



Emergency Preparedness and Response

Dealing with Dread

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In a crisis, people may feel fear, anxiety, or intense dread. These feelings can prevent people from receiving important information that could help them stay safe. Your goal as a communicator is not to make these feelings go away. However, using Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) principles, we can help people manage these feelings and possibly use them as motivation to act on public health recommendations.

Fear is a natural response to catastrophe. But when people are afraid and don't have adequate information they may react in ways that increase risk to themselves or their communities. Fear of the unknown or fear of uncertainty may be the most debilitating of the psychological responses to disaster—fear may actually prevent people from taking action.

Fear should not be ignored; it should be acknowledged. Communicators can recognize people's feelings by showing empathy. They may make a statement like, "we've never faced anything like this before in our community and it can be frightening." Communicators might also recognize that a perceived threat can be a source of motivation. In these cases, fear may prompt people to take desired public health actions.

Communicators can help people cope with fear by describing a realistic level of risk and recommending action messages so that affected people do not feel helpless. Regardless of the crisis, fear should always be an important communication consideration.

For more information on CERC visit our [website](#) and check out the [CERC manual](#). You can also read previous [CERC Corners](#).

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