



# TEACHERS' GUIDE

# CHAPTER 5

MENTAL HEALTH AND  
WELL-BEING ISSUES



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# WHAT YOU GET?

**In this chapter, you will find lesson plans and teaching aids to help you with conducting lessons in the following areas:**

**Part 1** Mental health and well-being issues from the perspective of first responders ..... 2

**Part 2** Psychological support given to the participants of natural disasters/catastrophes/accidents and other emergencies ..... 15

# PART 1

## MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING ISSUES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FIRST RESPONDERS

### Lesson 1

#### **Mental health challenges for first responders**

During the lesson students will talk about mental health issues in relation to first responders work.

### Lesson 2

#### **The mental health effects**

During the lesson, students will learn about the impact of work in permanent stress on the mental health of first responders.

### Lesson 3

#### **Coping with stress and mental challenges**

Students will learn about proven strategies for coping with stress and mental challenges



## INTRO

This part of the guide is designed to provide you with lesson plans and teaching aids needed to support the mental well-being of your students, fostering resilience and ensuring they are equipped to handle the emotional aspects of their critical roles. On the other hand, the guide mentions the perspective of the victim and helps the teacher to present the victim's perspective.

You will find here:



**3 ready-to-use lesson plans** that follow a practical, step-by-step approach to conducting classroom lessons using audio-video equipment, active teaching, and learning methods.



**Teaching methods** and techniques:

- discussion
- group work
- world-cafe method
- individual activities



**Ready-to use lesson resources:**

videos, text files, presentations, case studies, webinar



**Teaching aids supporting teaching/learning process during the lessons:**

- PC / laptop,
- Internet access,
- projector & screen or interactive whiteboard,
- students' own devices (smartphones with QR code scanners and Internet access).
- flipchart, markers, coloured cards, sticky dots



**Key vocabulary**

mental health, stress, Diathesis-stress model, physical health, spiritual health, intellectual health, social health, emotional health, PTSD, anxiety, depression, addiction, sleep disorder





## LESSON 1

# MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES FOR FIRST RESPONDERS

## PART 1 LESSON 1



### Learning objectives

Students will Know the most common mental health challenges for first responders.



### Follow the steps

1

### Introduction

1. Welcome the students, check attendance, and introduce the topic and learning goals.



5 min.



### 2. Group activity

Divide students into 3 groups and begin the lesson with discussions of 3 topics:

- What is health?
- Why do first responders face psychological problems?
- What are the impacts on first responders?



10 min.



Ask students to collect ideas on the paper and prepare for the presentation of the results of the discussion. Allow students to search for information (i.e. on the Internet)

Each group presents the result and makes notes on the whiteboard. Other students comment and add their thoughts.



10 min.

3. Explain that rescue workers face several serious mental health challenges – more than in other professions. Show the video as an introduction



5 min.

4. Introduce the definition of stress and its effects on mental and physical health. Use the diathesis–stress model schematic.



10 min.

**Diathesis–stress model**



## LESSON 1

# MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES FOR FIRST RESPONDERS

## PART 1 LESSON 1

2

### Study



45 min.

1. **Share, and describe** 3 real-life situations, and reactions to stress. The situation, the trigger, and the reaction should be mentioned. Collect at least 3 situations. Ask students to answer the questions why was it stressful?

Prioritize which of the 3 examples caused the most stress.

2. **Collect** common sources of stress for rescue workers from a group discussion. One source at one moderation card!

Put them on the flip chart. In the 2nd step, the teacher will fill in the missing ones.

- a. shift work
- b. sleep deprivation
- c. inadequate training
- d. technical problems
- e. bad crews
- f. malicious co-workers
- g. inconsistent policies
- h. poor leadership
- i. traumatic experiences



3. **Discuss** with students the listed common sources of stress for rescue workers. What are “technical problems”? Collect the answers to the flip chart.



Prioritizing the sources of stress.

**Which one was the most impactful?**

Instruction: Everyone in the class gets 3 sticky dots. These must be stuck onto the moderation cards. They can all be placed on one card or distributed arbitrarily.

The card with the most sticky dots has the highest influence on stress. The cards are now arranged in descending order from highest impact to least impact.

## LESSON 1

# MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES FOR FIRST RESPONDERS

## PART 1 LESSON 1

3

### Practice

*World cafe method.*

**Instruction:** The teacher writes one of the three previously identified sources of stress on a flip chart. Divide participants into groups of 4.

Each group answers the question **"Why is the given source causing most stress?"**

After 10-15 minutes (depending on the discussion flow) there is a change; one scribe stays with the flipchart during each change.

The others go to the next one and add what is not already listed.

Finally, the writer presents the results. So each group became a professional for the given stress theme.

4

### Useful resources

Top3 most  
intense fire  
rescues



## LESSON 2

### THE MENTAL HEALTH EFFECTS

# PART 1

## LESSON 2



#### Learning objectives

Students will learn about the effects of stress on health.



#### Follow the steps

1

#### Introduction

1. Welcome the students and introduce the learning goals of this lesson. They will learn about the 5 dimensions of health and common mental illnesses. The aim is to know the 5 dimensions of health and to recognize signs of mental and somatic illnesses.



5 min.



2. Take up the main topics of the last lesson. Use the flipchart to note down open questions. The questions are answered by the group and the teacher.



10 min.

Then start with questions related to the new topic:

- What are the effects of stress on mental health?
- How can we categorize the effects?

Let the students answer freely what they think.

3. The teacher introduces the definition of **Holistic wellness**: students will know the 5 dimensions of health and well-being:

- Physical health
- Spiritual health
- Intellectual health
- Social health
- Emotional health



15 min.

Useful materials:



Holistic wellness: 5 dimensions of well-being

**Download file:**  
Dimensions of health



5 min.



## LESSON 2

### THE MENTAL HEALTH EFFECTS

# PART 1

## LESSON 2

4. The teacher writes 3 questions on the flipchart.

- What effects does stress have on mental health?
- Can stress lead to permanent mental illness?
- How can the effects of stress be categorized according to physical and mental effects?

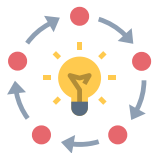


5 min.

These questions represent the transition to the “study” part, which may be continued in the next part

## 2

### Study



#### 1. World cafe method:

Instruction: **Divide participants into groups of 4.**

Each group chooses one of the 3 questions that the teacher has previously written on the flipchart. And discuss them in the small group. The results are noted on the flipchart.



30 min

After 15 minutes there is a change; one scribe stays with the flipchart during each change. The others go to the next one and add what is not already listed. Finally, the writer presents the results.

#### Discuss these!

2. The teacher presents the main mental effects of stress and traumatic experiences.

The teacher explains the development and course of PTSD in detail as an example. The Word document can be used as a source. Characteristic symptoms should be mentioned for each of the diseases.



10 min.



**ANXIETY DISORDER**



**SLEEP DISORDERS**



**DEPRESSION**



**PTSD**



**ADDICTIONS**

## LESSON 2

### THE MENTAL HEALTH EFFECTS

# PART 1

## LESSON 2

3. The typical signs of mental illness are presented by the teacher.

- Avoidance/withdrawal
- Compensatory behavior (aggressiveness, rule-breaking, substance abuse)
- Unorganized behavior and emotional instability
- (emotional instability)



15 min.



The students discuss in groups of 4 whether they have ever noticed any of these symptoms in a colleague or in private. And describe how they dealt with it. The question can be: What have you noticed in colleagues after a stressful assignment?



15 min

4. Finally, the results of each group are presented. The results are discussed.

**The teacher gives summary**

3

### Practice



15 min

1. **Students discuss** in groups what challenges they already experienced (first hand or from testimonials)
2. **Students collect and discuss** signs and symptoms of the mental effects



## Learning objectives

Students will learn about proven strategies for coping with stress and mental challenges: emotional self-care. The aim is to know the factors that affect the 5 dimensions of health and well-being. The lesson will be carried out within 2 lesson units (90 minutes).

Short cut should be: decision making - feel good AND protect yourself.



## Follow the steps

### 1

## Introduction

1. **Welcome the students** and introduce the learning goals of this lesson



5 min.

2. **Take up the main topics** of the last lesson.

Present the most important concepts and definitions related to “emotional self-care”, also ask students, what they think it is.



15 min.

Use the flipchart to note down open questions. The questions are answered by the group and the teacher.

3. **Explain the importance of emotional self-care.** Use the YouTube video to raise awareness of the importance of the topic. The aim is to emphasize the importance of self-care and represent the transition to “study”.



10 min.

4. **Discuss the video with the students.** What do they find important, and interesting, what do they think about self-care in their future job etc. Summarize the discussion and introduce topics for the next lesson.



15 min.

Useful materials:



My antidote for stress  
Hidde de Vries  
TEDxDelftSalon

2

### Study



45 min.



1. The students discuss in groups of 4.

The students discuss, what they have learnt to take care of themselves. The points identified are noted and written down in order of importance. The most important point is at the top of the list. There is no right or wrong! The result represents the objective opinion of the group.

Finally, the results of each group are presented and discussed.

2. The teacher gives a summary and introduces proven methods for coping with stress and mental strain and explains why these methods are efficient:

- prioritize sleep
- physical activity
- nutrition
- connect with supportive people
- meditation and yoga
- find and maintain a hobby
- look for help

Useful materials:



[How to achieve health and wellbeing in all 5 dimensions](#)



3. The teacher asks key questions.

- How do you react or how do you deal with it when you realise that you are in a mental health crisis?
- What are the first steps?
- What can you do if students recognise the symptoms in other rescue workers/colleagues?

The aim is to use your own experience methods of coping to react empathetically and sensitively to the challenges faced by rescue workers/colleagues.

All these questions and answers are written on the flipchart and supplemented by additions from the class.



3

### Practice - after class activity

You can use these exercises during the lesson at school or - after a short discussion in the classroom - students do the task as homework and present their work back in class.

#### Activity 1 Personal plan

Students create and discuss a personal plan for fitting mental self-care into their life

#### Activity 2 Strategies for helping others

The students note what they can do if they notice symptoms of a health crisis in a colleague.

4

### Useful resources



[download](#)

[Stress Management Strategies](#)

## REFERENCES

Below you will find some text and video materials to help you with conducting the classes.



### **10 Simple Ways to Cope with Stress**

[www.sutterhealth.org](http://www.sutterhealth.org)

(access: 23.08.2024)

<https://tiny.pl/p5syq0br>



### **Mindfulness-based stress reduction**

[www.sutterhealth.org](http://www.sutterhealth.org)

(access: 23.08.2024)

<https://tiny.pl/0j3t9jhn>



### **10 ways firefighters can support their own mental health**

[www.firerescue1.com](http://www.firerescue1.com)

(access: 23.08.2024)

<https://tiny.pl/kxywgzng>



### **Surviving the Job: Emotional Self Care for First Responders | 4/30/20 | SPONSORED BY VFIS**

Panelist: KathleenJansen, PsyD, WellSpan Health

[www.firerescue1.com](http://www.firerescue1.com)

(access: 23.08.2024)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fbUiRI7QJjo>



### **Tobias Esch, George B. Stefano**

**The neurobiology of stress management**

**Neuroendocrinology Letters Volume 31 No. 1 2010**

(access: 23.08.2024)

<https://tiny.pl/vvmg4d9p>

Download file



## REFERENCES



**My antidote for stress**

**Hidde de Vries**

**TEDxDelftSalon**

**(access: 23.08.2024)**

**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wXiWaZHhX6s>**



**Holistic wellness: learn the 5 dimensions of health and wellbeing**

**[www.healthylife.com.au](http://www.healthylife.com.au)**

**(access: 23.08.2024)**

**<https://tiny.pl/d2mtv>**



**Nightwatch: Top 3 Most INTENSE Fire Rescue**

**A&E**

**(access: 23.08.2024)**

**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPViCwRrHs>**



**Diathesis–stress model**

**Wikipedia**

**[en.wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org)**

**(access: 23.08.2024)**

**<https://tiny.pl/d2xgg>**

# PART 2

## PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT TO THE PARTICIPANTS OF NATURAL DISASTERS/CATASTROPHES /ACCIDENTS AND OTHER EMERGENCIES

### Lesson 1

#### Empowering strategies and resource development

Students will know how to apply practical strategies and resources to cope with the psychological impact of disasters.

### Lesson 2

#### Engaging exercises for instant relief

Students will learn practical exercises they can perform on the spot to manage stress, anxiety, and other mental health challenges.





## INTRO

This part serves as a valuable tool to promote mental health awareness and self-care. Instructors are encouraged to personalize these lessons, recognizing that each group is a unique blend of experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives. We stress the importance of being attuned to your students' cultural intricacies and sensitivities, fostering a nurturing and open environment where every voice matters.

Your adaptability is a key; feel empowered to fine-tune these lessons' pace, depth, and focus in response to your students' evolving needs and feedback. Remember, as an instructor, you play a vital role in not only teaching but also creating a transformative learning space that values diversity and individual well-being

You will find here:



**2 ready-to-use lesson plans**, that you are free to modify and adapt to the learner's needs, with some tips to follow step-by-step. You will need about 120 minutes to conduct the lesson. You can decide for yourself how to stagger the lessons.



**Innovative teaching methods** and techniques:

- information-receptive method
- dialogue in a group
- case study methods
- storytelling



**Ready-to use lesson resources:**

- presentation
- handouts
- case studies related to natural disasters and crises
- worksheets
- mats or cushions for some exercises
- timer or stopwatch
- inspirational quotes or images
- Recommended subject-specific educational apps that make learning fun and interactive. (ex. [Headspace](#), [Better Help](#) etc.)



### Key vocabulary

#### Lesson 1

##### 1. Psychological Reactions:

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

##### 2. Resilience:

- Ability to bounce back
- Coping mechanisms
- Social support
- Positive thinking

##### 3. Self-Care and Coping Strategies:

- Physical activity
- Relaxation techniques
- Healthy diet
- Professional help

##### 4. Accessing Resources:

- Crisis hotlines
- Support groups
- Online resources
- Mental health services

##### 5. Active Listening:

- Empathy
- Non-verbal cues
- Clarification
- Reflective responses

#### Lesson 2

##### 1. Expressive Breaths

- Breathing Techniques:
- Countdown Breathing
- Balloon Breaths
- Box Breathing

##### 2. Progressive

##### Muscle Relaxation:

- Guided relaxation
- Storytelling approach

##### 3. Mindfulness

##### Meditation:

- Focusing on senses
- Incorporating mindfulness into daily routines

##### 4. Grounding

##### Techniques:

- 5-4-3-2-1 method
- Using immediate environment for grounding



## Learning objectives

To equip students with practical strategies and resources that help survivors of natural disasters and crises effectively manage their mental health and empower students to cope with the psychological impact of disasters and crises.



## Follow the steps

1

### Introduction

A. Welcome students and begin the lesson with a brief discussion on the importance of addressing mental health after a crisis or natural disaster. Share the learning objectives with the students.

B. Mention that mental health is an integral part of overall well-being.

C. Introduce the case studies and explain their relevance to the topic.

D. you may explore, choose, and select among the following case study references and utilize them throughout the lesson:

#### Mental health case studies



#### Case studies for workplace mental health training



#### Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System - final report



## 2

## Study &amp; Practice

## I. Understanding Psychological Reactions

**A. Facilitate a discussion** about common psychological reactions to disasters and crises, such as anxiety, stress, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

**B. Share real-life examples** from the case studies to illustrate these reactions.

**C. Explain** that these reactions are normal responses to abnormal situations.

## II. Building resilience



**A. Discuss** the concept of resilience with students.

**B. Explain** that resilience can be developed and strengthened.

**C. Introduce key factors** contributing to resilience, such as social support, positive thinking, problem-solving skills, and self-care.

**D. Use the case studies** to demonstrate how resilience played a role in coping with the aftermath of disasters.

## III. Self-Care and Coping Strategies

**A. Present** a list of self-care and coping strategies with detailed explanations and, examples:

Engaging in **physical activity** (e.g., daily walks, yoga)

Practising **relaxation techniques** (e.g., deep breathing, meditation, progressive muscle)

Maintaining a **healthy diet** (e.g., the role of nutrition in mental health)





**B. Discuss** specific case studies where these strategies were applied successfully.

## IV. Accessing Resources

**A. Provide a list of mental health resources**, including crisis hotlines, local support groups, and online resources.

**B. Discuss** how students can access these resources in times of need.

**C. Share contact information** and emphasize the importance of seeking help when necessary.

## V. Role playing and case studies

**A. Divide students into small groups** and assign each group a case study related to a specific natural disaster or crisis

**B. Ask** the participants to analyze the case study and discuss the psychological reactions of the survivors, the role of resilience, and potential self-care strategies.

**C. Each group presents** its findings to the class, fostering a deeper understanding of real-life scenarios.

## VI. Open discussion and prioritization



Engage students in an open discussion to explore their opinions on the perceived importance of these sources of stress. Please encourage them to share their perspectives on which factors they believe might be more critical or have a greater impact on first responders' mental health.

**A. Presentation of Prioritised Sources:**

Following the open discussion, present the sources of stress for first responders in order of priority based on the collective input from the students. This can provide valuable insights into the perceptions and concerns surrounding the mental health challenges faced by rescuers.

To reinforce the theoretical understanding of the causes and symptoms of mental health issues for first responders, engage students in a scenario analysis exercise. This activity aims to apply their knowledge to practical situations and enhance their ability to recognize potential stressors.

**B: Instructions:****1.Group Formation:**

Divide the class into 2 or 3 groups.

**2. Scenario Presentation:**

Provide each group with a different realistic scenario involving a first responder.

The scenarios should include details about the responder's environment, the nature of the incident, and their emotional and physical reactions.

**3.Task:**

Ask each group to discuss and answer 2 or 3 basic questions related to the scenario. Encourage them to consider what might be happening to the rescuer, the possible reasons for their conditions or reactions, and how these factors align with the sources of stress discussed earlier.

**4. Possible questions:**

- What do you think is happening to the rescuer?
- Which is the most likely reason that causes these conditions or reactions?
- How might the identified stressors impact the rescuer's mental health in the long term?

### 5. Presentation

After a set period of discussion time, each group presents their analysis to the class.

Encourage students to support their answers with references to the theoretical knowledge discussed in the lesson.

### 6. Class Discussion:

Facilitate a class discussion after each presentation, allowing for questions and reflections from other students.

Emphasise the diversity of stressors and the importance of recognizing the interconnectedness of mental health challenges in real-life situations.



### Feedback incorporation

Consider incorporating feedback from students into the scenario analysis exercise, adapting future iterations based on their experiences and insights. Additionally, encourages open dialogue about the complexity of assessing mental health in dynamic and unpredictable emergencies. This practice session can enhance students' critical thinking skills and deepen their understanding of the practical implications of mental health issues for first responders.

**Note:** Creating a safe and supportive learning environment is crucial, especially when discussing sensitive topics like mental health. As vocational education teacher, you should be prepared to offer additional support to students who may need it and should be familiar with local mental health services and resources to provide referrals when necessary.

1

## Introduction. The Power of Instant Relief

**A. Welcome the students** and explain the importance of self-guided mental health exercises for immediate relief.

**B. Share the learning objectives** and explain how engaging exercises can make a difference.

**C. Introduce the concept of using quick exercises** for on-the-spot mental health management.

**D. Encourage students** to find a quiet and comfortable space for the duration of the lesson.

**E. Setting the Stage** for Mental Health Effects. Discuss with students the following questions:



**Why is understanding the effects of mental health crucial for first responders?**

**Teacher's follow-up:** Exploring the profound impact mental health can have on individuals and their ability to perform in high-stress situations.



**How can we categorise the effects of mental health on first responders?**

**Teacher's follow-up:** Introducing different dimensions and classifications of mental health effects, laying the groundwork for a comprehensive discussion.



**In what ways might mental health challenges extend beyond the individual and influence team dynamics among first responders?**

**Teacher's follow-up:** Highlighting the interconnectedness of mental health within a team context and its implications for overall effectiveness.

## ENGAGING EXERCISES FOR INSTANT RELIEF



**Can you think of examples where mental health issues may not only affect job performance but also have broader societal implications?**

**Teacher's follow-up:** Expanding the discussion to consider the ripple effects of mental health challenges on a larger scale, emphasizing the societal importance of addressing these issues.



**How do you believe cultural factors can influence the perception and management of mental health in the context of first responders?**

**Teacher's follow-up:** Exploring the role of cultural nuances in shaping attitudes towards mental health within the specific context of emergency response work.

## 2

## Study &amp; Practice

## I. "Expressive Breaths" - Breathing Techniques

**A. Video Presentation:**

Show a video demonstrating Box Breathing. To ensure comprehensive coverage, consider creating additional videos for Countdown Breathing and Balloon breathing.

**B. Handouts:**

Provide handouts with step-by-step instructions for Countdown Breathing and Balloon Breaths. Include details on when and how each technique can be effectively used.

**Suggested  
teaching aid**



**Box breathing  
relaxation technique:  
how to calm feelings of  
stress or anxiety.**



**II. Progressive Muscle Relaxation****A. Storytelling Approach:**

Incorporate storytelling into Progressive Muscle Relaxation.

For example, create a narrative where each muscle group represents a character in a story, gradually relaxing as the plot unfolds.

**B: Discuss** how imagination and relaxation can work hand in hand

**Suggested  
teaching aid**



Reduce Stress  
through  
Progressive  
Muscle Relaxation  
(3 of 3).

**III. Mindfulness Meditation**

**A.** Use a guided mindfulness meditation session to engage students, focusing on their senses and immediate surroundings.

**B.** Discuss ways to incorporate mindfulness into everyday routines.

We recommend you visiting [www.baldis.eu](http://www.baldis.eu) website, which includes the results of the ERASMUS+ educational project for teachers. On the website, among other interesting materials, you will find the **School's guide to balance the distance**, offering a large number of universal practices and techniques to support people in stressful situations, including mindfulness techniques, grounding etc.

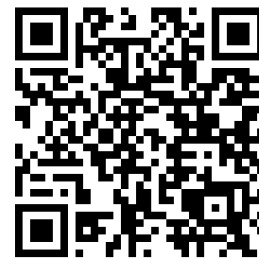


#### IV. Grounding techniques

**A.** Teach grounding techniques, such as the 5-4-3-2-1 method, as they relate to their immediate environment.

**B.** Encourage creativity in finding grounding items.

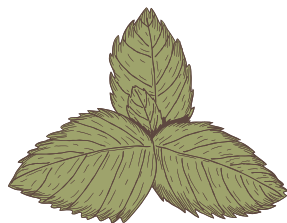
**C.** Offer examples of grounding items that can be used by teachers during the practice session.



#### Example:



**Smooth Stones:** Holding a smooth stone and focusing on its texture.



**Scented Objects:** Utilising items with calming scents, like lavender or mint.



**Tactile Tools:** Such as stress balls or fidget spinners to engage the sense of touch

#### V. "Your Instant Relief Toolkit"

**A. Encourage students** to reflect on the exercises they found most engaging and beneficial.

**B. Explain** how they can create such a toolkit.

**C. Have them create** their personalized "Instant Relief Toolkit," which should include their chosen exercises and any additional resources.



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#### D. Advise students on how they can create their instant relief toolkit.

- **Breathing Cards:** Personalised cards with breathing techniques.
- **Comfort Objects:** A small object with personal significance.
- **Guided Relaxation Recordings:** Audio recordings for relaxation session

#### VI. Conclusion and Action Plan

**A. Summarise** the key takeaways from the lesson.

**B. Challenge students** to use at least one exercise daily and track their progress in a journal.

**C. Remind students** that they can take control of their mental health instantly.

**Note:** Creating a safe and supportive learning environment is crucial, especially when discussing sensitive topics like mental health. Vocational education teachers should be prepared to offer additional support to students who may need it. They should be familiar with local mental health services and resources to provide referrals when necessary.

# ABOUT US



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edition:



You have read **Chapter 5 Mental health and well-being issues** of the **Inspirational Educational Guidelines for VET teachers & educators**. This material has been developed by the Ready4Crisis project team.

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For more info check: [www.ready4crisis.eu](http://www.ready4crisis.eu)



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