



# Mental Health For Our Own

Lifting the veil on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder  
and  
Cumulative Stress Disorder

# What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?

- Otherwise known as PTSD.
- It's mental trauma we endure as first responders.
- It can be as simple as one incident that may have effected you or your group.
- It can be an elderly person that is very sick or hurt that reminds you of a loved one.

# What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?

- It can be a horrific car accident with a prolonged extrication with patients trapped.
- The fact is, it's different for everyone.

# What is Cumulative Stress Disorder?

- Otherwise known as CSD.
- This is seen in public servants who deal with these mental stresses over time.
- The repeated bombardment of horrific events, death, and seeing people hurt or sick.
- CSD is most seen in emergency personnel well into their career.

# Who does this effect??

- This can affect anyone put in an environment that causes severe mental stress.
- Emergency Medical Services such as EMTs and Paramedics, Firefighters, Law Enforcement, and Military; basically anyone who is exposed to mental trauma.

# Who does this effect?

- This can also be applied to individuals who have gone through tragedy or abuse in their lives, such as child abuse, child trafficking, mental abuse, bullying, etc.

# PTSD vs CSD

- PTSD can result from one specific incident.
- CSD takes time with repeated insults of events.

# Why do we do what we do?!?

- Most of us get into Rescue and Fire because we love helping people in a time of need.
- But, we also love the excitement of the calls.
- We enjoy rolling down the streets with lights and sirens en-route to a unpredictable scene.



# Why do we do what we do?!?

- While these mental stresses are ongoing, behind the scenes your memory is subconsciously remembering all the terrible scenes, death, and all other stresses associated with these incidents.
- After years of bombardment of these incidents, issues may present and effect our work and personal lives.

# At first...

- These calls are exciting! You may not feel any stresses or have any issues dealing with these calls.
- People brush off these bad calls and keep going.
- Some laugh and joke with peers after a bad call. This is a way of coping.

# Later on ...

- You may or may not notice certain issues starting to emerge weeks, months, or years later.
- You, your friends, or family may notice a change in your life or behavior. Be vigilant and listen to them.

# Work environment

- When we work in a typical environment of “suck it up” or “just deal with it”, it makes it more challenging to open up and vent to others.
- It can be difficult to lower your guard and ask for help or want to talk with someone.
- Our line of work has classically been viewed as a physically and mentally tough job that sees “a need for help” as weakness.

# Work environment

- With this, it creates an environment that sets the stage for failure.
- 50 percent of people in EMS and Fire will not seek help due to the culture and unsupportive environments. (1)

# Is it a sign of weakness?

- Absolutely NOT!
- It actually takes a stronger person to speak up and ask for help than someone to remain quiet, dormant, or reclusive.

# Facts and Statistics

- A 2015 survey was done with 4,000 self selected EMS providers. 85 percent of those providers reported having very strong emotional responses from the stresses of the job. (1)
- 37 percent reported having suicidal thoughts (1)
- 5 percent reported having at least one attempted suicide. (1)

# Facts and Statistics

- The study did not clarify the subjects' call volume or time on the job.
- As you can imagine, these stresses are exacerbated by high call volumes and years of service.



# Facts and Statistics

- These stats are unacceptable and calls for an immediate culture change in EMS and Fire.
- It is ok to ask for help.
- It is ok to talk to someone.
- It is ok to be human.

# Who is your best ally in this?

- Family
- Close friends
- CISM team(s) (Available thru the Lord Fairfax EMS Council office)
- Your work partner
- Religious members (pastor, bishop, etc)
- Multiple online resources (listed at the end of this presentation)

# When something is wrong.

- You may or may not know something is wrong.
- Your friends, family, or coworkers may notice before you do. If they make comments about your demeanor or personality changes, you must....
- Take a good look at yourself and ask “Have I changed?”

# Signs and Symptoms

- Signs and Symptoms may vary from person to person. Here are some to be on the lookout for..
  - Depression
  - Increased alcohol or drug use
  - Reclusive behavior

# Signs and Symptoms

- Quicker temper
- Becoming negative about life, job, and family
- Caring less about things they enjoy
- Anxiety, Anger, Sadness, or Hopelessness

# Signs and Symptoms

- Frequent nightmares or reoccurring dreams of an incident(s)
- Problems with relationships or finances
- Hiding thoughts or feelings from everyone
- Thoughts of harming themselves

# Contributing Factors:

- Sleep deprivation
- Working long hours
- Birthdays, holidays, and special times away from family and loved ones
- Irregular incomes
- Constant exposure to trauma
- These are all additional contributing factors...

# Signs and Symptoms

- Again, you may not recognize any of these issues but maybe a friend, coworker, loved one may say something to you.
- It is imperative that you reassess yourself here.
- Sometimes when we are involved, we can't see what is happening.



# How to change the status quo...

- Be an advocate for your peers, friends, and yourself. Keep your eyes and ears open.
- Keep an open line of communication with them and without judgement.
- Talk about calls or incidents with a trusted person. This helps “offload” the stress.
- Find a hobby or sport that allows for an outlet.

# In closing...

- We are all human. We all bleed and we all hurt.
- If you're not operating at your best, how do you expect to help the people in need?
- Isn't that why you got into this job anyway?
- The time has come to dissolve the negative stigma of needing help.

# Code Green Campaign

- Website with the mission of raising awareness about mental health issues among first responders and eliminating the stigma about mental health treatment.
- This website also includes hundreds of anonymous stories from first responders who share their stories.



**THE CODE GREEN  
CAMPAIGN**

*We call code strokes, code STEMIs, and code traumas. It is time we called a code alert on our mental health.*

# Sources of help

\*\* <https://concernhotline.org/>

- (local resource available within our entire region, 365 days a year, 24 hours a day)

\*\* 911 Buddy Check:

- Facebook and IG @911buddycheck

\*\* National Suicide Prevention Hotline

- 1 (800) 273-8255 (TALK)

- Online chat: [suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat/](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat/)

# Sources for help

- \*\* Safe Call Now – a 24 hour crisis hotline for First Responders  
1-206-459-3020
- \*\* Crisis Text Line – Text “Hello” to 741741
- \*\* Uniformed Services Peer Council  
- [www.uniformedhelp.org](http://www.uniformedhelp.org)

# Sources for help

\*\* Need to find a therapist :  
[psychologytoday.com/us/therapists](http://psychologytoday.com/us/therapists)

\*\* Chaplain Services:  
[emergencychaplain.org](http://emergencychaplain.org)

\*\* 7 Cups  
- [www.7cups.com](http://www.7cups.com)

A close-up, artistic photograph of a glass filled with a golden-brown liquid, likely whiskey, with a blurred background. The glass is partially filled, and the liquid has a rich, warm tone. The background is a soft, out-of-focus mix of light and dark colors, creating a bokeh effect. The text "Thank you for your time." is centered in the middle of the image in a clean, black, sans-serif font.

Thank you for your time.

# Sources:

(1) Sullivan; Bob, MS, NRP & Sullivan; LCSW, LLC  
Mental Illness treatment: Hope for EMS Providers