


The Bridge Retreat

March 4 – 6, 2022

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▶ Thank you!

- For what you do
 - For being here
 - For taking care of yourselves so you can take care of us
 - YOU ARE NOT ALONE
- 



FIRE/EMS

911

POLICE



DISPATCH



LAW ENFORCEMENT







Why are you HERE:

“I want to help others.”

“I recognize I’m feeling burnt out.”

“I can’t stop thinking about critical incident’s.”

“I want my life to be less impacted by this job/my loved one’s job.”

“I feel empty and hopeless”



- ▶ Empty?
- ▶ Overflowing?
- ▶ Full of sadness, grief, tragedy?
- ▶ Anything uplifting?

- ▶ **THERE IS HOPE!**



What we will cover this morning

Part 1: Impact of the job

Burn out/ Cumulative Stress/ Critical Incident Stress
Traits that help/hurt you
Family impact

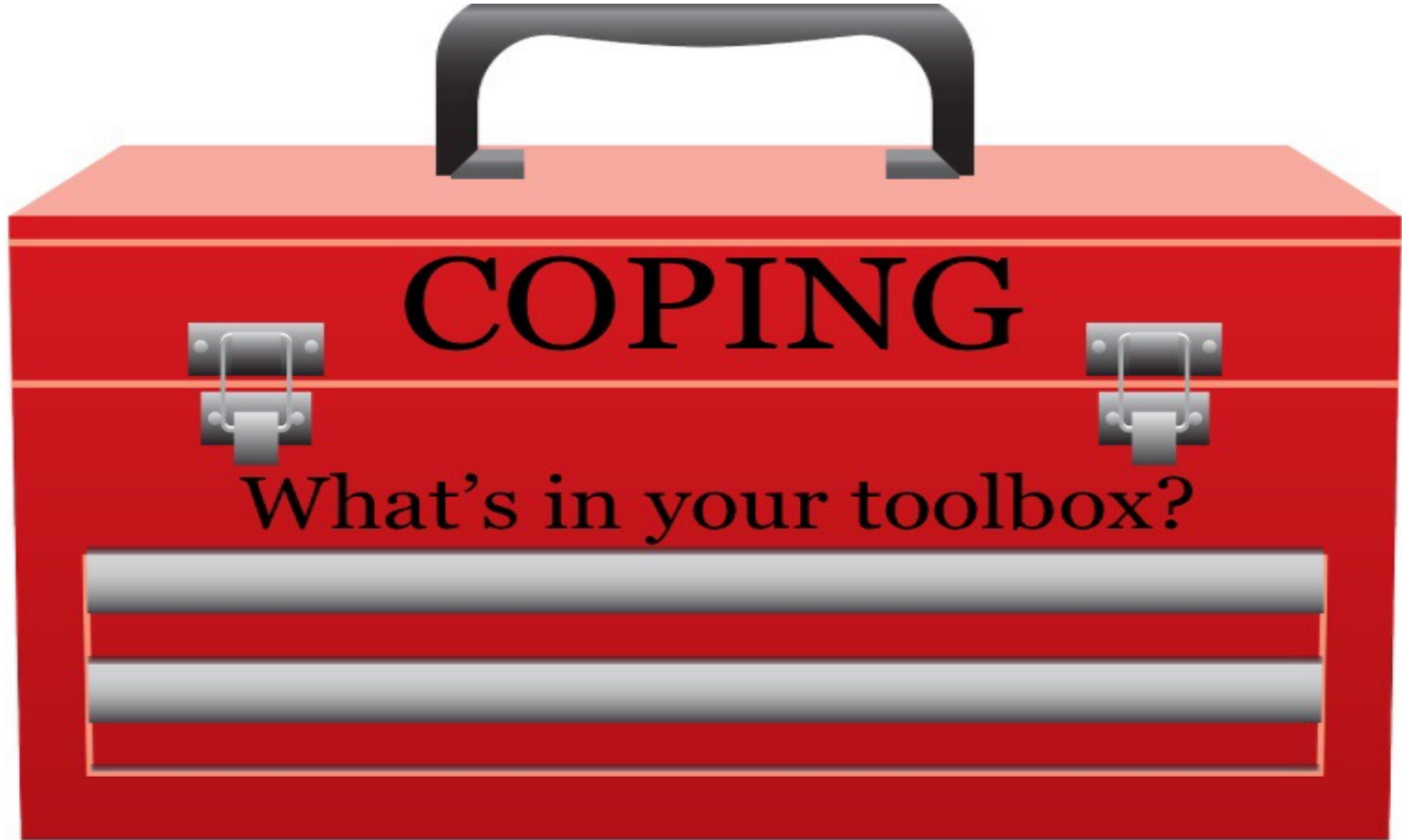
Part 2: Tool box: Strategies for high resilience

Part 3: Traumatic stress and PTS, PTSD

Effective strategies: EMDR; CISM




RESILIENCY TOOLS:



Toolbox STRATEGY #1:



Calming Breathing Strategies:

- ▶ 3 In, 4 Out
 - ▶ Box breathing
 - ▶ Counting breath while tapping on legs
 - ▶ Slow breathing along with Body Relaxation Scan
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We don't always notice our own stress:

“Did somebody else die?”


Thinking about work all the time--preoccupied

Feeling of weariness and fatigue


Ran 2 red lights



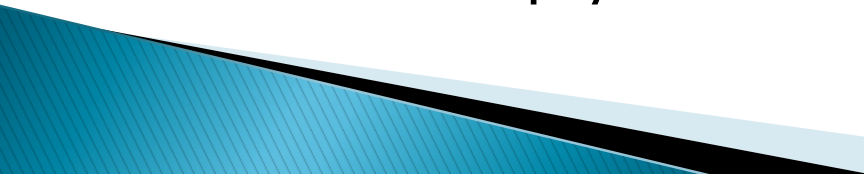
Toolbox STRATEGY #2: Accountability person

- 1. Do I have the courage to specifically ask another person to watch my back mentally?
 - 2. Am I open to feedback?
 - 3. Do I surround myself with those who will agree with me?
 - 4. Do I get and remain angry and blaming those who are honest with me?
 - 5. “How have I changed?”
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Have you heard/said this?

- ▶ “You’ve lost your heart”
 - ▶ “You are so impatient all the time”
 - ▶ “You laugh at sick stuff”
 - ▶ “You never listen to me”
 - ▶ “You only see the negative stuff in life”
 - ▶ “Everything is always doom and gloom with you”
 - ▶ “You’ve changed”
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“Joe”

- ▶ “Can’t do this job anymore”
 - ▶ “Look and feel terrible”
 - ▶ “I’m not being a good husband, dad, friend”
 - ▶ “Can’t get the distraught families, mangled bodies, and dead people out of my head”
 - ▶ “I drink in order to sleep”
 - ▶ “I feel so empty inside”
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Others:

- ▶ Medic whom is frustrated by repeat “band aid” and “hauling” call’s
 - ▶ Officers who are frustrated and angry about law enforcement/corrections getting bashed on social media
 - ▶ Dispatcher who feels public “takes us for granted”.
 - ▶ Spouse who feels disappointed/disconnected because loved one doesn’t share anything about the job
 - ▶ YOU ARE NOT ALONE!
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Frustrated, disillusioned, disappointed.....




"My question is: Are we making an impact?"

The Continuum of Stress:

What Burnout/Cumulative stress looks like:

- ▶ Physical, mental, emotional exhaustion
 - ▶ Frustration, guilt, loss of sense of purpose
 - ▶ “Nothing I do makes a difference”
 - ▶ “There’s just too many _____”
 - ▶ High Cynicism, negativity
 - ▶ Disappointment, discouragement, etc.
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Contributing Factors:

- ▶ Repeat callers
 - ▶ Staffing/Coverage
 - ▶ High run volume
 - ▶ Administrative practices, etc
 - ▶ Media/Social media, body cameras
 - ▶ View of public towards first responders
 - ▶ Civil unrest
 - ▶ Covid-19
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The Continuum of Stress:

Critical Incident Stress:


- ▶ Out of the ordinary incidents
 - ▶ Incidents that impact your HEART
 - ▶ Kids, peers, some connection to you personally
 - ▶ Experienced at a time when you are experiencing other things: recent death in family; depression; major life changes, etc.

 - ▶ More on this later.....
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Hopelessness:


- ▶ Higher rates of suicidal ideation/attempts among all first responders groups, than general population.
- ▶ About 10% of prison guards have considered or attempted: 3x that of general population
- ▶ Even higher among retired guards; 14%, similar to rate among military veterans.
- ▶ More suicides than line of duty deaths among all first responder groups.

- ▶ **YOU ARE NOT ALONE! YOU CAN FEEL BETTER!**




“I wish my Head
would Forget
What my Eyes
have Seen”

Families of the RCMP for PTSD Awareness

- ▶ Keys to avoiding burn out, cumulative stress build up, surviving the job, and having a successful and healthy family life is to adjust expectations. Be flexible. GO WITH THE FLOW.
 - ▶ This sounds good, but is contrary to what we know to be usual personality traits of first responders.
 - ▶ Let's look at these:
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A word about personality traits of first responders:

- ▶ First responders have **GREAT** traits, that help navigate the realities of the job
 - ▶ Good and not-so-good-news:
 - These traits allow you to do the job
 - These traits sometimes prevent you from seeing how your life is being impacted by the job
 - From: Jeff Mitchell, International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF)
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Always good to be in charge?




9 Traits of First Responders:

- ▶ **1. Focused and task oriented...get the job done:**
 - Can be impatient; Fixers
- ▶ **2. Action oriented:**
 - Easily bored with routine, “normal” life stuff
- ▶ **3. All or nothing mentality:**
 - Everything black/white (but life is mostly gray)
 - “Life is all GOOD or all BAD”
- ▶ **4. Motivated to help:**
 - Can lose sight of oneself (airplane example)
- ▶ **5. Perfectionistic:**
 - Expectations of self and others unrealistic

9 Traits of First Responders, cont:

- ▶ **6. Ability to perform well under pressure:**
 - Heightened state of adrenaline becomes “usual” or normal, but is exhausting. (8 years)
- ▶ **7. Become angry at self/others for human error:**
 - Low tolerance for conflict in personal life
- ▶ **8. Ability to function when others would be overcome by emotion:**
 - Emotional connecting in personal life gets shut down
 - Shielding is IMPORTANT to survive the job
- ▶ **9. Accustomed to taking control of situations that are out of control:**
 - Spouse/family doesn't want you to be in charge all the time

3 Useful On-Duty Coping skills (which protect your heart)

- ▶ 1. Compartmentalize: put it in the box/file folders
 - ▶ 2. Detachment: “not my kid”
 - ▶ 3. Shielding: arms distance from human emotion; protects your heart
 - ▶ Switch gears when off duty!!!!!!
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▶ FAMILY LIFE

A firefighter in a yellow and black uniform is walking through a thick, blue-tinted smoke. The firefighter is holding a hose. In the background, another firefighter is visible, also in a smoky environment. The scene is dimly lit, with the primary light source being the blue smoke.

I know what to do when the smoke clears on the job.

But what to do when that happens in our
relationship...

Well my confidence there isn't quite so high.

Maybe we could practice some drills in that?

I'm willing if you are.


"Being married to a cop is so easy,"
said no police wife ever.



your  cards
someecards.com

Impact on family:

▶ Checked out?

- Physically
 - Emotionally
 - Poor communication
 - Low tolerance for routine life “stuff”
 - Increase in alcohol consumption
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**YOU DESERVE A LONG,
and a GOOD LIFE**



- ▶ Must intentionally counteract the impact of the job

EMOTIONAL SURVIVAL FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT



**A Guide for Officers
and Their Families**


Kevin M. Gilmartin, Ph.D.

"If you want to make it through to


Toolbox STRATEGY #3: Know what your body tells you about stress:



Toolbox STRATEGY #4: Maintain balance in life:


- ▶ Be Disciplined about including RE-CREATION in your life
 - ▶ Counter the effects of being hypervigilant with scheduled “down time”
 - ▶ Focus on non-job related people, things
 - ▶ Schedule time together
 - ▶ Get rest....WHENEVER YOU CAN!!!
 - ▶ Increase body awareness so you know when stress is building
 - ▶ Consider Meditation as a tool to improve relaxation response
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Toolbox STRATEGY #4: Maintain balance in life:


- ▶ Switch your routine up
 - ▶ Schedule dates with each other
 - ▶ Improve your spiritual life
 - ▶ Talk with others
 - ▶ Use a journal
 - ▶ Get a hobby
 - ▶ Improve how you communicate
 - ▶ Recognize when you are impacted by a CRITICAL INCIDENT
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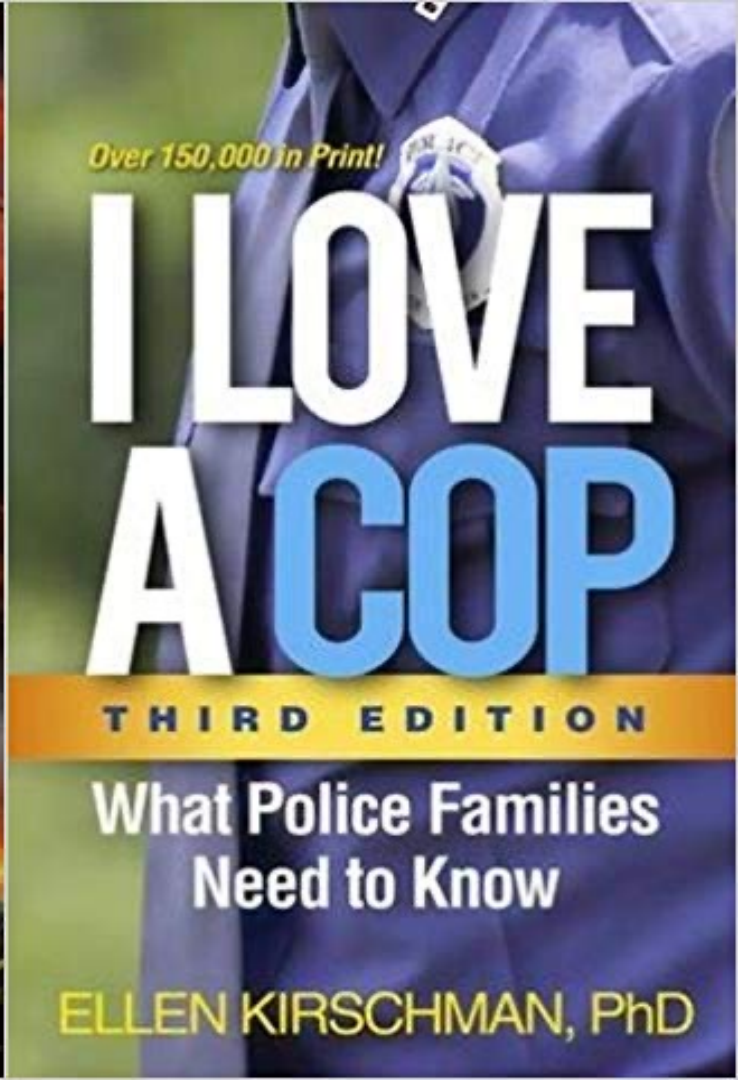
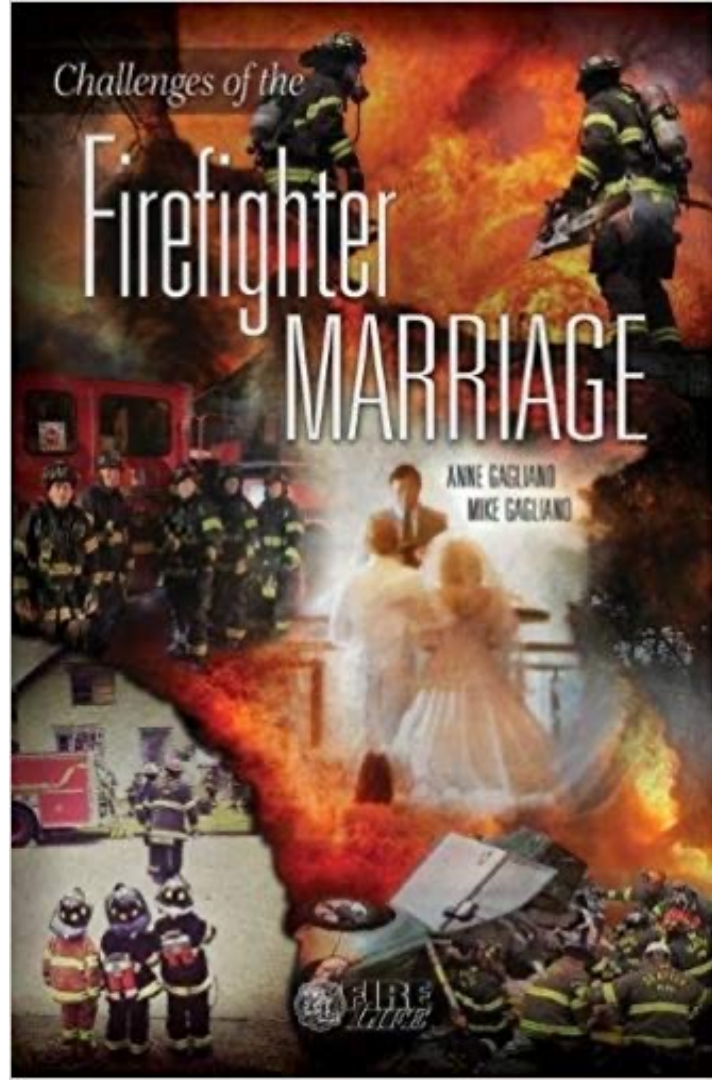
Toolbox STRATEGY #5: Reach out:

- ▶ Find providers (clinicians) that work with first responders: union, department, word of mouth, insurance?
 - ▶ Explore if your department has an EAP and make them work for you!
 - ▶ It only takes 2 to start a group
 - ▶ Connect with local CISM/Peer teams
 - ▶ Connect with first responder Chaplains
 - ▶ Retirees lunches, etc?
 - ▶ Auxiliary groups?

 - ▶ If you've never talked with anybody about all of this, use this weekend to do this!
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ASK YOURSELF:

- ▶ What do you enjoy? What brings you peace?
 - ▶ Where is your spirituality? How do you practice that?
 - ▶ Is your life where you want it to be?
- 





HOW FULL IS YOUR BUCKET?

Let's make a Coping Skills Toolbox!

What is it?

A Coping Skills Toolbox is a place for you to keep things that calm you down in periods of distress. If you have everything gathered in one place, it's easier to remember to use your coping skills, rather than using negative behaviors.

Self-Soothing

(Comforting yourself through your five senses)

1. Something to touch
(ex: stuffed animal, stress ball)
2. Something to hear
(ex: music, meditation guides)
3. Something to see
(ex: snowglobe, happy pictures)
4. Something to taste
(ex: mints, tea, sour candy)
5. Something to smell
(ex: lotion, candles, perfume)

Distraction

(Taking your mind off the problem for a while)

Examples:

Puzzles, books, artwork, crafts, knitting, crocheting, sewing, crossword puzzles, sudoku, positive websites, music, movies, etc.

Opposite Action

(Doing something the opposite of your impulse that's consistent with a more positive emotion)

1. Affirmations and Inspiration
(ex: looking at or drawing motivational statements or images)
2. Something funny or cheering
(ex: funny movies / TV / books)

Emotional Awareness

(Tools for identifying and expressing your feelings)

Examples:

A list or chart of emotions, a journal, writing supplies, drawing / art supplies

Mindfulness

(Tools for centering and grounding yourself in the present moment)

Examples:

Meditation or relaxation recordings, grounding objects (like a rock or paperweight), yoga mat, breathing exercises.

Crisis Plan

(Contact info of supports and resources, for when coping skills aren't enough.)

Family / Friends
Therapist
Psychiatrist
Hotline
Crisis Team / ER
911

Put it all together!

Once you've gathered all of your items, put them together in a box or other container, decorate it to your heart's content, and put it in a place where you'll remember it. Then USE IT!

THANK YOU!

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