Psychological & Emotional Resiliency for First Responders

Resiliency Against Burnout, Traumatic Stress, Compassion Fatigue

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OVERVIEW

• Risk of Helping [first responder] Occupations
• Cause of Stress, Including Traumatic Stress
• Developing Resiliency Skills
Work-Related Stress, Compassion Fatigue, Traumatic Stress, Burnout

"That which is to give light must endure burning”

- Viktor Frankl
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Helping, Serving, Protecting, and Caring Hurts!

• Pain associated with helping and caring for others
• Bearing witness to human suffering
Exposure to Traumatic Stress

- **General Public**
  - Half of US adults,
    - Seven (7), in the course of a lifetime

- **Police Officer**
  - Over three (3) for every six (6) months of service

- **Higher than Normal Rates of Traumatic Exposure**
  - First Responders: Firefighters, EMTs and Paramedics, Crisis Therapist, Healthcare, Human Services, Mental Health, etc.

**Traumatic events**: armed conflicts, severe traffic accidents, abusive violence, handling dead bodies, and investigating allegations of rape or child sexual abuse
Burnout

- Firefighters/EMTs/Paramedics
  - Elevated levels of burnout
  - High rates of *emotional exhaustion*
  - High rates of *depersonalization*
  - Increased risk of *alcohol and drug use*

- Law Enforcement
  - 69.7% *emotional exhaustion*
  - 84.6% *depersonalization*
  - 63.9% *low personal accomplishment*
Work-Related Stress

- **Firefighters/EMTs/Paramedics**
  - 59% report sleep deprivation
  - 58% report binge drinking

- **Medical Dispatchers (9-1-1 Dispatch)**
  - Higher levels of stress
  - Higher cortisol values
  - Higher heart rates
Work-Related Stress

• Law Enforcement
  • Increase risk of sleep problems
    • Significantly worse sleep quality
    • Significantly less than average sleep time
  • Increased autonomic activation, prior and after critical incidents
  • Increased risk of alcohol abuse
  • Increased risk of hypertension
  • Increased risk of depression
  • Increased risk of suicide
  • Increased risk of interpersonal relational problems
  • Increased risk of premature retirement
Helping, Serving, Protecting Caring is NOT Suffering

- Possible to be healthy while working in a toxic environment!

“That which is to give light must endure burning”

- Viktor Frankl
Psychological & Emotional Resiliency

“I am Not What Happen to Me, I am What I Choose to Become”
- Carl Gustav Jung
Silent Witness Exercise

The Effects of Our Work

1. Write down three (3) Negative effects from your work on an index card.

2. For two minutes circulate among the group allow others to see your card.
Is Your Life Stressful?

- Job
- Relationships
What are some of the causes?

- Write a list of things that cause your stress, under Causes
Effects of Stress

What are some of the effects?

• Write a list of the negative effects that those stressors have produced in your life
Stress: Cause & Effect

STRESS
Cause and Effect

CAUSES

EFFECTS
Stress: Cause & Effect

Stress
Cause and Effect

CAUSES

- Multiple demands
- Time constraints
- Workload/too much homework
- Financial problems
- Disgruntled families [negativity]
- Incompetence of others
- Pain/suffering

EFFECTS

- Irritability/Anger
- Sleep problems
- Fatigue
- Relational difficulties
- Compulsive behaviors
- Somatic issues (HA/GI)
- Bad attitude
- Chemical Abuse/Dependency
Stress: Cause & Effect

These Are Not the Causes of Your Stress

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As Long as You Believe These Are the Causes of Your Stress, You Will Continue to Have These Effects
Social Cognitive Perspective:

Our mental perception of threat causes a shift in physiological state

Nervous System Perceive the Environment as Unsafe
Cause of Stress

- Shift in physiological state
- Activates the biological defense system, causes discomfort
- Can be triggered by your perception of danger, threat, or risk

Your current perception of danger, threat or risk can cause a shift in the body
Are you 100% Safe Right Now?
Learning Experiment

“Lose your mind & come to your senses”

Fritz Perls

Take 10 seconds to experience the room, without any judgment.

Cut off any past learning about objects you see in the room.

Identify something in this room that is dangerous.
Think-Pair-Share

Why do we perceive threat where there is none?
Traumatic Injury

Past Painful Experiences

= Traumatic Injury

Hijacks our Perceptual System

Distorts Reality
Experience-Dependent Neuroplasticity

Learning
Brain Changes in Structure and/or Function
Distortion of Reality

Caring Wife

Reminder – eat more salad, less junk food

Hijacks our Perceptual System

Distorts Reality
Integrated Biobehavioral Resiliency Program

Six Skills for Building Professional Resiliency

- Self-Regulation
- Mental Flexibility
- Positive Psychological Strengths
- Interpersonal Connection and Support
- Self-Directedness and Virtue of Character
- Self-Care and Revitalization
1. **Self-Regulation** – ability to shift the body into a physical state that supports the sense of safety by down-regulating activity in the body’s defense systems.

2. **Mental Flexibility** – ability to look at a situation in another way (change perception) to consider options and change the response to it.

3. **Positive Psychological Strengths** – ability to use positive habits of the mind that allow us to become more optimistic, practice self-control, apply acceptance and commitment, forgiveness and kindness, practice fostering gratitude, cope with stress and worry, apply the ability to learn and grow from adversity (post-traumatic growth), and create a sense of meaning and purpose in life to increase perseverance.
4. **Interpersonal Connection and Support** – ability to develop and maintain healthy interpersonal connection to support physical, psychological, and emotional regulation. Utilization of support systems to deal with work-related stress and traumatic stress.

5. **Self-Directedness and Virtue of Character** – ability to deliberately direct one’s behavior in accordance to our values, mission or goals.

6. **Self-Care/Revitalization** – ability to refuel depleted resources to energize and achieve healthy pursuits of success.
Questions/Answers

Contact Information

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