

# **Beyond Panic Prevention: Addressing Emotion in Emergency Communication (p. 1 )**

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(Based on work done for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

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## **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.

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### **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.

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For more about my take on this issue, see:

- Nukes, the Freeze, and Public Opinion (Spring 1984) -- [www.psandman.com/articles/nukes.htm](http://www.psandman.com/articles/nukes.htm)
- Scared stiff -- or scared into action (Jan 1986) -- [www.psandman.com/articles/scarstif.htm](http://www.psandman.com/articles/scarstif.htm)
- Beyond Panic Prevention: Addressing Emotion in Emergency Communication (Feb 2003) -- [www.psandman.com/articles/beyond.pdf](http://www.psandman.com/articles/beyond.pdf)
- Duct Tape Risk Communication (Feb 2003) -- [www.psandman.com/col/ducttape.htm](http://www.psandman.com/col/ducttape.htm)
- "Fear Is Spreading Faster than SARS" -- And So It Should! (Apr 2003) -- [www.psandman.com/col/SARS-1.htm](http://www.psandman.com/col/SARS-1.htm)
- Scaring people about terrorism (Jul 2003) -- [www.psandman.com/gst2003.htm#amber](http://www.psandman.com/gst2003.htm#amber)
- Fear of Fear: The Role of Fear in Preparedness ... and Why It Terrifies Officials (Sep 2003) [www.psandman.com/col/fear.htm](http://www.psandman.com/col/fear.htm)
- Tsunami Risk Communication: Warnings and the Myth of Panic (January 2005) -- <http://www.psandman.com/col/tsunami1.htm>

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