

Activities for Emotional Wellbeing

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Directions

The following are structured activities.

Some exercises deal with personal, difficult, vulnerable issues. Participation is encouraged but not required. If at any point, a participant doesn't want to share, that is okay.

1. Emotional Risk Mapping Exercise (Individual + Small Group)

Objective

Build awareness of personal triggers and stress patterns.

Tasks

Come up with a hypothetical difficult assignment (for instance, a mass casualty event, a school shooting), or think about a hard assignment that you or your newsroom has dealt with in the past.

- ① Ask each participant to identify:
 - What would likely affect them most emotionally?
 - What physical stress signals might show up (tight chest, irritability, numbness, etc.)?
 - What ethical tensions might increase stress?
- ② Then have them create a short “risk map”
 - Before assignment
 - During coverage
 - After publication

✓ Deliverable

A one-page “Personal Impact Plan” outlining risks and coping strategies at each stage.

Optional Prompt

What surprised you about your own anticipated reactions?

2. Secondary Trauma Self-Assessment & Mitigation Plan

Objective

Normalize and prepare for secondary trauma.

As a group, prepare a short checklist of common secondary trauma symptoms (intrusive thoughts, cynicism, sleep disruption, emotional numbness). This can also be done as a solo exercise.



Have participants:

- Identify which symptoms they've experienced before. (share IF you want)
- Discuss the situation of that experience. (share IF you want)

Participants create a Personal Mitigation Plan including:



- Who they would talk to
- What physical reset practices they'd use
- What newsroom supports they would/could/should request
- What signs mean they need time off

Optional Addition

Ask participants to write the sentence they would use to ask an editor for support.

3. Ethical Stress Test Discussion

Objective

Focus on the individual's response.

Present ethically complex moments from the assigned scenario

①

Such as:

- Publishing a grieving parent's image.
- Identifying an undocumented protester or user of illegal drugs
- Using graphic language to describe the scene after a mass casualty event.

②

The group must discuss:

- What are the concerns? Is there an obvious ethical choice? How do you move forward?
- What emotional weight does that decision carry?
- How can journalists process "moral residue" afterward?

Draft a 3-sentence "Post-Publication Processing Protocol" (e.g., team debrief, mental reset, peer check-in).

4. Aftercare Protocol Design

Objective

Focus on the newsroom response

Design a newsroom “After Heavy Coverage” protocol that includes:

- ①
 - Immediate debrief timing
 - Editor check-ins
 - Optional counseling resources
 - Comp time guidelines
 - Peer support structures
- ② Have participants present it within your group as if pitching to newsroom leadership.

Optional

Break into 2 teams and do the above. Have the teams pitch to one another.

5. Emotional Detachment vs. Numbing Reflection

Objective

Distinguish healthy boundaries
from harmful suppression.

Writing Prompt

- ①
 - Describe a time you felt emotionally overwhelmed in reporting.
 - What did you do?
 - Did you detach or numb?
 - Couches should guide participants in thinking about this.
 - What might you do the same/differently now? Why?

Optional

Sharing in small groups.

6. The Weight of the World: Threats, Hostility, and Public Pressure

Objective

Acknowledge the broader emotional burden of journalism beyond individual assignments.

Discuss how journalists today often carry not only the trauma of the stories they cover but also hostility directed at the press itself.

- ① Participants discuss experiences or concerns related to:
 - Online harassment and social media attacks
 - Public hostility toward journalists in the field
 - Safety concerns at protests or volatile events
 - The psychological burden of constantly covering—or even just consuming news about—global crises

Reflection Exercise

- ② Ask participants to identify:
 - What forms of pressure feel most personally difficult (public hostility, harassment, constant exposure to crisis)?
 - What boundaries they need with social media or audience engagement.
 - What institutional support should exist when journalists face threats.
 - What personal support could exist to support journalists.

Draft a short “Journalist Protection & Support Checklist” including:

- One personal boundary you will implement
- One peer-support practice you recommend
- One newsroom or industry policy that would improve safety and wellbeing

Optional Debrief Prompt

How do journalists remain committed to public service without carrying the entire emotional burden of the world?

7. Resilience Toolkit Build

Info

If editors/newsrooms elect this task, it should be the final task, after working through some of the above tasks.

Tasks

Have participants create a personalized “Field Toolkit” card they can keep in their phone or notebook.

- ① They must list:
 - 2 grounding techniques usable in the field
 - 1 sentence to remind themselves of professional boundaries
 - 1 person they can call after a hard assignment
 - 1 sign they’re reaching overload

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