

A Self-Care Plan

Building Your Bridge for Your Future

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There are Two Objectives in Today's Presentation

1. Let's start discussing what your plan is for the next 30 days-for both First Responders and Second Responders ("significant others").
2. Let's find out where you are in the *Process of Change*. Let's see how ready you are to change and begin recovery.

What is a Self-Care Plan?

- It's an agreement to begin your healing from 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 trauma.
- It's a contract between you and your higher power, your partner, your children, your coworkers, and/or The Bridge.

A self-care plan is necessary
because of Adverse Responder
Experiences

AREs are...

During your Work Have you Ever Been Exposed To:

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. A responder-involved shooting, serious accident, or abuse?
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?

What happens to a person when they go through AREs?

AREs, sometimes called critical incidents, overwhelm the FR especially
If they happen repeatedly and there is no help.

“I got more training on how to drive a cruiser in reverse than training on
how to deal with trauma.”

Significant Others-Describe what you see has happened to First Responders following AREs.

- What behaviors do you observe?
- How has your first responder changed?
- “He’s different...he’s angry all the time. He stays in the basement and tells me everything is fine.
- I’ve changed too.
- This is not the person I fell in love with and I don’t know how to help him, or myself.”

AREs 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
- Hurt those around them

Exposure to AREs: How it Effects First Responders...this is why we talk about self-care.

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.

Exposure to AREs: How it Effects First Responders...this is why we talk about self-care-2

The rate of PTSD among the general population is 6%. It is 25-30% among first responders. That does not tell the whole story...

- PTSD Requires a Medical Diagnosis
- The other 70% of First Responders suffer from PTS
 - AREs
 - Death by one thousand cuts

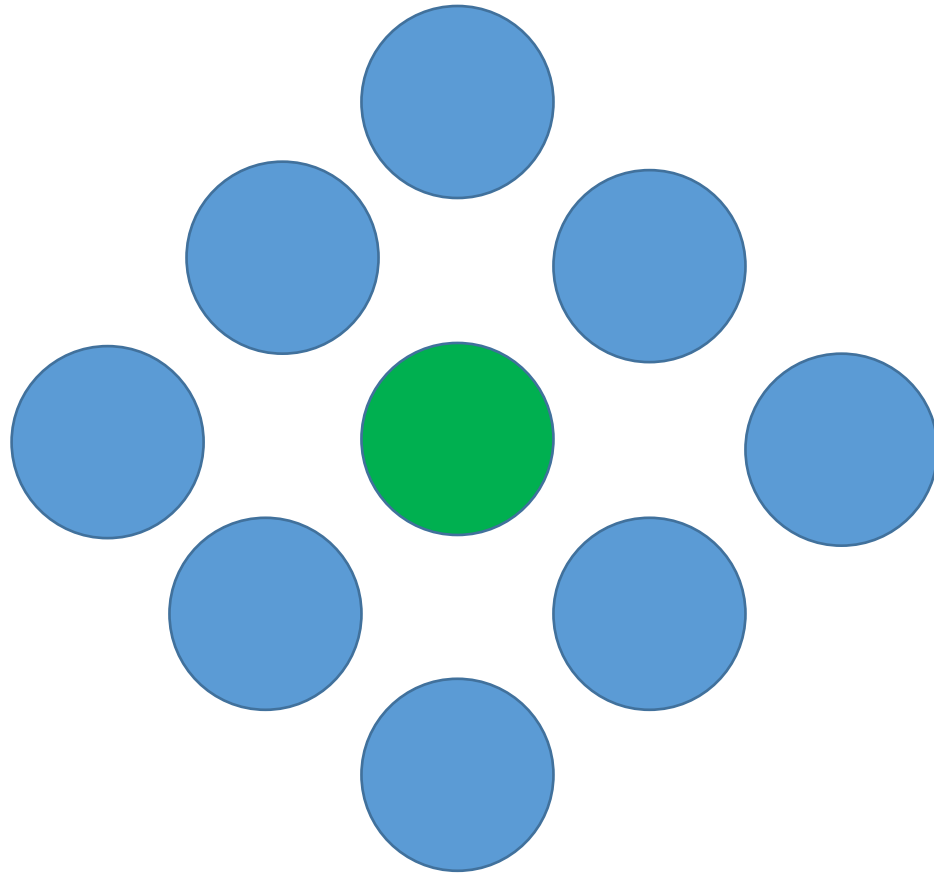
ARES are the enemy, not the First Responder. Externalize the Problem.

- We do not blame, alienate, or turn away from others when they need help.
- We work to strengthen them.

“For the longest time I was angry at him. I was blaming him for how his job changed him. *It is the horrible things he has seen that are the problem.*”

Why Self Care?

How Many People Rely On You?



Why Self Care?-2



When you fly on an airplane, the flight attendant instructs you to “put your oxygen mask on first,” before helping others.

Why is this an important rule for ensuring survival? Because if you run out of oxygen yourself, you can’t help anyone else with their oxygen mask. Or put more simply: if you die, you can’t help anyone else.

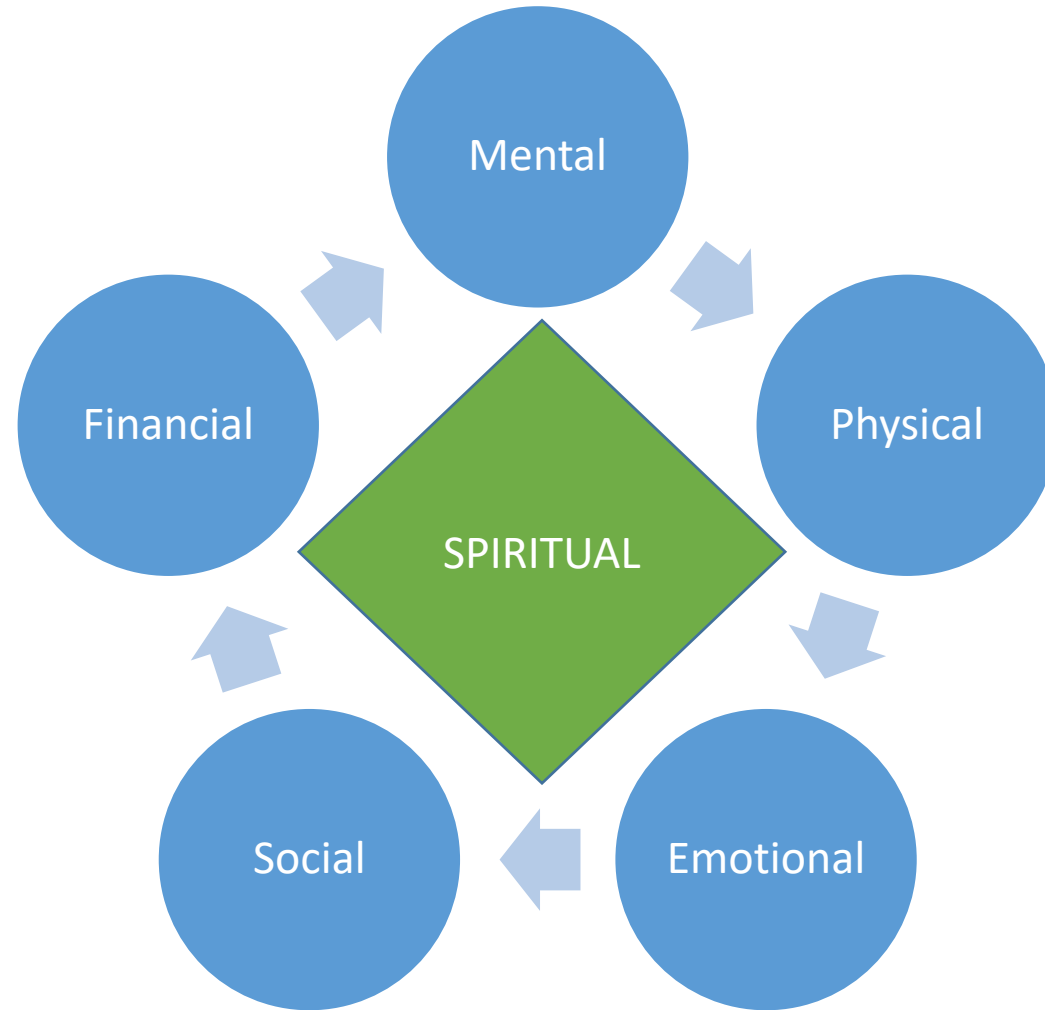
Why Self Care?-3

Believe it or not, you and your family deserve a life filled with:

- Joy
- Happiness
- Love
- Fun
- Passion
- Fulfillment
-

Life is TOO Short to be MISERABLE!

Six Areas of Wellness



How will you begin to make change, to heal, to self-care in the next 30 days.

What is your plan?

- A self care plan is something you want to accomplish in the next 30 days.
- Example: *"I want to have fewer angry outbursts at home. I don't want to yell at my kids anymore."*
- Example: *"I will begin to treat my PTSD and depression and begin to fight it back."*
- Example: *"I just need some time to talk with other partners going through this."*
- We will learn to refine these by using [SMART Goals](#)

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. There are six stages, but we will only focus on these four.

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

Let's see where you are in
readiness to change. How ready
are you to get help?

URICA

How ready are you to begin to take care of yourself?

- When you attempt to change something about yourself, you will go through predictable stages of change on your journey to recovery.
- It is useful to know which stage you are currently experiencing because you can use specific strategies that will be effective in taking you to the next stage in your recovery of healing.

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. You are not ready for a change because you haven't acknowledged there is a problem.**

"I am only here because she told me I had to go."

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

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

I'm just not going to do it.



Contemplation

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

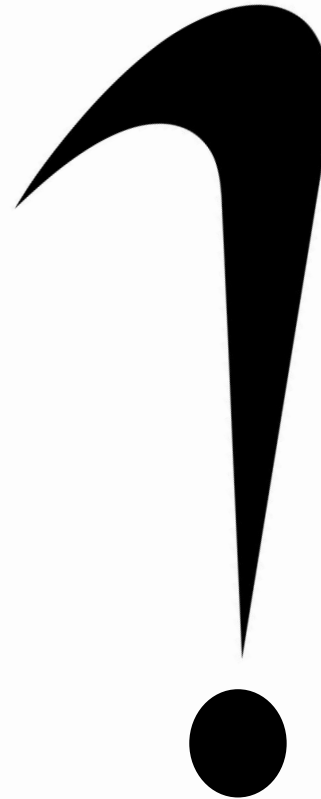
“Do I get help or not?”

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.



Preparation

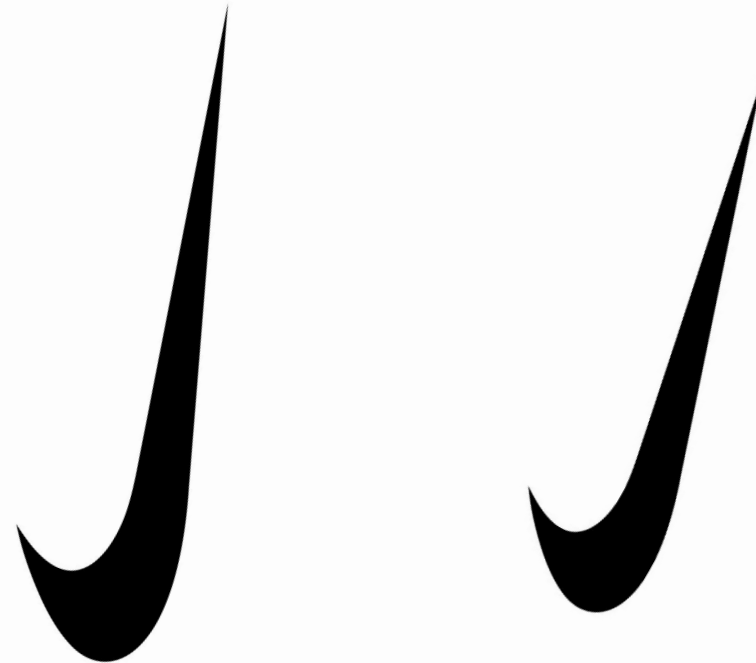
The first responder in this stage has made a commitment to begin self-care and will do so in the next 30 days.

“Changing my behavior has more positives than negatives.”

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.



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!



The New Years Eve Problem

“Why do many attempts to change behavior fail?”

- Plans will fail if you don't take into account your **readiness to change**.
- Human beings have a bias against change because they **believe that they can not change**
 - The reality is that **change is constant**
 - You began changing in the precontemplation stage
 - You changed when you registered for this retreat
 - You changed when you walked through the door on Friday night
- You **did not create SMART Goals**
- **Change is HARD**
- Change requires **Relentless Effort**

26.2 Miles

How do you run a **Marathon**?

- **One Mile at a time**
- Track your **Splits**
- Give your self some **grace**

How do you Lose Weight?

- **One Pound at a time**
- Track your **progress**
- Give your self some **grace**

Each **new day is an opportunity** to succeed

Each new day is an opportunity to **learn from yesterday** but give yourself **grace** if you did not succeed

If you are the Precontemplation phase, what can you 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. You can also inspire by walking the talk...taking care of yourself doing simple things.
- 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 about PTS, PTSD, depression, stress, what AREs do to you over time.
- 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.
- Think about other First Responders who were hurting...what happened to them?

If you are in the Contemplation phase, what can you do?

- 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. [Ask your partner to add](#) to the list from their point of view.
- [Talk to a professional](#) about what you think would have to happen to lead to change.

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

Pros

- 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.

Cons

- 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.

If you are in the Preparation phase, what can you do?

- View past attempts to self-care as not failures but you are a “work in progress”. We are all works in progress. Don’t beat yourself up if you haven’t sustained change.
- Keep in mind: 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...they can help keep you committed to your plan.
- Significant others can help the first responder by helping remove barriers that would interfere with taking action.
- Get contact information for professionals, support groups or peers that can help.

If you are in the Preparation phase, what can you do?

- Create SMART Goals
 - **Specific**- Narrow is better
 - **Measurable**- How will you track progress?
 - **Attainable**- Is the goal realistic given your circumstances and the time frame?
 - **Relevant**- Does the goal align with your values and long term objectives?
 - **Time-Based**- Set a realistic yet ambitious time frame- Stretch yourself!!

If you are in the Action phase, what can you do?

- Reinforce yourself for working on yourself. Small things...go out to dinner with your partner, get a sitter...
- For partners, praise your first responder. Reinforce their hard work. Write a special note they can read while at work.
- Treat others when you take steps in your self-care plan...for each session you attend, give your child an extended bedtime.
- Expect relapse to happen. Discuss how you would get back on track if you slid.
- Help others if they are struggling and are in the earlier stages of change. Peers helping peers.
- Encourage significant others to attend sessions with you.
- Work with your significant other to make a record of your progress.

“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 get 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. I will write about what my life was like before all this.
- [For each 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 do for trauma.
- I will [share the list with my partner](#) and have him/her add to it.

“I am in the Action phase, my goal is to address my PTSD.”

- 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 and give therapy a try. If I don't connect with the therapist, I can get another referral.
- I will make an appointment, and keep it, to talk to my spiritual mentor about how my work is affecting my life.
- I will keep calling my friend, Mick, when I am in distress or at least once a week to touch base.
- I will re-read 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 that I have kept inside me about my work.
- I've downloaded the free **PTSD Coach** app and I will keep using it.
- I will practice tactical breathing...three by three breaths at least once a day.
- I reward myself for my hard work by taking the family to dinner.
- I will share some of my journal of my experiences with my partner.
- I will continue to go to at least three AA meetings a week and call my sponsor if I need to.
- I will create a plan how to manage if I relapse and stop going to treatment and share this with my partner.
- I will use our sitter for a few hours a week so me and my partner can reconnect.