volunteers that they can decline any task if for any reason they do not feel capable of carrying it out (e.g., lack the knowledge, skills, or personal capacity).
- Prepare volunteers for the difficult and challenging tasks of witnessing death and distress and providing support for bereaved and separated families.
- Thank the team for their efforts during the shift.
- Update the team on any matters of importance.

KEY QUESTIONS/TALKING POINTS FOR SUPPORTIVE TEAM LEADERS:

- How did it go today?
- How do you feel right now?
- What went well?
- What did you like most about today?
- What did you like least about today?
- Are there any problems that need resolving?

SETTING UP BUDDY SYSTEMS

All volunteers are given a 'Buddy'. Volunteers are paired together. Either they spontaneously pair up, or pairs are allocated by the Team Leader. The buddy is the first person a volunteer contacts in case of problems (e.g., sick, struggling to access the branch office, safety needs, etc.). Buddies support each other daily. Each buddy checks in, by calling or in-person, with the other at the beginning and end of each day or



shift. This is empowering and will enhance their responsibility as team members.

PEER SUPPORT

Encourage volunteers who are trained in PFA and other MHPSS skills who may like to become a 'Peer Supporter' – where they formally support other volunteers who may be struggling. Peer Supporters are trained to assess the needs of another person in distress, to supportively listen and to refer.

SELF-CARE

Regularly discuss basic self-care tips and positive coping strategies. Encourage sharing of self-care resources among the team members. Remind the team of any staff care resources within the NS or externally.

TEAM COMMUNICATION

Create instant messaging groups (e.g., Telegram, Signal or WhatsApp groups) to enable volunteer teams to easily communicate with each other. Insist that communication platforms should be for information sharing and communication purposes. The sharing of distressing images on social media and instant messaging groups by volunteers should be discouraged. Discuss with volunteers how to handle interest from the media and communications teams to maintain the dignity of individuals and families being portrayed.

APPRECIATION OF VOLUNTEERS AND STAFF

Show appreciation and thank the volunteers for their services to humanity at team meetings and at the end of the day or shift. Send volunteers an e-mail, a message on communication channels, or a letter of appreciation for their work and time. Arrange a small gathering, perhaps at the end of a week for volunteer teams. Celebrate team and individual successes however small.



FURTHER GUIDELINES AND TOOLS

- IFRC E-learning: [It Starts With You - Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing as a Manager \(csod.com\)](#)
- [Guidelines for Caring for Staff and Volunteers in Crises](#)
- [A Guide to Psychological First Aid for Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies](#)
- [Basic Psychological First Aid - training module 2](#)
- [Caring for Volunteers Toolkit and training manuals](#)
- [Team meetings - Psychosocial Support IFRC \(pscentre.org\)](#)
- [Buddy talk brief handout - Psychosocial Support IFRC \(pscentre.org\)](#)
- [Peer support in volunteer organizations - Psychosocial Support IFRC \(pscentre.org\)](#)
- [ICRC-GUIDE_support-for-managers_incidents.pdf \(pscentre.org\)](#)
- [Podcasts - Psychosocial Support IFRC \(pscentre.org\)](#)



Funded by
the European Union

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the IFRC PS Centre and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

