How to Survive 25 Years in the Fire Service

A guide to building new hire resiliency
Learning Objectives

- The need for pro-active resiliency programs to help prevent first responder suicide as well as other mental/behavioral health problems.

- The definition of a “critical incident” and the likely hood of facing such calls.

- Various coping mechanisms that can help first responders deal with the stressors that they face.
Why do we need to be pro-active?

- Seventy percent of the general population at some point will experience a traumatic event. Of that seventy percent, twenty percent will develop PTSD. (ptsdunited.org/ptsd-statistics-2)

- Our job is to mitigate traumatic events.

- FF Suicide has become an epidemic in the Fire Service.
Firefighter Suicide vs. LODD

FFSuicide LODD

2013 2014 2015 2016 2017

77 103 123 148 142 114

95 90 89
How do we protect ourselves?
What is the result if we don’t?

Training

Decision Making and PPE
What happens when we don’t protect ourselves mentally?

- We can only fit so much into our “cup”.
- Our “cups” may come pre-filled.
What defines a critical incident?

We won’t run many “critical incidents”

WRONG!!

Any event that overwhelms our normal coping capacity is a critical incident.

Mitchell, J. T., & Everly, G. S.
“Terrible Ten” Critical Incidents

Mitchell, J. T.

- Line of Duty Death
- Suicide of a Colleague
- Serious Work Related Injury (to Self or Colleague)
- MCI / Disaster / Terrorism Incidents
- Events with High Degree of Threat to Ourselves
- Events Involving Death or Injury to a Child
- Events in which Victim is Known
- Events with Excessive Media Interest
- Prolonged Events with a Negative Outcome
- Any Significantly Powerful, Overwhelming Distressing Event
Are there affects from the hundreds of non-critical calls we will respond to?

- Burnout/Compassion Fatigue
- Substance Abuse
- Strained Relationships
- Depression
- Anxiety
- PTSD
- Suicide
Do bad stress and Critical Incidents only affect us?

Negative coping mechanisms isolate us from family, friends and coworkers, causing strained relationships.
How can we survive 25 years?
Maintain work/life balance

- Spouse
- Children
- Household
- Finances
- Social (outside of the firehouse!)
- Physical
- Recreational
- Spiritual
- Other
Utilize Peer Support Programs

When you have a Critical Incident, take advantage of your departments programs!

- Post-Incident Support
- Peer Support
- Referrals to professional help if needed
Talk to someone

- Spouse
- Friend
- Coworker
- Mentor
- Peer-Support
- Counselor
Make use of EAP

This is a benefit that you’ve earned!

- Explore your EAP program
- Know your benefits
Make use of Firestrong

- www.firestrong.org
- Firestrong Peer Support team
- Addiction education and assessments
- Mental Health education and assessments
- 24/7 Firefighter & Family Crisis and Support Line
- 844-525-FIRE (3473)
Take care of yourself

- Workout regularly
- Eat clean
- Sleep well
Don’t hold back from crying

Crying is the body’s release valve for stress, sadness, grief, anxiety, and frustration.
Don’t hold back anger or frustration

- Angry, cathartic ventilation can be very therapeutic.
- Find positive outlets for anger and frustration.
Get a pet

Animal-assisted therapy has been shown to help with anxiety, depression, and fatigue.
Find what you like to do and do it well

▪ Find your passion and be selfish about it!
▪ Balance overtime and make time for you.
▪ This is part of your restorative care!
Welcome to the best job in the world!
Ask Ourselves

- What are we doing to build resiliency in our First Responders?
- Are we doing enough?
- Can we do more?