

Self-Care Planning

Building Your Bridge for Your Future

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There are Four Objectives in Today's Presentation

1. Defining a Self-Care Plan for First Responders.
2. Identifying Why a Self-Care Plan is Necessary for First Responders.
3. Educating First Responders About The Process of Change.
4. Teaching First Responders How to Write a Self-Care Plan.

1. Defining a Self-Care Plan for First Responders: What is a Self-Care Plan?

- It's an agreement to begin your healing from trauma and the negative physical, emotional and spiritual effects caused by trauma.
- It's a 'bridge' between where you are now and where you would like to be in the future with your mental, behavior and spiritual health.
- It uses what you have learned at the retreat to reduce the effects of your work to address trauma, anxiety, depression, addictions, and substance use.
- It includes a goal and discrete steps to reach that goal.
- It's a contract between you and your higher power, your significant other, your children, your coworkers, and/or The Bridge.
- It is written, reflective, personalized, and serves as a 'road map' for the First Responder to heal.

2. Identifying Why a Self-Care Plan is Necessary for First Responders

- The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Study of 1995-1997.
- Applying the ACEs Study to Understand Adverse Responder Experiences (AREs).
- Reviewing the Morbidity and Mortality Data of First Responders.

Years ago, Kaiser Permanente, an insurance company, conducted a large survey of its members. They found that traumatic events that kids experience such as neglect, abuse, or witnessing domestic violence, were highly related to health and social problems across the lifespan. So, if a child had such adverse childhood experiences, referred to as ACEs, as an adult they were much more likely to engage in smoking, alcohol abuse, illegal drug use, to have obesity, depression, heart disease, cancer and a shortened life span. We now know that child maltreatment contributes to many chronic diseases (e.g., cancer, diabetes, depression, anxiety, stroke) and that these diseases are the most common causes of death and disability in the U.S. 'ACEs' cause changes in the brain and body, and 'speed up' the processes of disease and aging. In short, trauma can cause disease.

During your work, were you exposed to any of these AREs?:

- 1. A coworker's death or disfigurement?**
- 2. The death, rape, severe neglect or serious injury of a child or teenager?**
- 3. Multiple fatalities or grossly harmed survivors?**
- 4. Attempted or completed suicides?**
- 5. Accidents involving death or permanent injury?**
- 6. Acts of terrorism?**
- 7. Sexual assault of an adult such as rape?**
- 8. An officer-involved shooting?**
- 9. Grotesque injuries such as burned or dismembered bodies?**
- 10. Acts of violence resulting in someone's death, such as murder?**
- 11. Natural or man-made disasters?**
- 12. Administrative problems in your department that worsened your mental health?**

Can you think of any other AREs that you have experienced as a first responder?

AREs Tend to Cause First Responders to...

- Have nightmares
- Feel tired, exhausted much of the time
- Get headaches
- Have difficulty breathing
- Feel anxiety, guilt, panic, anger
- Feel depressed most days
- Become hyper vigilant to your surroundings
- Develop sexual addictions
- Experience flashbacks of a traumatic event
- Become inattentive, distracted
- Withdraw from others
- Abuse drugs, alcohol
- Overeat, undereat
- Become irritable or very angry
- Have recurrent memories of traumatic events

Exposure to AREs: How it Effects First Responders

- The rate of PTSD among the general population is 6%. It is 25-30% among first responders.
- First responders are *10 times* more likely to attempt suicide.
- 85% of first responders have experienced symptoms related to mental health issues such as heightened anxiety and depression.
- Past month heavy or binge drinking was reported by about half of male firefighters; 9% reported driving under the influence. Over 39% of female firefighters binge drink.
- In 2017, suicides left more officers and firefighters dead *than all line of duty deaths combined*.
- In 2017, 46 police officers were fatally shot. More than triple that — *140* — committed suicide.

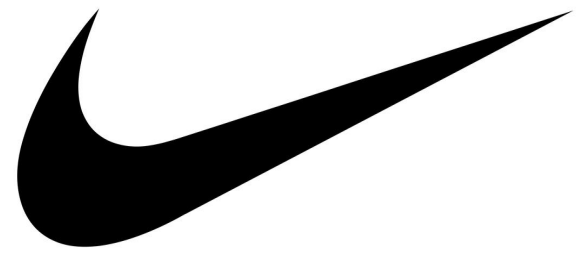
3. Educating First Responders About The Process of Change.

Self-Care requires the first responder to seek change, to begin healing from trauma

Trauma is a normal reaction to abnormal events

Healing takes change

Change is a process



What Stages do People go Through to Change Their Behavior and Begin Self-Care?

- Precontemplation: I'm just not going to do it.
- Contemplation: I may just do it.
- Preparation: I'm getting ready to just doing it.
- Action: I'm just doing it.

When people change, they do so by moving through these stages. Change is a process.

It's important for you to identify which stage you're at so that you can make a self care plan that works. The most effective self-care plans address where you are in this stage of change. More about this later.

Dr. James Prochaska

Transtheoretical Model

Precontemplation

First responders in this stage have no intent to take any action on self-care. They don't see a need to change, at least yet.

People in this stage will typically rebel if they feel forced to change.

They may want to self-care, but do not intend to.

I'm just not going to do it.



If you are the precontemplation stage, what can you and others do?

- For the significant other, don't force someone to take care of himself/herself. That will only be met with resistance and resentment. They will be less likely to consider change in the future. Rather, provide the first responder with the key if they are in this stage: Give them information.
- For the first responder, get as much information as you can so you can make an informed decision to change. Coming to this retreat is an example of gaining information. Learn as much as you can.
- Learn about how you are affecting people in your world, for better or worse particularly how your trauma is affecting you and the people you care about.
- Compare how you were when you started your career, with what you've become.
- Get information from others you trust, such as your significant other, children, a coworker.
- Have others share information about how they see you and how you've changed.
- Write about what could be different if you took steps to take care of yourself. Write about what your life would be like if you begin to heal.

Contemplation

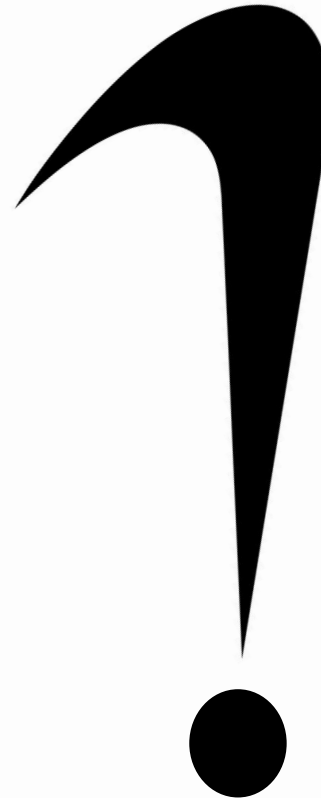
The first responder is considering both the pros and cons of self-care.

The pros of adopting self-care strategies are outweighing the cons.

The first responder however, often remains ambivalent and continues to question the need to change his/her behavior.

It may only take one more 'pro' to tip the scales and help the first responder move to the next stage.

I may just do it.



What can you and others do if you are in the contemplation phase?

- The first responder should consider all of the benefits and risks, the pros and cons, that are associated with self-care.
- You can make a list of the pros and cons of changing.
- Once you complete that list, begin to challenge the 'cons' on the list...one by one.
- Get help creating that list from someone you trust.

Example: My List of Pros and Cons of Starting Self-Care.

- I would learn more about what is bothering me and why I am so angry.
- If I got self-care, I could maybe help other first responders someday.
- I could stop having nightmares.
- My drinking could decrease or stop.
- My marriage could improve.
- My kids wouldn't fear me.
- I wouldn't hate myself and feel guilty so much.
- I would get embarrassed to go and talk to someone about what I've experienced.
- I could get known as "Crazy Chris".
- A therapist probably wouldn't understand me even if I shared.
- I would be afraid of failing if I started to make a change in myself.
- I don't know of any help where I live.

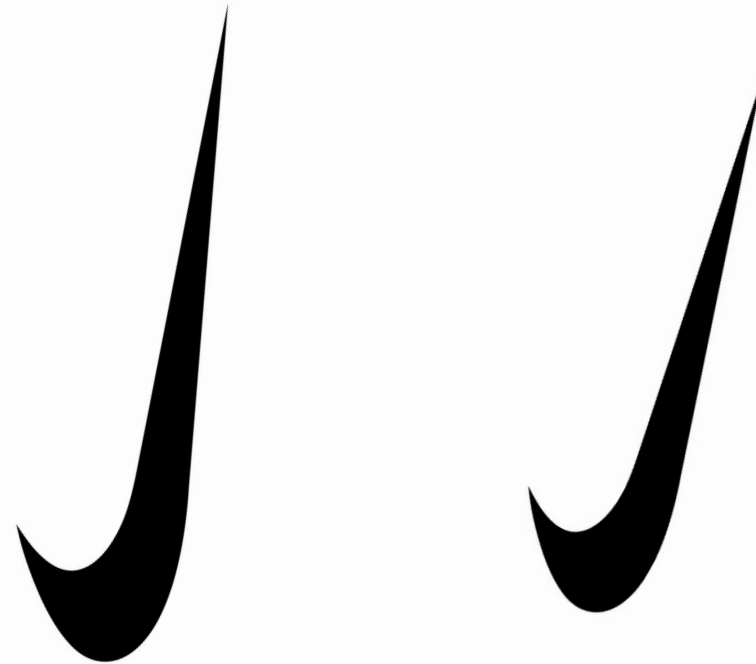
Preparation

The first responder in this stage has made a commitment to begin self-care and will do so in the next 30 days.

He/she is taking real steps to begin acting on healing.

The first responder is identifying what resources are needed to get help and make a change.

I'm getting ready to just doing it.



What can you and others do if you are in the preparation phase?

- View past attempts to self-care as not failures but you are a “work in progress”.
- You will use your inner strengths that are inherent in all first responders to your advantage: problem solver, being patient, being solution focused, being a hard worker, etc.
- You can make your commitment to take care of yourself ‘public’. Commitments are strengthened if you let others you trust know what your plan is.
- Significant others can help the first responder by helping remove barriers that would interfere with taking action.

Action

In this stage, self-care has started.

The first responder is beginning to take real steps towards better psychological, physical and spiritual health.

You are working on being less self-destructive.

Maintenance of self-care is key so first responders need encouragement and support.

Anticipate relapse-it will happen, so plan for it.

I'm just doing it!



What you and others can do if you are in the action phase?

- Reinforce yourself for working on yourself.
- For significant others, praise your first responder. Reinforce their hard work.
- Treat yourself and others when you take steps in your self-care plan.
- Expect relapse to happen. It will. Create a plan that addresses how you will get back on the wagon.
- Help others if they are struggling and in the earlier stages of change.

4. Teaching First Responders How to Write a Self-Care Plan.

Every self-care plan has a goal

- A Goal is something you want to accomplish in the next 30 days. Goals should be clear and achievable. Start out small...you can add other goals later.

Example: *“I want to have fewer angry outbursts at home. I don’t want to yell at my kids any more.”*

Example: *“I will begin to treat my PTSD and depression, and begin to fight it back.”*

...and every goal has steps...

- Steps are the specific, measurable actions you need to take to reach your goal.

Example: *“I will talk to my doctor about using medication to help manage my anger.”*

Example: *“I will keep a journal of my anger for the next 30 days. I will write what triggered it, what I did, and what I could have done differently.”*

Example: *“I will look into the Psychology Today website and find someone who does EMDR and call them to make an appointment.”*

Example: *“I will go to an AA meeting and listen.”*

“I’m at the Contemplation stage. In the next 30 days, I will decide if I want to start a plan of self-care.”

- I will make a list of the pros of changing and the cons of changing. I will have at least 15 pros on my list. And I will get this information from reviewing my life and also input from people I trust including my wife, my best friend, and my son.
- I will keep a journal of my nightmares, anger outbursts and how much I am drinking each day for the next 30 days.
- I will get a book about PTSD and read it.
- I will write about what my life would be like if I didn’t have the nightmares and if I stopped drinking.
- Of the cons on my list, I will write at least one challenge to each.
- I will get more information from Ohio Assist about their services and discuss these with my significant other.
- I will read up about EMDR and what it can and can’t do.

“My goal in the next 30 days is to get help for my PTSD and my depression.”

- I will contact the **Wounded Warrior Project** website and get some more information like their goals, who they help, when and where.
- I will gather the names of at least three therapists in my area and make an appointment. I will go to at least one intake appointment.
- I will make an appointment, and keep it, to talk to my spiritual mentor about how my work is affecting my life.
- I will call my friend, Mick, when I am in distress.
- I will document TICE in a journal in order to improve my self-awareness. My triggers, images, the cognitions and emotions I experience. I will talk to my partner about this when it happens and share one entry in my journal.
- I will buy the book *Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement* and read it.
- I will make a date with my significant other and share with him/her something I have kept inside me about my work.
- I am going to download the free **PTSD Coach** app and work through it.
- I will practice tactical breathing...three by three by three at least once a day.
- I will look into my department EAP to see what they can offer me.
- I will connect with my local CISM/Peer team.
- I will go to at least five AA meetings and see if it is right for me.

Take Aways

- First Responders Experience AREs
- These AREs are likely related to long-term problems if not addressed
- The First Responder is a Fighter and Can Heal From AREs
- Healing Requires Change
- Self-Care Plans are Your Commitment to Change