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

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The Impact of Trauma on the Dysfunctionality of First Responders

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• Police
• Fire
• EMS

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• Trau·ma. [ˈtroumə, ˈtrôme] 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

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• What is Trauma?
• What is Dysfunctionality?

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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
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• 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

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

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

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1. Law Enforcement
2. Firefighters
3. Military Veterans

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• What is PTSD?

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

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- 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

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- Characteristics that can 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

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- 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.

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- 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
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- 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.

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- 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.

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

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- 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.

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- 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.

As First Responders:

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

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

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

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• 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?

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

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?
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Although First Responders:

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

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As First Responders:
WE DO NOT KNOW IT ALL!

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Training to deal with the situation does help

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• “It’s no coincidence that four of the six letters in health are “heal”
  – Ed Northstrum

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

• Lack of hyperarousal (also known as the fight-or-flight response) symptoms
• Lack of symptoms related to re-experiencing the trauma
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- Get Rid of the Cycle of Abuse!

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INCIDENT DEFUSING
V/S
CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS DEBRIEFING (CISD)

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- 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.

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

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- 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.

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

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

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

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

- Putting It Together

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
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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

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• 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

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• 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

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• 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!

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• 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!