Five-Step Resiliency Tool

Directions: These questions can be used 1) individually as a journaling tool, 2) as a discussion guide for “check-in friends,” or 3) as a discussion guide for a daily or weekly team check-in debrief. Participation in the use of this tool should be voluntary. If someone decides to be present but quiet during a team debrief that is all right. If someone chooses not to participate at all, please ensure they have the 5 step process to do independently as well as information for accessing mental health care.

Question 1: Please share if there is anything you cannot shake right now? What is it? What do you remember about it (eg, what sounds, images, or sensations do you recall). What emotions do you feel about it now?

Question 2: Can you think of what you have DONE RIGHT in that situation—even the smallest thing counts (or any recent situation if there was no response to Q1)

Question 3: Is there anything you wish you had done differently?

Question 4: Is there anything you have learned or need to adjust for tomorrow or next time?

Question 5: Is there anything you feel grateful for or made you laugh in this situation (or in your recent past)

Rationale: This question invites an animal professional to put into words any experience that is causing intrusive thoughts and rumination. Intrusive thoughts are unwanted images and/or memories of a stressful event. Rumination is the circular repetition of these unpleasant thoughts. These are typical experiences when someone is experiencing traumatic stress. An important skill in managing this is to “name” what the event is and connect that to emotions that occur in relation to the event. If answered in a dyad or group, this “storytelling” allows others to normalize the experience and feel more comfortable sharing their own experiences. Importantly, this question invites someone to share, but does not assume a professional has such an experience or wants to decide to share it. Animal professionals may or may not have an answer to this question and may or may not wish to answer it publicly. It is essential to respect animal professionals self-determination on what and if to share answers to this question.

Question #2 (keywords this question targets: coping and self-efficacy)

Q2 Can you think of what you have DONE RIGHT in that situation—even the smallest thing counts (or any recent situation if there was no response to Q1)

Rationale: When someone is going through a stressful event, once it is acknowledged by Q1, inviting them to focus on how they are coping well is important. This question helps the animal professional recognize the ways in which they are demonstrating self-efficacy and positive intention in the midst of a difficult circumstance. Research indicates that attending to evidence of positive personal behaviors is helpful even if one thinks of a circumstance NOT related to the current stressor (as would be the case if there was no answer to Q1).

Questions #3 and #4 (keywords these questions target: coping, self-efficacy, and problem-solving)

Q3 Is there anything you wish you had done differently?

Q4 Is there anything you have learned or need to adjust for tomorrow or next time?

Rationale: When individuals can learn from their stressful experiences it promotes a sense of empowerment and self-efficacy. These questions also help a person engage active problem solving to avoid being simply overwhelmed by the stressor. They help professionals use their experience to change strategies and keep growing as an animal professional. Moreover these questions invite practical problem-solving so that the individual may be more successful when they face the situation again.
Animal Depopulation Resiliency Debrief Tool

Question #5: (keywords this question targets: gratitude, humor, and professional identity)

Q5 Is there anything you feel grateful for or made you laugh in this situation (or in your recent past)

Rationale: Research in the field of positive psychology has demonstrated that attending to gratitude can have a positive impact on mental health. Moreover, gratitude is also present for those with higher resiliency from traumatic stress. Although the use of humor in times of tragedy is very dependent on individual preferences and traits, there is some evidence that it helps in cultivating an authentic professional identity. This question allows professionals to choose which type of positive emotion to connect with that will be most personally helpful.

How to use the tool

Individually: This tool can be used individually by anyone who seeks to monitor his or her wellbeing throughout a depopulation experience. To do this an individual can use this as a writing prompt tool. Writing as a way to mitigate traumatic stress and promote post traumatic growth is evidenced in the research literature. 

Dyadically: This tool can be used as part of a dyadic “check-in friend” system that a professional sets up in preparation for a depopulation event. The “check-in friend” dyad would meet periodically, in person, by phone, or on a web meeting, and answer the questions together and share responses as a way to establish credible socio-emotionally attuned support before, during, and after the depopulation. The dyad can determine the frequency based on their own schedules and availability.

As a team: This tool can be used as a daily or weekly team debrief to establish and prioritize credible and socio-emotionally attuned support for each other. If in attendance each member can share or not share. Each person should be allotted about 7 minutes to share responses to the questions. It would be helpful to print out the tool and have copies on hand.

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Development of this resource was funded by USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service through the National Animal Disease Preparedness and Response Program.

References