

Trauma and Emergency Responders

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Trauma Journey

- Understanding of Trauma and ACES was a personal evolution
- Realization that many officers struggle not only with trauma experienced on the job but also from childhood
- Resiliency: some officers are quite resilient and others not so much but realization we can improve.



“Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And if you gaze long enough into an abyss, the abyss will gaze back at you.”

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)



“Our knowledge has made us cynical; our cleverness, hard and unkind. We think too much and feel too little. More than machinery, we need humanity. More than cleverness, we need kindness and gentleness.”

Charlie Chaplin in The Great Dictator



Nobility

Greatness of character and high ethical qualities or ideals that serve a cause greater than self; faithfulness to a higher calling or purpose.



“We’ve all got both light and dark inside us. What matters is the part we choose to act on. That’s who we really are.”

J.K. Rowling Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix



Why?

The most common stated reason for becoming an officer is to help people. Several aspects of a professional life of service are spiritual:

- Selfless
- Purposeful
- Compassionate
- Loving



How?

As an emergency responder, if you are not driven by your heart to make a positive difference with every call, with your colleagues, within your agency, and within your community, then the job is likely going to eat you alive.



Critical Problem for Emergency Responders

The everyday trauma of our professions erodes our ability to be consciously aware, purposeful, compassionate, and spiritual in our service.



The Issue

Prolonged exposure to violence, trauma, death, and suffering can scar a first responders spirit and take a terrible toll; substance abuse, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, emotional suffering, suicide, and lost careers plague these honored professions.



Police Officer Suicide

- Many feel police suicide is underreported so accurate numbers are hard to get.
- Police are more likely to die from their own gun than they are to be killed by a felonious incident.
- Number one cause of death for police officers is suicide – there are nearly 200 such deaths every year in the US (on average 120-140 documented yearly, with unknown additional deaths improperly classified as “accidental” or “undetermined”).



Emotional Stressors

- The abuse and / or death of a child
- A co-worker injured or killed
- Officer involved shootings
- Homicide scenes
- Suicide scenes



Emotional Stressors

- Motor vehicle accidents involving injury
- Domestic
- Constant interaction with citizens at their worst
- Public scrutiny
- Shift work / Long hours / Holidays



HIGH STAKES, HIGH CONSEQUENCES

requires

HYPERVIGILANCE



Hypervigilance Defined

- An enhanced state of sensory sensitivity accompanied by an exaggerated intensity of behaviors whose purpose is to detect threats.”
- “Abnormally increased arousal, responsiveness to stimuli, and screening of the environment for threats.”
- “Hypervigilance is accompanied by a state of increased anxiety which can cause exhaustion.”



Nine Warning Signs

- Isolation
- Irritability
- Difficulty Sleeping
- Anger
- Emotional Numbness, Apathy,
Disengagement with Life



Nine Warning Signs

- Lack of Communication
- Cynicism, Distrust, and Loss of Work Satisfaction
- Depression
- Drinking as a Perceived Need and Other Addictive/Compulsive Behaviors



- Acute stress is a major factor in early retirement and career changes for emergency responders, causing the public to lose the service of many solid, experienced men and woman. (Been estimated 50% of officers retire early)



Journey Through Law A Enforcement Career



Becoming a Police Officer

A person decides to become a law enforcement officer. They go through the Academy. They learn everything about police work but we fail to provide training that will help them cope with the stressors of the job and the proper support that will keep them healthy...physically, mentally, and spiritually

