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Are You Ready Series: Using Mental Preparedness to Survive

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Having the right frame of mind to handle the stresses before and after a disaster is a key component to surviving the event. Mental preparation is usually the last item one prepares for. Without mental preparedness for a given situation, many succumb to the traumatic event, due to distress, shock, indecision or panic. When it comes to survival techniques, there are many who feel confident with their knowledge and skills, but without the will to overcome a given situation, panic will set in and mistakes will be made.

The Mental Game

Fear can strike at the heart of anyone that allows it to, thus causing them unwanted stress and anxiety. Mental preparation for a given situation can create a resilience in them that can keep a person moving on. Maintaining a positive attitude and using seeds of hope in the wake of a disaster, can literally keep a person alive, and keep them putting one foot in front of the other. When a person begins to lose their sense of self, and begin to doubt they will see another tomorrow, they need to cling to their higher hope.

There are many ways of maintaining and keeping the right mind frame. For many, their own stubbornness can see them through the disaster. For others, they will need to use other methods.

- Maintain the will to live, no matter what.
- Adapt to the situation and use ingenuity.
- Be proactive and find anything that can alleviate the situation.
- There is more than one solution to the problem. All one needs to do is to find it.
- Having a goal (survival plan, see loved ones again, revenge).
- Go with the flow. And make the best of it.
- Refusing to give into negative core beliefs (not smart enough, not good enough, unlovable, defective, powerless, not safe, etc).

If a person is in a situation where they feel powerless, there are two scenarios that could play out. They will either imagine themselves as a hero and figuring a way out, or imagine themselves as a victim. When playing stories out in one's head, the mind does not know if the story is real or not real, it just plays the story out as it unfolds. If a person imagines themselves being decisive and controlling their fears and acting rational, then the mind will only know to act this way in the future. If the person imagines themselves hiding and afraid, then they will train their mind to act in this manner.

These fears can break a person's resolve, thus causing indecision. In the popular series, *Band of Brothers* a young leader for the soldiers suddenly freezes up when he is confronted with enemy combatants. He cannot face the situation he is in and cannot make a rational decision, all the while leaving his young soldiers in a vulnerable and precarious position. Failing to anticipate the stresses that a person may be under and not preparing for them can cause panic, indecision and possibly death.

Focus on What Can Be Controlled

Focusing on things way beyond one's control is allowing negative core beliefs to come into the mind. Finding ways to stay busy and focused on the task at hand can help a person get

the right frame of mind back. For example, if a person found themselves alone in the wilderness and are beginning to feel helpless, they could regain some confidence by physically putting out their items in their [72 hour bag](#) ^[1] to see if there are enough survival items there to keep them alive. Additionally, the person would be able to create a decisive plan with these survival items. The survival plan is the goal, and the seed of hope that will get the person out of danger and on their journey back to their family.

Reactions to Survival

For many, the immense amount of disruption from a disaster situation will create trauma and distress for them. Some go into shock and do not know how to deal and interact with their environment. The acknowledgment of fear can create emotions that many disaster victims are subjected to. Emotions such as fear, disbelief, disorientation, and difficulty making decisions. In a survival situation, a person feels these emotions for a reason, and those emotions are there to keep the person alive. Remember that using these feelings to a person's advantage is making good use of the situation as well as the energy that those emotion's are exerting.

Using our Emotions to our Advantage

Stress, fear and anxiety are all associated as negative and destructive emotions. However, these could make a person more alert of the situation, stimulate and motivate a person to perform at their very best levels. The emotions will not only to take advantage of a person's strengths, but to work on one's weaknesses and the face their fears. Using these emotions as an advantage requires great concentration and control, because too much of these stresses can cause distress and even paralyzing fear. A person must confront and manage these emotions head on in order to keep up their momentum and to not go into panic mode.

In Les Stroud's book, [Survive! Essential Skills And Tactics To Get You Out Of Anywhere – Alive](#) ^[2], Stroud advises anyone in a disaster situation to stay focused on how a person can improve their situation in order to find the strength to go on. Stroud goes on to say that "Finding ways to relieve fear through knowledge by assessing the situation and environment, and understanding the specifics of the emergency, a person should be able to begin formulating a decisive plan of action."

Nature can be a cruel and unforgiving place to be in when a person is facing it on their own. Depression and loneliness can set in and the act of giving up hope only approaches that much faster. The focus shifts from surviving and maintaining health in order to get out alive, to being convinced there is no way out. *There is always a way out. There are always a multitude of solutions that someone can find.* Focusing on what is important in a person's lives and clinging to that thought with all of their might will help lead them out of danger.

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[1] 72 hour bag : http://readynutrition.com/resources/are-you-ready-series-72-hour-kits_04122009/

[2] Survive! Essential Skills And Tactics To Get You Out Of Anywhere – Alive: <http://www.amazon.com/Survive-Essential-Skills-Tactics-Anywhere/dp/0061373516>