



Development Service and Health

**How to look after yourself and where you
can get help with psychological stress**

STRESS DURING AND AFTER DEVELOPMENT SERVICE – TAKING CARE OF YOUR HEALTH

As a professional development service worker or an accompanying family member you gain a lot of new experiences and enriching impressions. But some experiences can also be stressful. You might experience conflict, an accident or illness, for example, or be confronted by violence or poverty. Sometimes stress has after-effects which are persistent or only reveal themselves some time later.

Returning home can be difficult too. What was once your home town can seem foreign all of a sudden. Friends and family may turn out to be less understanding than you had hoped. Or you might have difficulty finding your way back into the job market in Germany or the EU as a whole.

It is important to pay attention to mental stress, to take good care of yourself, and to seek help, if you need it. People may react to similar experiences in very different ways: You should therefore make sure that all the members of your family, especially any children, are in good health too.



SMALL STEPS MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE - WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR OWN WELL-BEING

- Take time for things which do you good, help you to relax, and keep you healthy.
- Take regular exercise, preferably outdoors, even if you only take a 10 minute walk each day.
- Develop contacts with people who seem to understand you. And make new contacts through hobbies, in your neighbourhood, or through voluntary work.
- Keep count of all the little positive things which you experience throughout the day. You could write down three „good things“ at the end of each day.
- Create a regular daily routine for yourself.
- Make plans for the future.
- Share your experience as a development worker, e.g. by giving lectures or writing about it.

If you do not have enough energy to put these ideas into practice, you should seek support and advice.



WHEN IS IT ADVISABLE TO GET PROFESSIONAL HELP?

The following questions can provide an initial indication of whether you would be advised to get professional help. If one or two symptoms like these persist for several weeks, this may be an indication of serious psychological stress. In this case, it is advisable to take advantage of professional help. This is an important step in looking after yourself: You need to look after your own health.



- I feel very downcast and hopeless.
- I have no interest in things which I used to enjoy.
- I keep myself to myself most of the time and keep up only a few social contacts.
- I worry more and more about everything.
- I often find myself brooding over things.
- I have difficulty concentrating.
- I feel a lot of inner tension.
- I'm overcome by all sorts of fears.
- I don't really care much about anything any more.
- I feel strong inner compulsion and keep myself busy all the time.
- I seem to have ill-defined physical disorders or illnesses.
- I have difficulty getting to sleep or sleeping through the night. Or I sleep a lot.
- Memories keep surfacing of traumatic stories or events in the country I was working in.
- I feel the need to drink more alcohol or to drink more often or to consume larger quantities of other drugs.
- I get into conflict with my partner more and more often.
- I am increasingly – and increasingly often – irritated by my children.

HOW CAN I GET PROFESSIONAL HELP WHEN I'M SERVING AS A DEVELOPMENT WORKER?

Your first port of call is your sending agency. Alternatively, you can contact AGdD for information.

HOW CAN I GET PROFESSIONAL HELP IN EUROPE AFTER COMPLETING DEVELOPMENT SERVICE?

If you are looking for counselling or professional support, here are some of the first places to look:

HELPLINES

If you need help immediately, a telephone helpline can be a good first step in order to speak with a well-trained volunteer counsellor. They can also give advice about how to find other local psychosocial support organisations. Find a helpline in your country:

www.ifotes.org/en/ifotes-members

www.telefonseelsorge.de/international-helplines/

FAMILY DOCTORS / GENERAL PRACTITIONERS

Every country has their own health system with their own pathways for finding a doctor. Look for the terms “family doctor” or “general practitioner” when searching for them in your country. These doctors have networks in their area and know how



to get psychosocial support in your country.

The website www.expatica.com/healthcare offers information about healthcare systems in a number of different countries.

PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

The organisation Mental Health Europe has issued a map of helplines and organisations for young people in different countries in Europe: www.mhe-sme.org/library/youth-helplines/ Many of the services described focus on suicide prevention, but they will also be happy to offer support with other issues children or adolescents might be dealing with at the moment. If you are looking for support for your whole family, family therapy might be an option. The International Family Therapy Association provides a list of national organisations:

www.ifta-familytherapy.org/linksassociations.php



Read the stories of professional development workers recounting their own experience, interviews with experts, and other articles in the issue of our magazine, *transfer*, devoted to the subject of “mental health during and after development service”:

www.agdd.de/en/mental-health-in-development-service

Imprint:

Published by: Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Entwicklungsdienste e.V. (AGdD - Association of German Development Services), Meckenheimer Allee 67-69, 53115 Bonn, Germany, www.agdd.de/en

Design: cap communications, Bonn

Photo credits : Shutterstock; Pixabay; Adobe Stock

Information as of: Oktober 2023

The **Association of German Development Services (AGdD)** is the umbrella organisation of the seven agencies recognised by the state as sending organisations under the Development Workers Act.

Our member organisations



The **AGdD's Reintegration Programme** has for many years been the first point of call for professionals returning from development service. Our services include:

- individual counselling (careers counselling, help with job applications, advice about further education and training, etc.)
- seminars and discussion forums
- information (in print and online)
- contacts and networking

Contact:

Association of German Development Services (AGdD)

Meckenheimer Allee 67-69, 53115 Bonn, Germany

Phone: +49 228 908993-0

E-mail: info@agdd.de

www.agdd.de/en

With financial support from the



Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development