

The Buddy System

What is the Buddy System?

The buddy system is an effective method by which a deployed staff member shares in the responsibility for his or her partner's safety and well-being. This type of active support is important in any deployment. Buddies are responsible for looking after each other in two main areas:

- Personal safety
- Resilience

This fact sheet will help you understand the buddy system and how to use it.



Putting the Buddy System into Action

Deploy in 2-person teams (minimum).

- Get to know your buddy's background, prior experience, and job role (especially if different from your own).
- Stay close to your buddy and communicate regularly, especially when traveling in-country.

Look out for hazardous conditions, safety demands, and stressors.

- Identify your buddy's strengths and weaknesses.
- Monitor your buddy for stress (including environmental stressors).
- Check on your buddy's workload and encourage breaks when needed.
- Observe each other putting on and taking off personal protective equipment.

Manage stress to prevent burnout.

- Communicate basic needs and limits to leadership – make your buddy feel “safe” to speak up.
- Encourage routine sleep, exercise, eating.
- Acknowledge tough situations and recognize accomplishments, even small ones.
- Identify opportunities to have stress relief.
- Acknowledge burnout and discuss its impact.
- Talk with one another about your experiences.

Do

- Be a listener to your buddy.
- Actively communicate with your buddy to understand his/her perspective.
- Reach out to a buddy who may be struggling.
- Offer help with practical needs or finding services.
- Get help if you have reason to believe your buddy may be a threat to themselves or to others.

Do Not

- Offer clinical diagnosis or treatment.
- Take on the role of a therapist.
- Pass judgment on people or decisions.
- Pry or demand that a buddy discuss problems.

Remember

Not everyone reacts to stress in the same way. As a buddy, be sensitive to differences in culture and perspective. Your buddy may not even be aware of how they are handling the stress of deployment. You can help by identifying and advising on immediate needs, discussing an action plan, and acting to address their needs.

If you are unsure what to do or need more help, please speak with your team leader or supervisor.

Reference

Center for Mental Health Services [1994]. *Disaster response and recovery: A handbook for mental health professionals*. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

“The buddy system is an effective method to provide support, monitor stress, and reinforce safety procedures [during deployment].”

