

**On the Front Lines: Addressing  
Stress, Trauma & Suicide Prevention  
in Community Responders**

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Alabama Activity Center  
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**The Impact of Trauma on  
the Dys functionality of  
First Responders**

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**The Impact of Trauma  
on the Dys functionality of  
First Responders**

- Police
- Fire
- EMS



**The Impact of Trauma  
on the Dys functionality of  
First Responders**

- What is Trauma?
- What is Dys functionality?

**The Impact of Trauma  
on the Dys functionality of  
First Responders**

- Trau·ma. [ˈtroumə, ˈtrômə] NOUN
- 1. a deeply distressing or disturbing experience: "a personal trauma like the death of a child"
- 2. Medicine = physical injury.  
synonyms: injury · damage · wound · cut · lesion · laceration

**The Impact of Trauma  
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Psychological Trauma

- Psychological trauma is a type of damage to the psyche that occurs as a result of a severely distressing event
- Trauma is often the result of an overwhelming amount of stress that exceeds one's ability to cope, or integrate the emotions involved with that experience

### The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders

- A traumatic event involves one experience, or repeating events with the sense of being overwhelmed that can be delayed by weeks, years, or even decades as the person struggles to cope with the immediate circumstances, eventually leading to serious, long-term negative consequences

### The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders

- Dysfunctionality (Noun)
- A singular or collective noun alerting to the structural failure of a particular and expected function or functions within an individual, an organization, a machine or nature giving rise to an unpredictable and usually damaging outcome

### The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders

- Dysfunctionality (Noun)
- The condition that disallows someone or something to function or perform as expected in a norm or standard

### The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders

- Guess who lead the statistics as it relates to PTSD?

### The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders

1. Law Enforcement
2. Firefighters
3. Military Veterans

### The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders

- What is PTSD?

### The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders

- Brain structures and brain chemicals have both been implicated in the causes of PTSD
- Research shows that exposure to trauma can cause "fear conditioning" of the brain

### The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders

- Fear conditioning is where the person learns to predict traumas and the predicted traumas cause parts of the brain to activate
- With post-traumatic stress disorder, fear conditioning causes the brain to anticipate danger where none exists, causing PTSD symptoms

### The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders

- Characteristics that contribute to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) causes include:
  - Exposure to previous traumas, particularly as a child
  - Childhood adversity
  - Preexisting conditions like anxiety or depression
  - Family history of anxiety or depressive disorders
  - Gender (more women than men develop PTSD)

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- Some of the causes of PTSD are thought to be related to the type of trauma itself
- Exposures that are more likely to cause PTSD are:
  - More severe
  - Longer in duration
  - Closer to the individual

### The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders

- 70% of adults in the U.S. have experienced some type of traumatic event at least once in their lives. That's 223.4 million people.
- Up to 20% of these people go on to develop PTSD. As of today, that's 31.3 million people who did or are struggling with PTSD.
- An estimated 8% of Americans – that's 24.4 million people – have PTSD at any given time.

### The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders

- An estimated 1 out of 10 women develops PTSD; women are about twice as likely as men
- Among people who are victims of a severe traumatic experience 60 – 80% will develop PTSD
- Almost 50% of all outpatient mental health patients have PTSD

### **The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders**

- 20% of the soldiers who've been deployed in the past 6 years have PTSD. That's over 300,000.
- 17% of combat troops are women; 71% of female military personnel develop PTSD due to sexual assault within the ranks.

### **The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders**

- 15-43% of girls and 14-43% of boys will experience a traumatic event
- 3-15% girls and 1-6% of boys will develop PTSD
- As many as 30 – 60% of children who have survived specific disasters have PTSD

### **The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders**

- Does Trauma Increase An Individual's Suicide Risk?
  - A body of research indicates that there is a correlation between many types of trauma and suicidal behaviors.
  - For example, there is evidence that traumatic events such as childhood abuse may increase a person's suicide risk.

### **The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders**

- A history of military sexual trauma (MST) also increases the risk for suicide and intentional self-harm, suggesting a need to screen for suicide risk in this population.

### **The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders**

- What if the scars of previous trauma were not healed?
- What if the problems have never been addressed or diagnosed?

### **The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders**

#### **As First Responders:**

1. We See It ALL!
2. We Hear It ALL!
3. We Do It ALL!

### The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders

- The pictures you are about to review are graphic in nature.
- The pictures are included in this presentation as a teaching and learning tool only.

### The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders

- How does a First Responder deal with a fellow teammate getting killed in the line-of duty?



### The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders

- How many of you have dealt first hand with a line-of-duty death?



### The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders

- After days, months, and years of seeing this kind of trauma, how does the impact of trauma play on the dysfunctionality of First Responders to maintain good mental health?

### The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders

The question was asked previously:

- What if the scars of previous trauma were not healed?
- What if the problems have never been addressed or diagnosed?

### The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders

- There are ticking time bombs walking around and working as First Responders on a daily basis.

### **The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders**

**Although First Responders:**

1. See It ALL!
2. Hear It ALL!
3. Do It ALL!

### **The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders**

**As First Responders:**

**WE DO NOT KNOW IT ALL!**

### **The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders**

- Training to deal with the situation does help

### **The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders**

- “It’s no coincidence that four of the six letters in health are “heal”

*– Ed Northstrum*

### **The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders**

- Some factors can predict a better outcome for PTSD. These predictive factors include:
  - Availability of social support
  - Lack of avoidance or emotional numbing symptoms

### **The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders**

- Lack of hyperarousal (also known as the fight-or-flight response) symptoms
- Lack of symptoms related to re-experiencing the trauma

### **The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders**

- Get Rid of the Cycle of Abuse!



### **The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders**

**INCIDENT DEFUSING**

**V/S**

**CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS DEBRIEFING (CISD)**

### **The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders**

- The Defusing process is an intervention that is a shorter, less formal version of a debriefing
- It generally lasts from 30 to 60 minutes, but may go longer and is best conducted within one to four hours after a critical incident

### **The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders**

- It is not usually conducted more than 12 hours after the incident
- Like a Debriefing, it is confidential

### **The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders**

- The CISD process does not constitute any form of psychotherapy and it should never be utilized as a substitute for psychotherapy.
- Ideally it is conducted between 24 and 72 hours after the incident, but may be held later under exceptional circumstances.

### **The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders**

- The CISD is facilitated by a specially trained team which includes professional and peer support personnel. It is confidential.

### **The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders**

- What Can Also Help?

### **The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders**

#### 15 Day Positivity Challenge

1. Post your favorite picture of yourself
2. Post your favorite positive quote
3. Post what make you happy
4. Post a self affirmation
5. Post a picture of a person that makes you smile

### **The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders**

#### 15 Day Positivity Challenge

6. Post a song that makes life better
7. What have you done that makes you proud?
8. What's your favorite thing about you?
9. What is something you can do well?
10. Name an accomplishment

### **The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders**

#### 15 Day Positivity Challenge

11. Name something relaxing
12. Name a person that makes you feel safe
13. Name something that makes you laugh
14. Name something that makes you smile
15. Describe your happy place

### **The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders**

- Putting It Together

### **The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders**

- People tend to be generous when sharing their nonsense, fear, and ignorance.
- And while they seem quite eager to feed you their negativity, please remember that sometimes the diet we need to be on is a spiritual and emotional one.
- Be cautious with what you feed your mind and soul. Fuel yourself with positivity and let that fuel propel you into positive action.

• Dr. Steve Maraboli



## The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders

ANYWAY

By Mother Teresa

- People are often unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered; Forgive them anyway
- If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives; Be kind anyway
- If you are unsuccessful, you will win some false friends and some true enemies; Succeed anyway

## The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders

- If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you; Be honest and frank anyway
- What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight; Build anyway
- If you find serenity and happiness, they may be jealous; Be happy anyway

## The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders

- The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow, Do good anyway
- Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough; Give the world the best you've got anyway

## The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders

- You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and God; It was never between you and them anyway

## The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders

- The cost of a Stethoscope-----\$ 75.00
- The cost of a Glock Handgun---\$ 450.00
- The cost of Firefighter PPE-----\$1,500.00
- Telling a First Responder---THANK YOU!

## The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders

- I hope when you leave here today you have a better understanding and a new found appreciation for what your First Responders do and have to deal with on a daily basis.
- We do what we do because we took an oath to put our lives on the line to protect your safety and the safety of others in the communities we serve and we do just that because this is our calling!