

At some point in their career, many journalists find themselves in a situation where they are first-hand eyewitnesses to disasters, human suffering, or violent news events. For some, this “first responder” role is not the exception, but part of their daily routine. While some suffer physical injuries or even die in their pursuit of the truth, many more sustain hidden wounds that are much harder to track. It has become increasingly clear that **stress** and **psychological trauma** is a major occupational risk for journalists. However, if given the right **tools** and **knowledge**, media professionals can significantly build resilience and reduce the psychological toll that their reporting has on them.

EVERYDAY PSYCHOSOCIAL SELF-CARE



Practice self-care on a daily basis: meditate, do yoga or other anxiety or stress-management exercises. Create a “safe space” in your mind that allows you to escape and find calm and relaxation when needed.



Practice simple ways of self-gratitude that will let your brain chemistry recalibrate and get rid of excessive stress hormones.



Identify what is under your control and what not. Save your energy for things that are important and under your control, leave the others.



Maintain a healthy work-life balance and dedicate time to communicating with your support network (family, friends, etc.).



Do things you enjoy and dedicate time to hobbies and other positive coping mechanisms that won't harm you in the long run.



Avoid quick “fixes” such as alcohol and drugs. In the long run, they add more stress to your body, mind, and general wellbeing.

BEFORE AN ASSIGNMENT



Take care of all non-work, personal matters before leaving for your assignment. It helps reduce further anxiety or stress while in the field.



Be self-aware and have a clear understanding of where you stand with your attitudes, triggers, and strengths toward the mission and the actors involved.



Practice saying NO and setting proper expectations. This will mitigate stress you may get from going on a mission that might overwhelm you.



Be mindful of your basic needs (sleep, hydration, nutrition), especially if you don't know how long you will be on the assignment for.

DURING AN ASSIGNMENT



Be aware that feelings of fear, selfishness, anger, emotional numbing, as well as different and/or altered body sensations are perfectly normal. All people feel them when under stress.



Always carry drinking water. It will help you to stay hydrated, and “cool down” in moments of extreme stress, high adrenaline, and high anxiety. If possible in the moment, pause and take deep breaths.



Remember that you are in survival mode when on an assignment. That means that whatever decision our mind and body make for safety are worth it and there is no reason to feel guilty or ashamed.

AFTER AN ASSIGNMENT



Not feeling “normal” after a stressful or traumatic assignment is perfectly normal. Debrief and share your experiences with the rest of your team, editors, and solidarity groups.



Allow yourself to ventilate emotions; you can discuss the experience with friends and colleagues, write in your diary, etc.



Manage and dedicate time to your psychosocial wellbeing after your assignment. Actively address stress, burnout, and traumatization, and seek professional help, if needed.

About Securing Access to Free Expression (SAFE)

SAFE is IREX's flagship program to enable media practitioners and social communicators to work as safely as possible in closed and closing spaces. SAFE equips these individuals with means to resiliently continue their important work, and manage—as well as mitigate—the risks and threats they face in their day-to-day work. SAFE addresses safety through the unique lens of digital identity, physical awareness, and psychosocial care by delivering trainings in four regions spanning the globe.