



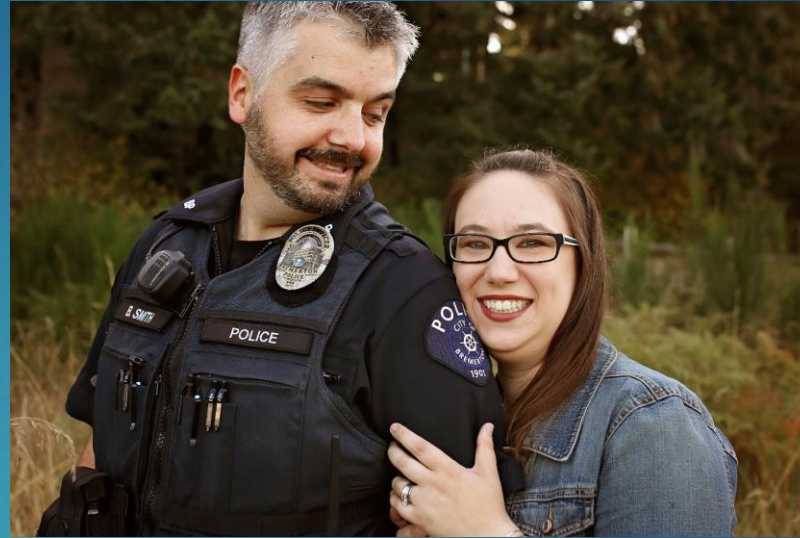
First Responder Resiliency

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FOUND THERAPY SERVICES, PLLC

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Who I Am

- ▶ Police wife, dog mom, Ravenclaw, scrapbooker, coffee addict, reader
- ▶ Graduated from SPU's MFT program in 2013; spent 8.5 years in community mental health in King County, working in an agency, in schools, conducting substance use assessments for youth
- ▶ Currently a doctoral student at Northcentral University, focusing on officer mental health
- ▶ Formed FTS in 2020 in response to the need I saw in our Responder community for mental health support



Overview

- ▶ Types of trauma that impact us in the Public Safety community: responders, support staff, family members
- ▶ Moral injury
- ▶ How it impacts our brains
- ▶ Mental health signs for concern
- ▶ Resiliency/coping skills

Please note that today is not psychotherapy. This is what we refer to as psychoeducation- I am sharing information and resources with you so you can make informed choices for your mental health.

Keep in Mind....

- ▶ The things presented today are tips for you to take control over your own health and well-being. It is up to each of us to take ownership of how we take care of ourselves within the limitations we find ourselves working with.
- ▶ Take what's useful, leave what's not

What is Resiliency?

“What happens to us becomes a part of us. Resilient people do not bounce back from hard experiences; they find healthy ways to integrate them into their lives.” –Eric Greitens

Kintsugi



Strengths of Responders

- ▶ Problem solving
 - ▶ Resilient
 - ▶ Compartmentalizing
 - ▶ Gut instincts
 - ▶ Dark Humor
-
- ▶ BUT....even strengths can be weaknesses if we allow them to.

Trauma: What Is It?

- ▶ Trauma is, first and foremost, a wound.
- ▶ Any event that negatively impacts how we see ourselves, the world around us, or other people can fall under the category of trauma
- ▶ However, not all trauma produces bio-psycho-social-spiritual consequences every time, and not everyone experiences it in the same way
- ▶ A word about PTS Disorder vs. PTS Injury
- ▶ A word about PTG: post-traumatic growth

Trauma and First Responders

The average officer will, over the course of a 20-30 year *career*, encounter approximately 200-1000 critical incidents. By comparison, the average civilian will encounter 1 or 2 critical incidents over the course of their *lifetime*.

Approximately 18-20% of officers and fire personnel will develop PTSD on a clinically diagnosable level, compared with only 6% of the general population.

Approximately 17% of dispatchers will develop PTSD on a clinically diagnosable level. An additional 16% of dispatchers will have PTS symptoms without rising to the level of a clinical diagnosis.

Mental Health Dx and First Responders

Fire/EMS:

Depression- 22% (according to NIH)

Substance Use Disorder (primarily alcohol)- 50% of male FF, 60.5% of female FF (according to SAMHSA)

Police:

Depression- 26% (according to SAMHSA)

Substance Use Disorder (primarily alcohol)- 11% of male LEOs, 16% of female LEOs (according to NIAAA study)

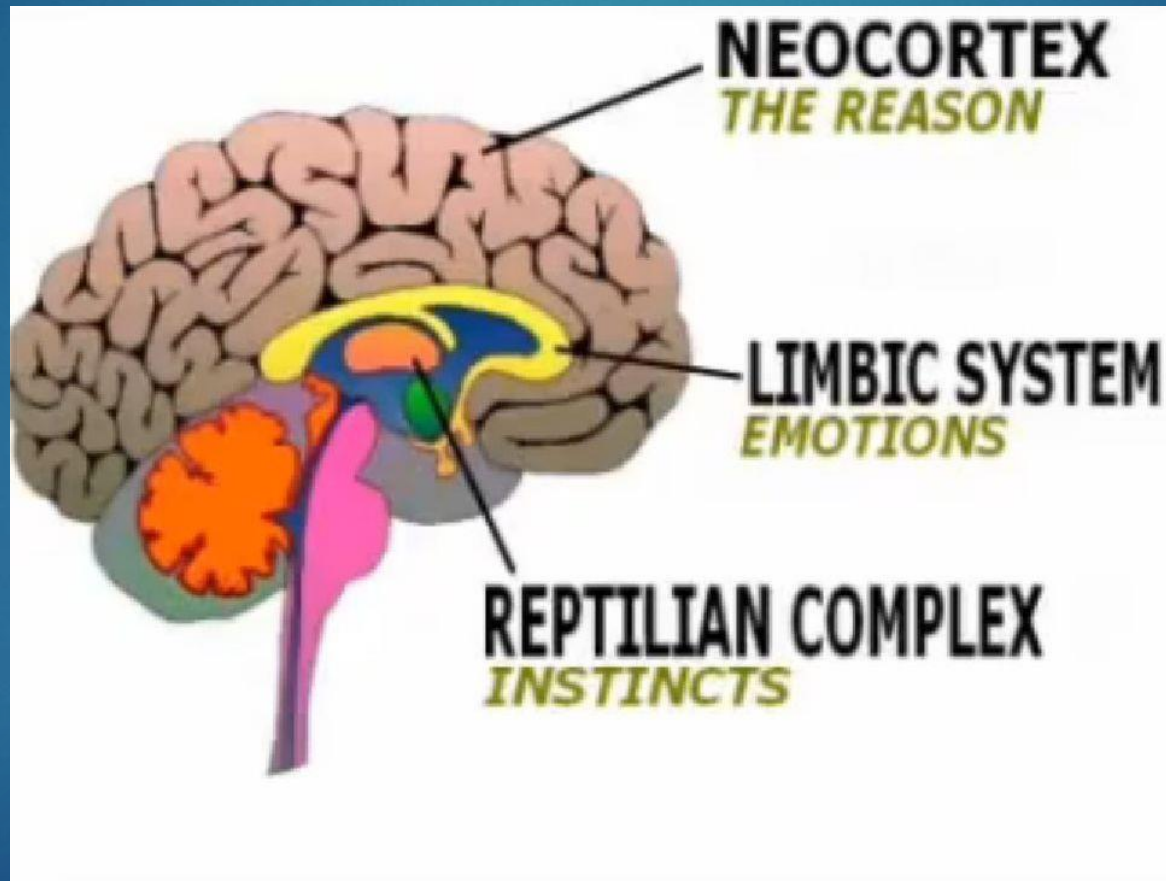
Trauma and Public Safety

- ▶ Peritraumatic stress- experiencing intense fear, horror, or helplessness in response to an event- can also precipitate PTS symptoms.
- ▶ Calls involving harm or death of children and other first responders particularly increase the risk of a stress response and development of PTS symptoms
- ▶ Factors contributing to mental health symptoms in public safety work include organizational stress, lack of training, shift work stressors

Types of Trauma

- ▶ **Primary:** an experience that directly threatens your safety or life, or witnessing first person this happen to someone.
- ▶ **Secondary:** witnessing the effects of trauma on people through hearing their stories and narratives
- ▶ **Vicarious:** effects of trauma from engaging empathically with someone who has experienced trauma.
- ▶ **Moral Injury:** Being forced to perpetrate or witness an action that deeply violates the deeply held values and morals of an individual

Trauma in the Brain



Possible Signs of MH Concerns

- ▶ Changes from baseline functioning
- ▶ Last for 2-4 weeks, occurring more days than not
- ▶ Mind-body-spirit-relationships
- ▶ Please know that these are normal reactions to abnormal situations. When they build up, that's when we become concerned about a clinical level of symptomology.

Possible Signs of MH Concerns

▶ BIO: physical changes

- ▶ Changes in sleep (can be hypersomnia, hyposomnia, nightmares, waking up repeatedly, not getting good rest)
- ▶ Changes in appetite (up or down)
- ▶ Increase in physical complaints like headaches, stomachaches, muscle tension, panic attacks

▶ PSYCHO: mental and emotional changes

- ▶ Experiencing thoughts that you'd be better off dead or the world would be better without you
- ▶ Racing thoughts
- ▶ Difficulty concentrating
- ▶ General increase in negative focus (trying to convince yourself you don't care)
- ▶ Cynicism, paranoia
- ▶ Increased irritability
- ▶ Sadness, hopelessness
- ▶ Apathy

Possible Signs of MH Concerns

▶ Social/Behavioral

- ▶ No longer enjoying activities you usually love
- ▶ Lack of motivation, especially for self-care
- ▶ Increase in substance use
- ▶ Increase in reckless decision making or risk taking
- ▶ Self-harm

▶ Relational/Spiritual

- ▶ Not being able to be present when with your loved ones
- ▶ Isolating from others
- ▶ ****REMEMBER: THESE CONCERNS FESTER WHEN IN ISOLATION****

The Two RED FLAGS

- ▶ Suicidality
- ▶ Substance Use

- ▶ CALL CODE4NW IMMEDIATELY. We need you here. Don't wait to seek help if either of these concerns emerge.

- ▶ Your agency likely also has EAP options available
- ▶ Contact peer support for a referral to a trusted provider

How do we foster resiliency in the face of these stressors?

- ▶ Developing healthy coping habits and self care skills.
- ▶ Resilience is a skill that needs to be built and cultivated.



Coping Skills

- ▶ Focus on what you can control. What's in your control?
 - ▶ Your own thoughts, actions, attitudes, and reactions
 - ▶ What you allow in to your mind is in your control
 - ▶ Your own self-care is in your control

Coping Skills: Therapy

- ▶ Common barriers to accessing care for First Responders:
 - ▶ Fear of a paper trail
 - ▶ Couple of options: first, if you pay cash, you don't have to have a diagnosis. Diagnosis is only required in cases of insurance. Talk to the therapist about this concern. However, please remember that even if you use insurance, all information is confidential unless it falls under a reporting mandate (child abuse/elder abuse/suicidal or homicidal intent)
 - ▶ WAC 246-809-035 allows for a client's written request for no records to be kept to be honored. All that would be documented are signed consent forms, relevant billing information, and a record of dates/time/duration of session.

Coping Skills: Therapy

- ▶ Common barrier: Struggling to find a therapist who “gets you”
 - ▶ **Code4NW**, Academy Hour, Serve and Protect all have databases for referrals to culturally competent therapists for Public Safety personnel.
 - ▶ Someone who is not scared off by dark humor, hard stories, or who don't understand the impacts of the job.
 - ▶ For trauma specific treatment, find an EMDR provider. EMDR is a proven, safe, efficient method to address trauma and reduce the symptoms you experience as a result.

Coping Skills: Self Care

- ▶ Eat healthy food. Our brains need protein every 3-4 hours to optimally function
- ▶ DRINK. WATER.
- ▶ SLEEP. Turn off technology at least an hour before your desired bed time. Take a shower, drink warm tea, or read in soft light until you are ready to sleep if you need a way to wind down. Find an app like Calm and use their meditations or sleep stories.
- ▶ Exercise. This has multiple benefits: endorphins, bi-lateral motion to help with processing, and it releases the lactic acid that gets stored in your muscles as the result of stress

Coping Skills: Hobbies and Support

- ▶ To protect against moral injury progressing in to a PTSI, it is helpful to have hobbies and support systems outside of the Responder community.
- ▶ **It is vital that you be able to answer the question “who am I?”** apart from the job
- ▶ Hobbies and connections outside of the Responder community is vital to this.
- ▶ Hobbies outside of Responder interests also provide an additional outlet for stress.

Coping Skills: Mindfulness


▶ **What is mindfulness?**

- ▶ Focusing on your body in the present moment, rather than getting sucked in to a spiral of anxiety or worry
- ▶ Non-judgment of thoughts and feelings
- ▶ Noticing the present intentionally and without judgment.

Why practice these skills? Research shows that practicing mindfulness and meditation can lower the production of cortisol (stress hormones), lower blood pressure, and has benefits like an improved immune system, improved self-awareness, and improved pain tolerance.

Coping Skills: Mindfulness & Breathing

- ▶ **Box breaths/tactical breathing/square breaths:** inhale for a count of 4, hold it for a count of 4, exhale for a count of 4, and hold again for a count of 4. Repeat 4-5 times or until you feel your body come down.
- ▶ If you need to distract yourself from an angry, anxious, or overwhelming thought, do a silly activity at the same time that involves both sides of your body. Do a silly walk while waving your arms, rub your tummy and pat your head then switch, alternate fingers touching your nose, etc
- ▶ **5-4-3-2-1:** list, out loud, **five** things you can **see**, **four** things you can **feel** (internal or external), **three** things you can **hear**, **two** things you can **smell**, and **one** thing you can **taste**.
- ▶ If a mindfulness or meditation exercise is too difficult, try doing a regular activity mindfully: wash the dishes, cook a meal, or color. Notice how the activity feels- the weight of the dishes in your hand, how chopping the food feels, the way the color goes on the page.



I know the world is bruised and
bleeding, and though it is important
not to ignore its pain, it is also critical to
refuse to succumb to its malevolence.

-TONI MORRISON

Resources

- ▶ “Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement” by Kevin Gilmartin
- ▶ “Mindfulness for Warriors” by Kim Colegrove
- ▶ “Trauma Stewardship” by Laura Van Dernoot Lipsky
- ▶ “The POWER Manual” by Daniel Blumberg, Konstantinos Papazoglou, & Michael Schlosser
- ▶ “Relentless Courage” by Sgt Michael Sugrue & Doc Shaunna Springer

Crisis Lines

- ▶ Code4NW- [425.243.5092](tel:425.243.5092)
- ▶ Serve & Protect: 615.373.8000
- ▶ Suicide Prevention Hotline: 988
- ▶ Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255, press 1

Presenter Contact Info

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