Helping First Responders

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First Responder Support Network

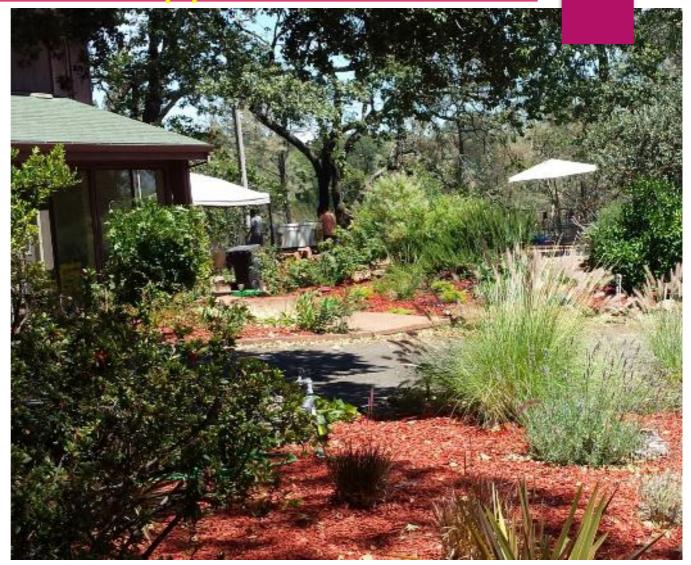
The West Coast Post
Trauma Retreat (WCPR)

Significant Others and Spouses (SOS)

Training

Internship

www.FRSN.org



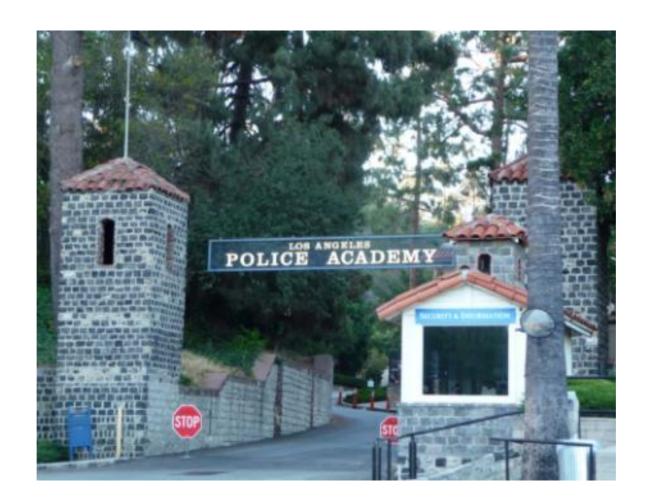
Who are First Responders

- **▶** Police
- Fire
- **EMS**
- Dispatch





My Story...



Oct 2020 study

Survey: What is the state of first responder mental health in 2020?

Spoiler Alert – It isn't good

Attitudes

 Overwhelming majority of officers felt trapped or hopeless about their job.

 Most officers would not recommend a LE career to someone they cared about 47% of the sample screened positive for PTSD. (9-10x's >)

29% of the sample was in the moderate to very severe range of anxiety. (2x's >)

37% of the sample was in the moderate to very severe range of depression. (5 x's >)

The most frequently cited reasons for refusal to seek treatment were <u>stigma</u> and fear that seeking assistance is a sign of personal weakness, followed by fear of job loss or repercussions in the workplace.



80% of FF and 90% of LEO's report stigma as the #1 reason for not asking for psychological help.

23-Question Mental Health Pilot Survey

Effects of trauma

Suicidal ideation

Barriers preventing seeking assistance

- ➤ 26 agencies
 - 15 police departments
 - 6 fire and rescue departments
 - 5 public safety communication centers

- ► 4,871 respondents
 - 4,156 police officers
 - 566 firefighters
 - 149 dispatchers



Approx. 20% of responders (police, fire, dispatch) had experienced suicidal thoughts.

8% had them in the past year



Nearly 60% of the people who had suicidal thoughts in the past year, selected,

"I want to handle it on my own"

as a reason for not getting help.



Most respondents thought the career changed them for the worse

- ▶ 55% reported increases in depression and/or anxiety
- 25% reported a need for psych meds
- 35% reported increased alcohol use
- 47% said their physical health was poor

2020 Study – Risk factors for mental health problems for responders worldwide (Syed 2020)

- ▶ 14.6% for Depression (7.8%)
- ▶ 14.2% for PTSD (3.6%)
- ▶ 9.6% GAD (3.1%)
- ▶ 8.5% for Suicidal Ideation (2%)
- ▶ 25.7% for Hazardous Drinking (12.7%)
- Strongest risk factors for depression and SI was High Occupational Stress (HOS)
- ▶ Strongest risk factors for PTSD were HOS and avoidant coping strategies



https://bluehelp.org/ As of 11/12/21

View Statistics for Year 2021 Total Line of Duty Deaths: 412 9/11 related illness Assault Automobile crash 19 COVID19 270 Drowned Duty related illness Gunfire 54 Gunfire (Inadvertent) Heart attack Motorcycle crash Stabbed Struck by vehicle Training accident Vehicle pursuit Vehicular assault Weather/Natural disaster

https://www.odmp.org/search/year/2021

71 as of 11/12/21

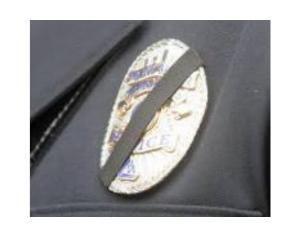


"How can I share my emotions? You can't show weakness. It's not acceptable. The weakest link has to go."

Police officer sharing his perspective on why he couldn't ask for help.

From his suicide note...

"Every day I went to work I felt sick to my stomach. My body is broken from police work. I have so many physical problems that I can't even enjoy my off- duty life. Exercise was the one thing that allowed me to clear my mind and now that's gone. My body is always in pain on top of the crazy things in my head".



From his suicide note...

"...I was angry at people who committed suicide because I thought about it myself...

...over the last couple of years I had considered getting help but that would mean that I was crazy or weak minded"...

This is part of a suicide note written by Billy Burke, of OPD. It is shared by Maria, his widow, with her hope that officers will ask for help before they run out of options.

Study: More firefighters died by suicide than in the line of duty in 2017

A study found that 103 firefighters and 140 police officers died by suicide in 2017, compared to 93 firefighter and 129 officer line-of-duty deaths

Apr 13, 2018



"I would never kill myself but, if I were to be killed in the line of duty, that would be ok."



So what does a responder do to cope?

The Emergency Responder Paradox Al Benner PhD, SFPD (ret)

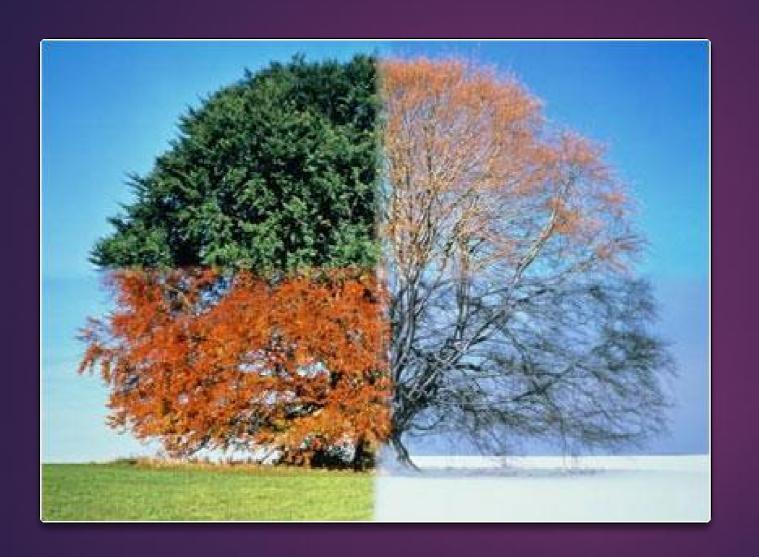
"To function effectively in our job, you must annihilate, smother, and suppress normal emotions like fear, anger, revulsion, and even compassion."

The Emergency Responder Paradox

"To do otherwise is to invite overwhelming doubt or hesitancy when decisive action is required.

The penalty for your achieved competence is a mindset that might as well be a foreign language to your social contemporaries.

We are....victims of our own success."



Changes Over Time



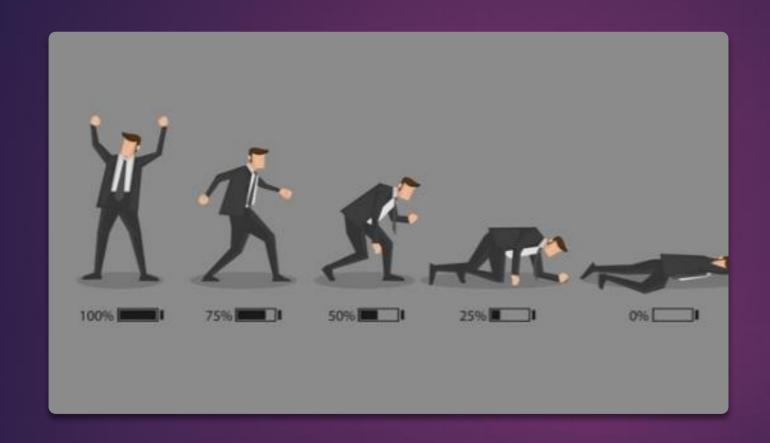


Life Happens



Q: "Why do you want to join this agency?"

A: "Because it is the best of the best and I want to help people, Sir!"



Five Years Later...

"I HATE THIS DEPARTMENT."

In the first five years of a LE career there is a doubling of the rates of depression (US Marshals Study)

Twenty years later...

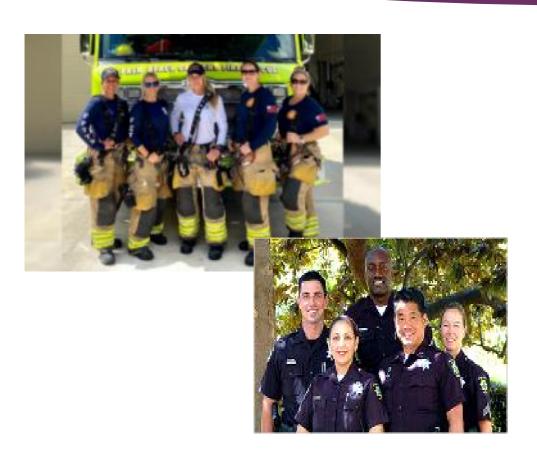
"I am forty five years old. I would retire today if I could, but I can't.

Where else could I get this salary?

I feel trapped."



Who becomes a first responder?



- desire to make a difference
- action oriented/decisive
- comfortable giving and taking orders
- willing to be visible
- high security needs
- value variety and stimulation
- dislike being confined to an office
- value conformity
- take pride in their work
- value control in themselves and in their environment
- honest
- well adjusted
- extroverted

Who becomes a first responder?

- assertive
- average or above average IQ
- can be or become emotionally guarded
- able to suppress their feelings under stress
- funny and value humor
- value tradition
- value structured, standard work procedures
- eye for detail
- value predictability
- perfectionistic and have high standards for self and others
- great in a crisis
- rate high on mental stability psychologically screened







But the job can take a toll

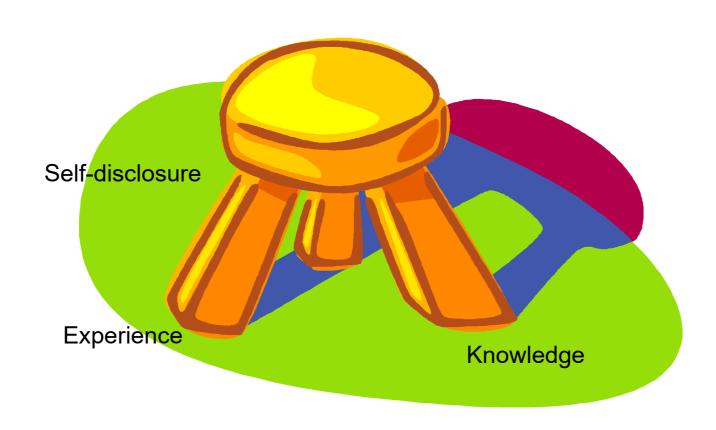


PTSD or PTSI

Factors Affecting a Willingness to Get Help

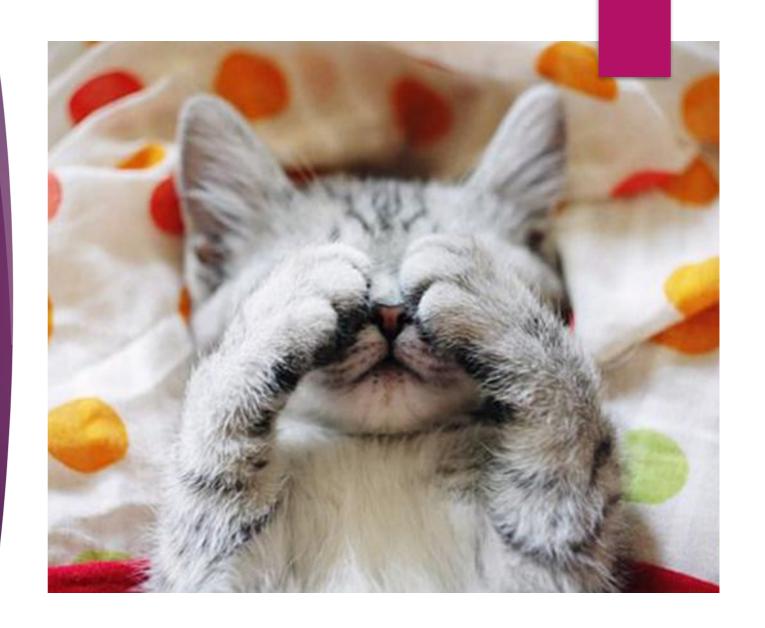
- Inability to identify when they are experiencing a mental illness/crisis (SUDS)
- Concerns about confidentiality
- ▶ Belief that providers cannot relate to their work
- Stigma

Al Benner's Three Legged Stool



SELF-DISCLOSURE

"I'll show you mine if you show me yours"



SELF-DISCLOSURE

- Theoretical orientation may prohibit SD
- Done only when in the best interest of the FR
- ▶ Balance with APA Ethics Code

KNOWLEDGE

- "Why didn't you shoot the knife out of his hand?"
- "Are you ready to stop being a paid killer?"
- Understand confidentiality
- Familiarize with Worker's Comp
- Learn about trauma

- Get out of the office--go on a ridealong
- Read:
 - ▶ I Love a Cop / Fire Fighter
 - Counseling Cops
 - Emotional Survival for LE
 - Increasing Resilience in Police and Emergency Personnel
- ▶ Be prepared to hear bad stories. Very bad stories.
- Avoid "psychobabble"

DON'T OVERREACT OR OVER INTERPRET HUMOR



IRONY

They'd never guess.

- ▶ Be flexible FR work is unpredictable
- Normalize when possible. This is really important
- Speak to the Responder's strengths

- Avoid telling anyone to quit. First responder work is an identity, not just a job
- Separate personality from job relevant tasks (Don't over-pathologize)
- Understand group relations theory (para-military, chain of command)
- Remember who is the victim.
- Victim vs survivor
- "Hero"







Not Every Responder Is the Same

White male dominated profession

Cultural consideration s for women, ethnic minorities & LGBTQ cops

- Minorities may be victims of harassment & discrimination; subtle or obvious in promotions, training or treatment
 - Statistical minorities stand out
 - May have difficulty receiving credit for their work
 - May have dual allegiances (Black and Blue)
 - May fear not being backed-up or fitting in.

Women have to prove themselves at every rank

- ► They have to be as good as men, men only have to be as good as each other
- May be seen as aggressive, pushy, or strident
- ► Have the added burden of childcare
- Relationship / divorce issues

Age related problems or Growing Old in a Young Person's Profession

- Honeymoon period: fitting in, becoming competent, over-dedication, lack of experience
- Middle phase: boredom, cynicism, personal over police goals, decisions re promotion, cumulative stress, Usta syndrome
- Late middle phase: Physical problems, burnout, compassion fatigue
- Retirement: loss of identity, fraternity, purpose, uptick in alcohol abuse, suicide





Responders and Clinicians

Similarities and Differences between Cops and Clinicians

Relieve suffering

Make a difference

Problem solvers

Guided by ethics code

Hold public trust

Exposed to people in pain

At risk for burnout and compassion fatigue

Objects of stereotyping & derisive humor

Choice of career influenced by family of origin issues

Similarities

Value Differences

"It's all in the Label"

- action oriented vs aggressive, impulsive
- vigilant vs paranoid
- decisive vs commanding
- controlling vs domineering
- detail oriented vs obsessive
- humorous vs callous, avoidant, immature

Value Differences

"It's all in the Label"

emotionally sensitive

- touchy feeley empathetic/trusting
 - victim prone

introspective

wishy-washy

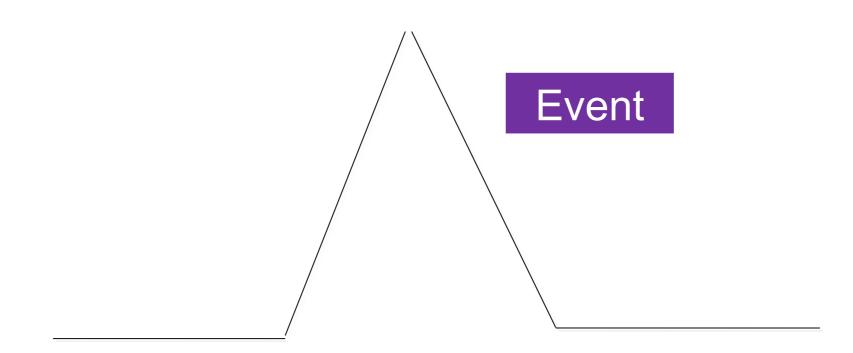
candid re problems

admitting weakness

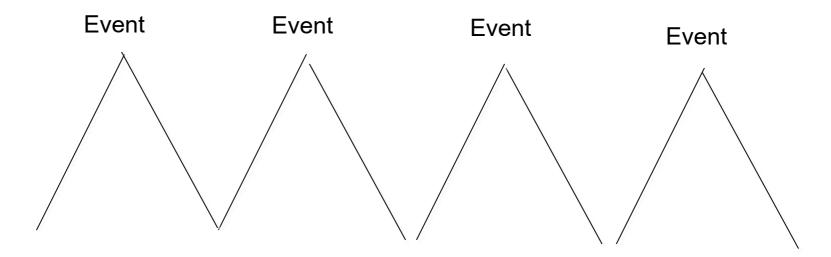
cautious

fearful

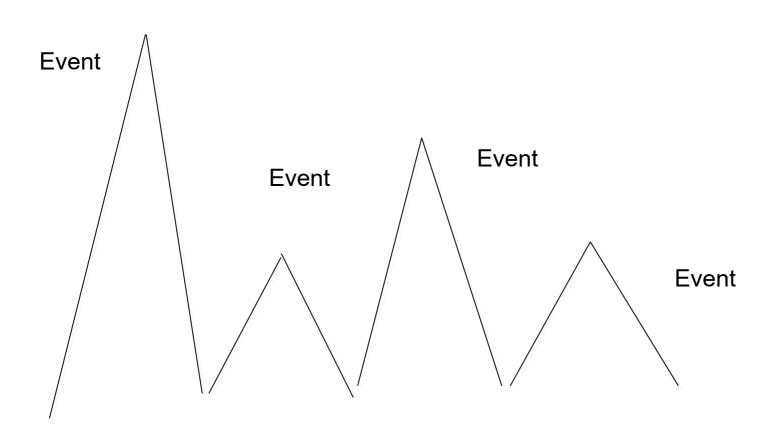
Acute Stress



Chronic Stress



Cumulative Stress



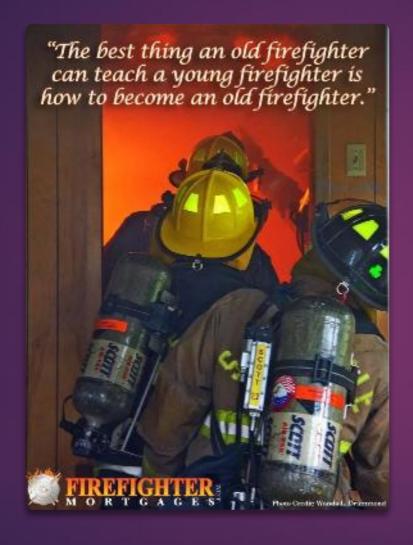








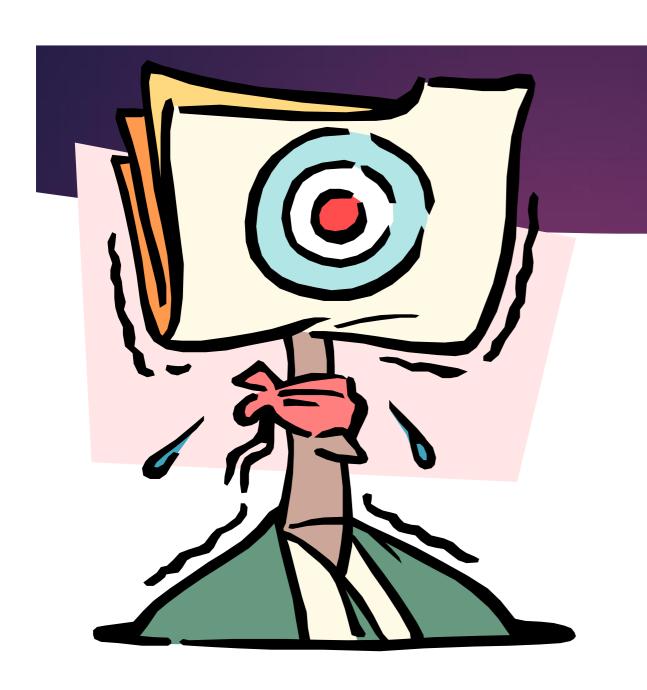
Compartmentalization vs Suppression



Unique challenges to working with responders



They will want to use the EAP – challenges with the number of sessions authorized.



Betrayal is its own Cl

We believe there are four types of betrayal. These are:

- Administrative
- Organizational
- Personal
- Community

Overcoming Betrayal

- Acknowledge it and move toward forgiveness
- See connection between current CI and personal history
- Help responder understand why it is so powerful

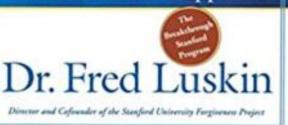
Holding a Grudge Is Hazardous to Your Health

"I have read many books about forgiveness; this one is by far the best."

—RABBI HAROLD S. KUSHNER, author of Living a Life That Matters

Forgive for Good

A PROVEN Prescription for Health and Happiness



Forgiveness is for you.

Refusing to forgive is drinking poison and hoping the other person dies.

Unenforceable rule

The opposite of love is not hate.
The opposite of love is indifference



Issues w/ Workers' Compensation

- Reports every 45 days
- ► RFA
- Difficulty in payments
- Most likely need to be a PhD/PsyD to provide treatment
 - Can do variation

We Carry Our History With Us

- In our backpacks are:
 - ► Early trauma
 - Work trauma
 - Betrayal



Example: Early Trauma

- Where and when have you felt this way before?
- The primary unspoken rule in my family was...
- Growing up I knew...
- Growing up I could never...
- I learned early on that

Where do you start?

- First Responder w 20+ years average 180 Cl's
- Listing if Cl's
- "Well, about 10 years ago there was this triple homicide..." and "About 5 years ago there was this fatal MVA..." and on September 9, 2009 at 1535 I responded to a call of a baby drowning..."

Why responders don't ask for help?

- It means I'm weak or crazy
- I don't want to take medication
- I don't want to talk about my childhood. I dealt with that already.
- I'll lose my job
- Everyone will know (confidentiality)



Stigma





The Omnipotence Curse

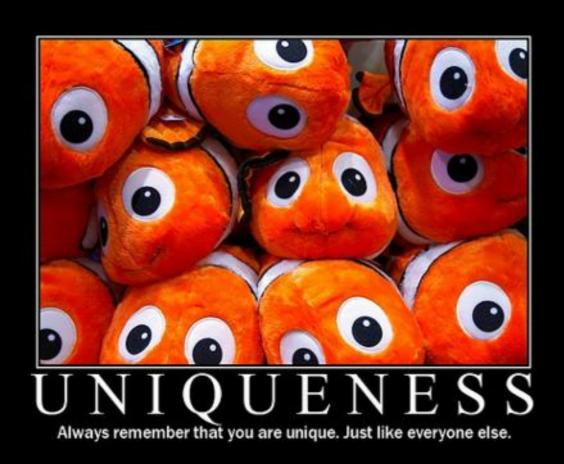


An exaggerated sense of control over the feelings and behaviors of others





Incident Envy



Myth of Uniqueness

The Imposter Myth

"If you knew what I was feeling or thinking, you wouldn't want me on your team."





"Mando'ed"

Fitness For Duty (FFD)

No confidentialit y

Department is the client Must be a connection to work

Cognitive Dissonance

"Sometimes people hold a core belief that is very strong.

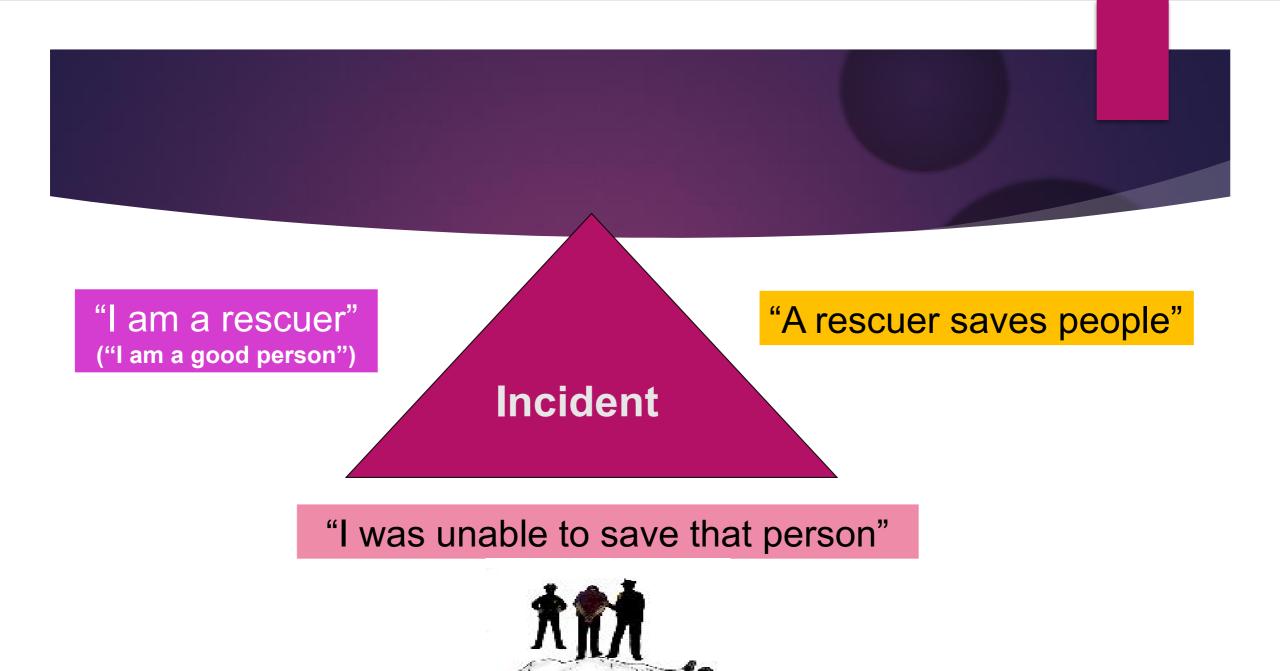
When they are presented with evidence that works against that belief, the new evidence cannot be accepted.

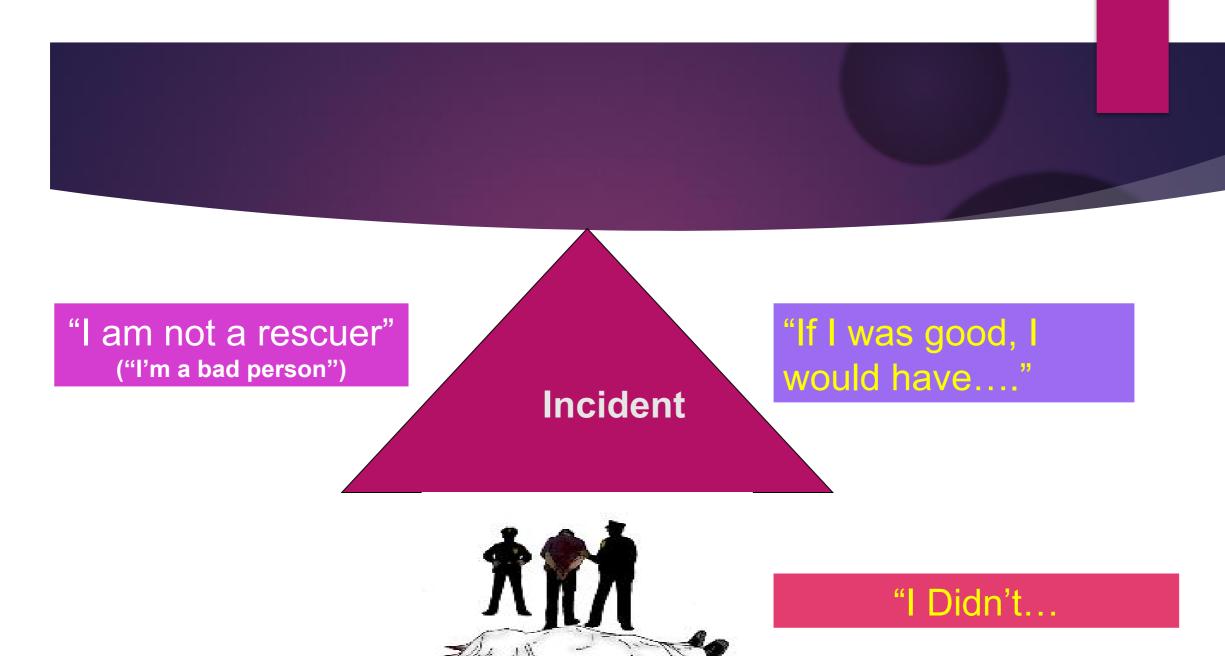
It would create a feeling that is extremely uncomfortable, called cognitive dissonance.

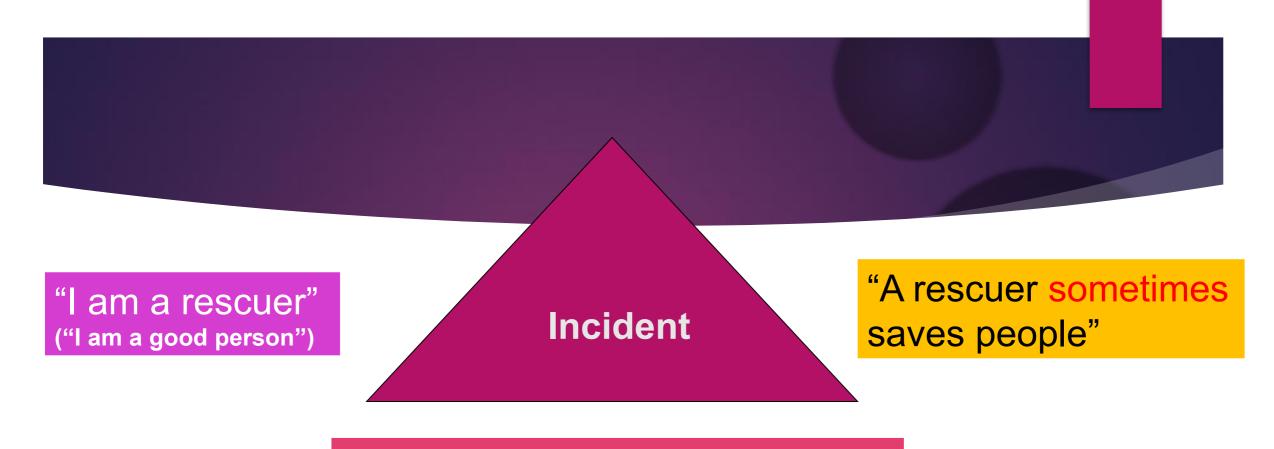
And because it is so important to protect the core belief, they will rationalize, ignore and even deny anything that doesn't fit in with the core belief."

-Frantz Fanon

Cognitive Distance







"But in this case I was unable to save that person"





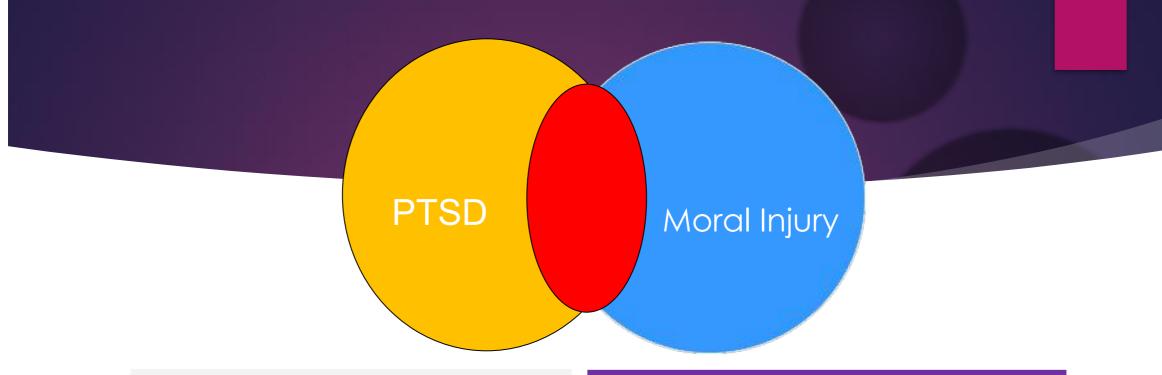
If you blame yourself, it gives you control

EVENT

Or another way of understanding this is – Once you know something, it is very hard to go to a place of "not knowing."

Tell me something you now know, but maybe didn't know before your critical incident...

"As a result of being involved in my incident I now know...."

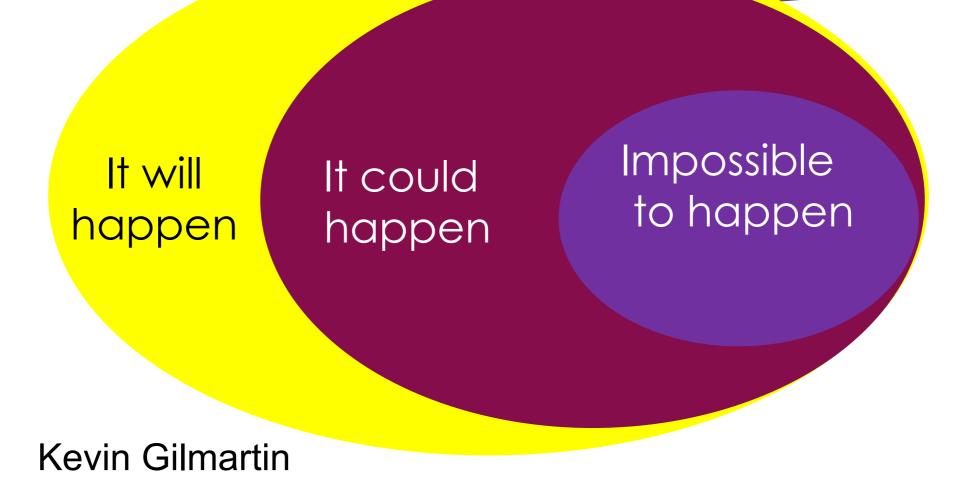


PTSD – something happened that triggered the flight / fight response

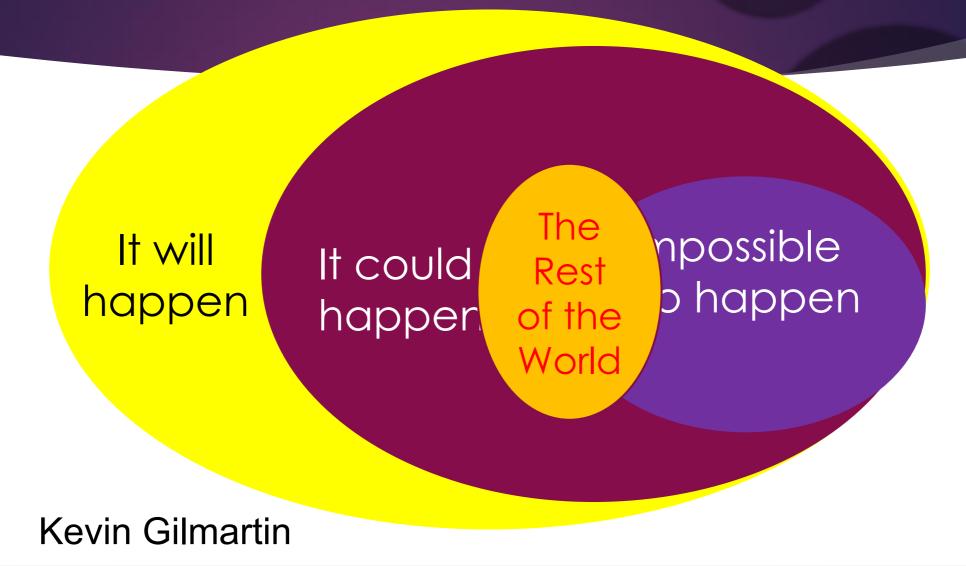
MI – you were involved in an event that challenged core beliefs and either did or did not do something in violation of those beliefs.

Doesn't have to be rational.

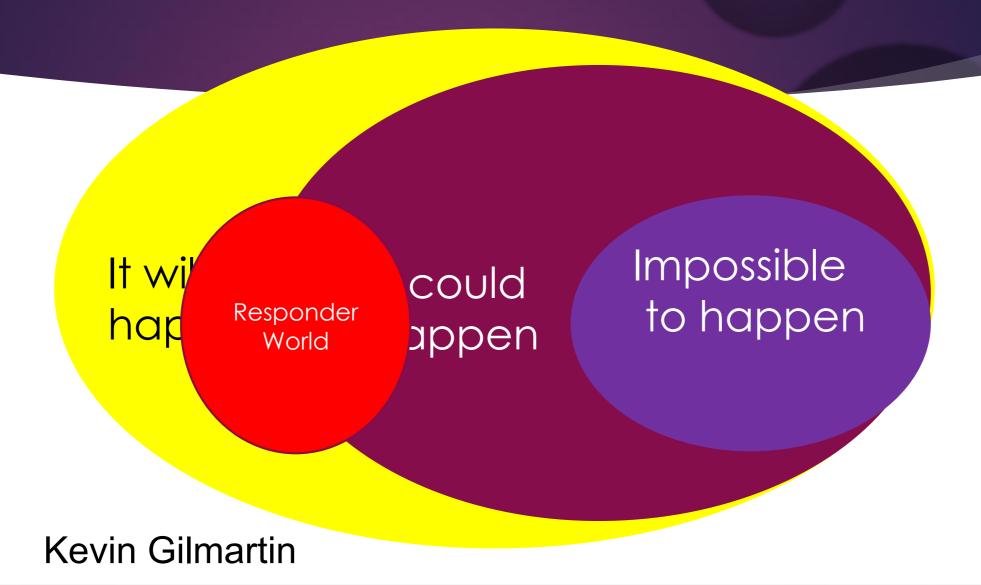
Responders live in the world of possibilities



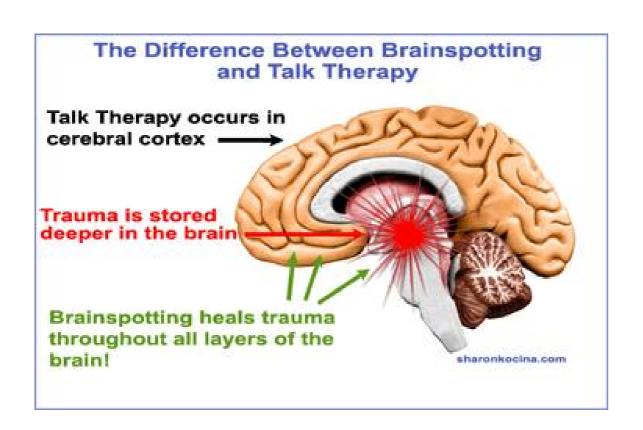
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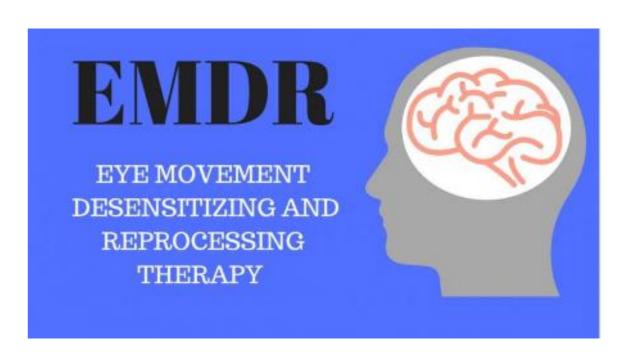


Responders live in the world of possibilities



EMDR and Brain Spotting









Good Character Traits

- Honest
- · Light-hearted
- Leader
- Brave
- Thoughtful
- Happy
- Studious
- · Inventive
- Creative
- Independent
- Intelligent

- Imaginative
- · Fun-loving
- · Successful
- Responsible
- Courageous
- Funny
- Unselfish
- · Self-confident
- Respectful
- Considerate
- Helpful



Resourcing



Tactical Thinking Errors

FIGHTING BACK WORKSHEET

TRIGGER (Something Happers)	UNHELPFUL THOUGHT	INITIAL REACTION (I do., feel or say something)	TACTICAL THINKING ERRORS (choose from below)	REALISTIC, RATIONAL OR HELPFUL THOUGHT/ACTION (What I can tell myself or do in the future)
"I was criticized."	"I never do things right."	"I get angry and withdraw."	8	"It is human to make a mistake."
			G.	
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TACTICAL THINKING ERRORS

All or Nothing Thinking	Confirmation Blas – wishful thinking	Blaming Others	Blaming Yourself	Mind Reading	Predicting the Future
Looking at events in extreme mays. "People only care about the mankers." "No one has a truly happy marriage."	We accept information that fits with our thought process but reject information that decan't fit in. We do this all the time on social media or the news outlets we chose to listen to.	Focusing on other people as the cause of negative events and not looking at your own responsibility. My entire situation is due to my as apouse." The Sgt. doesn't like anyone." No one will give me a break and allow me to get ahead in life."	Focusing only on yourself as the cause of negative events and not looking at the environment or other people's behavior. 1 amso stupid." 1 can never do anything right." 1 sheays pick the wrong person."	Assuming you know what other people are thinking or assuming they should know what you are thinking or need. "It she loved me, she would know what I wanted." I can tell he/she is going to reject me." I amswre he thinks I am doing a terrible job."	You predict a negative outcome without realistically considering the actual odds of that outcome. 1 know I can't pass the test." 1 will never find anyone to be in a relationship with me. 1 ampositive this won't to out well."

Adaptive Denial

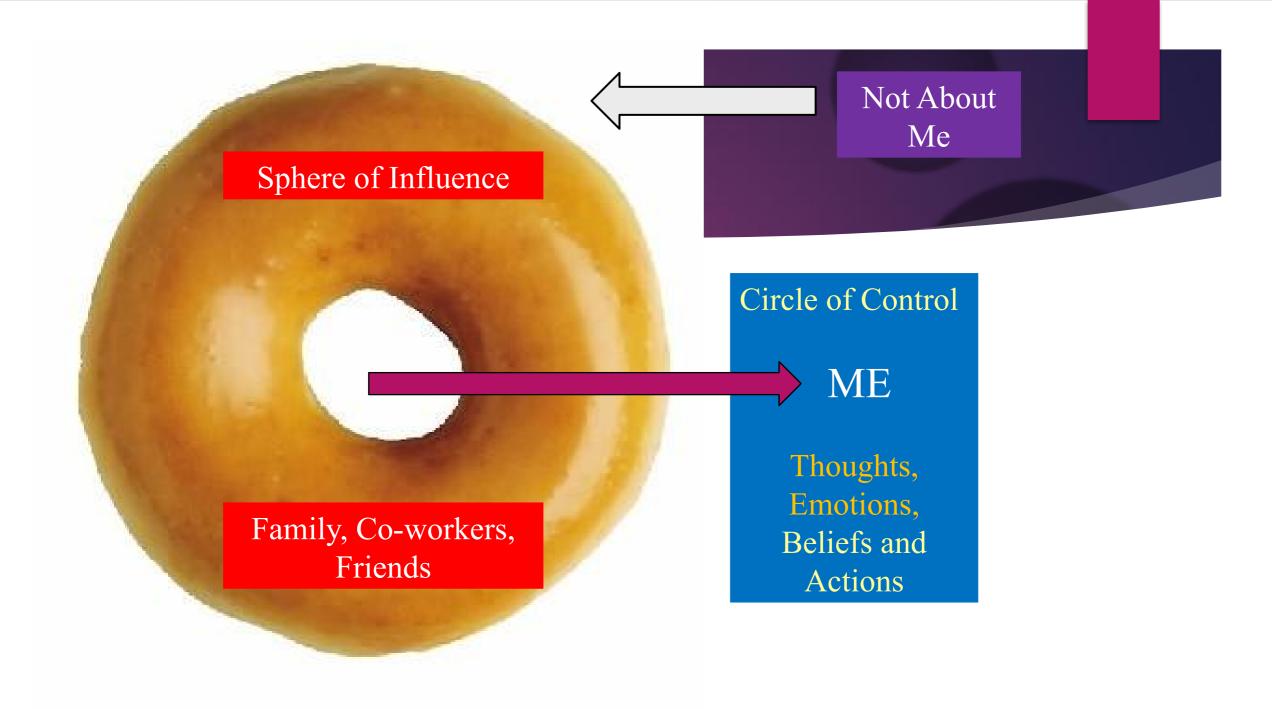
- "This can't/won't happen to me"
- "I work in a small town"
- "I'm in real good shape"
- "I'm an expert marksman"
- "I work day shift"

Tsunami of Emotions

Dr. Emily Keram



Just because an incident sounds bad to you, doesn't mean it was bad for the responder.





Why I do this work....

And Never Let Someone Else or Some Event Control Your Life and Happiness

Who/What is worth keeping you stuck in the "stumbling place" for 38 seconds, let alone 38 years?

Fight Back and Get Help And remember...