

DEVELOPING AND MENTORING EMPLOYEE WELLNESS AND PEER SUPPORT TEAMS FOR LEO

Objectives:

At the end of this block of instruction the student will be able to recognize the benefits of an employee wellness program, identify the hurdles and obstacles within the law enforcement culture that hinder wellness program effectiveness, and apply best practices when developing a peer support team.

- Objectives:**
1. Identify critical incident and cumulative stress events that affect the LEO employee
 2. Explain the benefits of developing an employee wellness program
 3. Identify roadblocks for employee acceptance of a wellness program
 4. Recognize warning signs of an employee struggling with stress
 5. Describe key components of a successful peer support team
 6. Identify resources and ways to sustain an employee wellness program

Why do we need a Employee Wellness and Peer Support Program in our agency?

Understanding What Affects Our People

- Identify different types of stress
- Recognize an employee dealing with negative effects of stress
- Understand roadblocks of mental health in law enforcement culture
- Embrace employee wellness and change the culture

The Baggage

- Both internal and external stressors
- Relationships – marriage, divorce, pregnancy
- Finances – new house, new car, child support
- Overall health - Poor diet/lack of exercise/pre-existing conditions
- Fear of uncertainty, the unknown
- Prior history of traumatic events (i.e. military combat, abuse)
- Loss of a spouse, child, other family member or loved one
- "Normal" stress

Organizational Stress

- ⦿ Shift work/long hours
- ⦿ Irregular sleep patterns/chronic fatigue
- ⦿ Married to the radio
- ⦿ Unhealthy nutrition choices
- ⦿ Case loads
- ⦿ Agency expectations and performance standards
- ⦿ Inherent dangers/constant vigilance
- ⦿ Lack of organizational support
- ⦿ Public demands/expectations
- ⦿ Media/vilification of the profession

Critical Incident Stress

⦿ **Critical Incidents** are unusually challenging events that have the potential to create significant human distress and can overwhelm one's usual coping mechanisms. - (Everly & Mitchell, 2008)

Critical Incident Stress

- ⦿ Types of Critical incidents:
 - High risk situations, pursuits
 - Assault on LEO w/ deadly weapon
 - Deadly force incidents, OIS, Line-of-Duty Death
 - Fatal MVA or house fires
 - Homicide, suicide, infant death investigations
 - Child Abuse, exploitation, sex abuse
 - In-custody deaths
 - Rioting, civil unrest
 - Mass casualty events, natural disasters, terrorist acts, school shootings

Cumulative Stress

- ⦿ Compounding effects from all stressors
- ⦿ LEOs bottle things up
- ⦿ Circular relationship of stress from past experience, personal everyday life, and work related stress
- ⦿ Add in external pressures, guilt, grief, poor health choices

Who's stressed?

- ⦿ Noticeable changes in performance or attitude
 - Working less/less output
 - Working more
 - Uncharacteristic behavior
 - Unhealthy coping mechanisms
- ⦿ Stress is not biased
- ⦿ Early detection and intervention is key to recovery

Working Less/Less Output

- ⦿ Less productive
- ⦿ Frequent use of sick time
- ⦿ Tardiness
- ⦿ Increased absenteeism
- ⦿ Chronic fatigue
 - Sleep on the job
 - Poor decisions
 - Lack focus
 - Trouble keeping up with workload

Working More

- Overtime shifts
- Secondary assignments/side jobs
- Financial stress
- Avoidance of home life and responsibilities
- Missing important events, anniversaries, birthdays, holidays
- Damaged personal relationships

Uncharacteristic Behaviors

- Unusual changes in mood or behavior
- Unreasonably agitated
- Frequently irritable
- Uncharacteristic cynicism
- Uncharacteristically reactive
- Complacency, declined officer safety habits
- Expressing hopelessness

Unhealthy Coping Mechanisms

- Increased/excessive alcohol use
- Substance abuse, prescription and non-prescription drugs, illicit drugs
- Gambling, excessive spending
- Extramarital affairs, infidelity
- Used as an escape from reality of life stressors

Mental Health Roadblocks in Law Enforcement Culture

- ◎ Proud belief system
- ◎ Helper/Protector, "sheepdogs" – Lt. Col. Dave Grossman
- ◎ Unreasonable expectations of stoicism
- ◎ We are not victims
- ◎ Stigma of asking for help
 - Fear of weakness, embarrassment, shame
 - Exposure of vulnerabilities
- ◎ Fear of reassignment or termination
- ◎ Sense of loss of control
- ◎ Fear of the unknown

"The greatest sources of our suffering are the lies we tell ourselves."

- Bessel van der Kolk, M.D.

The Cost of Doing Business

- ◎ Common effects of stress
 - Severe physiological and psychological maladies
 - Chronic heart disease
 - Cancer
 - Obesity
 - Depression
 - Anxiety
 - Post-Traumatic Stress
- ◎ "Hypervigilance Biological Rollercoaster: Disengagement from Personal Life" – Kevin Gilmartin, Ph.D. from "Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement"

The Cost of Doing Business

- Higher mortality rate/shortened life expectancy
- High suicide rate
- LE far more likely to die by their own hand than someone else's
- "False all-or-nothing choice of suicide" from "My Life for Your Life" by Clarke Paris
- Loss of Identity, hopelessness

The Cost of Doing Business

- Identify is never one-dimensional
- We are not just police officers
- Spouses, parents, sons, daughters
- Church members, youth leaders, coaches
- Mentors and friends
- "If it's predictable, it's preventable" – Gordon Graham

The Truth About Peer Support

- Nothing new
- History of informal "peer support"
 - Car-to-car
 - Mealtime
 - Locker room
 - Choir practice
- Can have negative effects
- Look for the quick answer
- Promote the stigma/validating cynicism
- Influence bad/unhealthy coping strategies
- Structured, wellness-centered program is needed

Team Development and Planning

Lead from the Front

- Reinforces positive, help-seeking behaviors
- Practice what we preach
- Develop/adopt policy
- Identify program mission
- Transparent procedural application

Get the Big Picture

- Needs top-down buy-in
- Change how we view and talk about wellness and self-care
- Identify needs
- No one-size-fits-all approach

Funding

- Community-based mental health options
- EAP
- Grant funding
- Promote your program, get the information out to the public
- Private donors

Network

- Partnerships with mental health professionals
- CBHLs
- MO CIT First Responder Provider Network
- MSHP DEFENSE TEAM
- Non-profit benevolent organizations
- Other peer groups

Selecting a Coordinator

- Administrative
- Trusted by agency
- Good organization and communication skills
- Trusted by employees
- Confidentiality is of utmost importance
- Proactive and passionate about officer wellness

Team Considerations

- ⦿ Approachable
- ⦿ Experience level
- ⦿ Trusted with confidential matters
- ⦿ Trusted to follow program rules and requirements
- ⦿ Proactive without constant, direct oversight
- ⦿ Not everyone who desires to be a peer will make a good peer team member
- ⦿ Diversity matters
- ⦿ Selection process
 - Application vs. nomination

Change the Culture

- ⦿ Getting buy-in
- ⦿ Normalize the conversation about MH
- ⦿ Promote self-care
- ⦿ Education, don't wait
- ⦿ Sincere organizational support
- ⦿ Patience

"If we remember that wellness is the state of being in good health, especially as an actively pursued goal – then we are reminded that we must continually work on being well. And if we achieve it, it is not automatically ours to keep forever."

- Dr. Nancy R. Panza

Confidentiality Matters

- ⦿ Cornerstone of program
- ⦿ Recovery from breach of trust is difficult at best
- ⦿ Could deteriorate program credibility
- ⦿ Three exceptions:
 - Suicidal ideations, connect with professional resources
 - Law violations
 - Policy violations
- ⦿ Confidentiality does not equal privilege
- ⦿ Transparency is key

What We Do

- ⦿ Peers are not clinicians/licensed therapists
- ⦿ Eyes and ears to identify employees in crisis
- ⦿ One-on-one confidential support
- ⦿ Aid in normalizing the conversation about MH
- ⦿ Break the stigma/promote help-seeking behavior
- ⦿ Make referrals to professional services
- ⦿ CISM debriefings
- ⦿ Family support
- ⦿ Education and training

Making Cents Out of Employee Wellness and Peer Support

- ⦿ Workforce instability
- ⦿ Increased litigation
- ⦿ Retention issues
- ⦿ Attrition
- ⦿ Increased errors, poor decisions
- ⦿ Excessive force claims, civil rights violations
- ⦿ Criminal acts, break public trust
- ⦿ Cost of suicide, line-of-duty death
- ⦿ Resources, education, and training = "Life insurance"

The Payoff

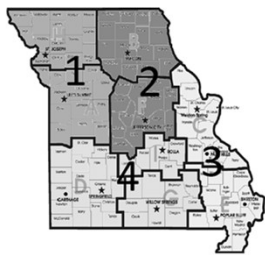
- Minimize psychological effects and injuries related to CI and Cumulative Stress
- Make mental health and employee wellness a priority
- Break the stigma
- Give Your Employees the Tools for Success
- Identify problems lying in wait
- Improve retention and recruitment
- Improve morale and community relationships
- Better employees = better service to your community

Resources

- Compass Health Network
- MO CIT Council First Responder Provider Network
- Troop C and E Law Enforcement Counselors list
- National Law Enforcement Suicide Awareness Day – September 26
- Blue H.E.L.P. crisis lines
- C.O.P.S. grants
- 590.192 RSMO

MSHP DEFENSE TEAM

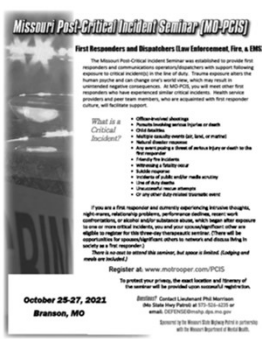
MISSOURI STATE HIGHWAY PATROL
DEFENSE PEER TEAM REGIONS



MSHP DEFENSE TEAM

- MSHP DEFENSE Team
 - Region 1 – Troops A and H, Master Sergeant Andy Henry, (816) 387-2345
 - Region 2 – Troops B and F, Lt. Jerry Callahan, (573) 751-8444
 - Region 3 – Troops C and E, Lt. Michele Coon, (573)840-9500
 - Region 4 – Troops D, G and I, Master Sergeant Trois Maloney, (573) 526-6174

PCIS



Missouri Post-Critical Incident Seminar (MP-PCIS)
 First Responders and Dispatchers Live Enforcement, Oct. 6, 1983

The Missouri Post-Critical Incident Seminar was established to provide first responders and communications centers/dispatchers with support following exposure to critical incidents. The goal of this 3-day seminar is to help the first responder deal with the emotional, physical, and mental stress that may result from a critical incident. In MO-PCIS, you will meet other first responders who have experienced critical incidents, learn about resources and peer team members, who are acquainted with first responder culture, will be helpful support.

What is a Critical Incident?

- Other critical incidents
- Transporting someone injured or dead
- Critical incidents include car, bike, or motor
- Critical incidents include
- Any event that is a threat of death or injury or death to life
- Critical incidents
- Witnessing fatalities
- Critical incidents
- Critical incidents include other incidents
- Critical incidents include
- or any other incident that can be

From the Missouri Post-Critical Incident Seminar: "The right words, relationships, problem-solving, performance, health, team work, communication, or financial support is critical to success. With proper education in use or more critical incidents, you will gain knowledge that other are unable to provide. This is the Missouri Post-Critical Incident Seminar. It is the only seminar of its kind in Missouri. It is critical to your success in this industry. There is no charge for attending the seminar, but please do include lodging and meals as indicated."

October 28-27, 2021
 Branson, MO

Register at: www.mshp.org/PCIS
 To attend this seminar, the most valuable and necessary of the seminar will be provided with seminar registration.

Missouri's Critical Incident Post-Mortem
 This seminar is held at 11:00-12:00 PM
 Email: PCIS@mo.gov
 Sponsor: The Missouri State Highway Patrol in partnership with the Missouri Department of Transportation

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