

Minimizing Stressors in Our Environments

Chaotic living and working environments are one cause of chronic stress. Meeting the standards below will help you keep this type of stress to a minimum.

You will not be able to do all these things, especially not at the beginning of a large emergency. However, it is important that we work towards these goals, and that staff see that we are doing so.

Office Space

In addressing all the subjects below, make sure to consider local custom. Pay special attention to traditions involving gender (it is OK to establish separate facilities for women and men).

Try to meet these standards for Office Space:

1. Staff should feel safe and secure coming from, going to, and working in the location. Work with security staff to accomplish this.
2. The office should be big enough to house all staff comfortably.
3. Habits and routines reduce stress, so each person should have his/her own established place to work as soon as possible. For example:
 - a. Try not to have permanent staff working at a conference table where they will have to move every time there is a meeting.
 - b. Try not to have permanent staff at a different desk each time they leave and return to the office.
4. The office should be clean.
5. Bathrooms must be cleaned regularly and have sufficient supplies of toilet paper, soap, and clean towels.
6. There should be water, coffee, and tea available.
7. The office must be a comfortable temperature.
8. The office must have consistent electrical power and at least two locations in each room to access the power.
9. The office must have consistent internet access.
10. The office should be reasonably quiet.
11. The office should contain places for private meetings.

12. Consider having a dedicated prayer room. If you do establish one, agree with staff on the rules of use (Is it for all religions? Is it for both men and women?) and publish them.
13. If you will be preparing meals in the office, the food should
 - a. Be prepared in a hygienic location
 - b. Be prepared in a hygienic manner
 - c. Be nutritious
 - d. Be somewhat different from day to day
 - e. Be sensitive to specific religious, cultural, or other dietary requirements of staff

Living Space

In addressing all the subjects below, make sure to consider local custom. Pay special attention to traditions involving gender (it is OK to establish separate facilities for women and men).

The standards below apply whether we are running our own guest house or having people stay in hotels. If staff are in hotels, we should try to find hotels that meet these standards.

1. Staff should feel safe and secure coming from, going to, and living in the location. Work with security staff to accomplish this.
2. Try to establish a guest house separate from the office (that is, try not to work on the first floor and live on the second floor – even a separate building in the same compound is better.)
3. Sleeping areas should
 - a. Be quiet
 - b. Be private
 - c. Be lockable
 - d. Allow for individual bedrooms (This may not be important to some people from some cultures, and it is, again, a *goal* for which to strive. But ultimately it would be good to be able to *offer* each person some individual space.)
 - e. Be maintained at a comfortable room temperature (provide fans, heaters, air conditioning as necessary)
 - f. Have a comfortable mattress with clean sheets, pillows, and towels
 - g. Be cleaned regularly

4. Bathrooms should
 - a. Have only a limited number of people using them
 - b. Be cleaned thoroughly and regularly
 - c. Have hot water for showers

5. Food should
 - a. Be prepared in hygienic locations
 - b. Be prepared in a hygienic manner
 - c. Be nutritious
 - d. Be somewhat different from day to day
 - e. Be sensitive to specific religious, cultural, or other diet requirements of individuals

6. Provide regular power and internet access (If they can't be on all the time, establish and publish a regular schedule that people know and can plan on).

7. Have an exercise space (with equipment, if possible)

8. Have a social space for gathering. This could be outfitted with:
 - a. A television and cable or satellite service
 - b. A DVD player and DVDs
 - c. Board games
 - d. Books
 - e. Ping-pong, Foosball or other types of games

Tips for Guest House Standards:

1. Establish a person for each house (this person can change every month) who is responsible for making sure standards are met.
2. Post a sheet where staff can write problems with meeting the standards. Assign these improvement tasks to different people, writing each person's names next to the task for which he/she is responsible.