

Enhancing Officer Wellness and Resiliency in Policing

The stressors that police officers face can have serious implications for overall health and wellness. In times of stress and uncertainty, officers must take practical steps to prioritize their mental and physical wellness.

Stress on the Job

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. How an individual might respond depends on their background and personality, as well as the community they live in. First responders may react more strongly to difficult experiences due to the responsibility of maintaining public safety, the cumulative exposure to traumatic events, and the concern for loved ones at home.

Pay Attention to Your Mental Health

It is essential to pay attention to your mental and emotional health. Taking care of your health can help you think clearly and react to urgent needs in a timely manner, both at work and at home. While some situations may seem overwhelming and out of control, focusing on what you can control will help reduce stress.

- **Refocus on your purpose** to help avoid burn out. This can be accomplished by assessing the impact of your daily routines, which can help you to restore your energy. Questions to consider include:
 - Why did I join the policing profession?
 - How does my work make life better for other people?
 - How can I add more meaning to what I do every day?
- **Take care of your body** by maintaining healthy habits such as eating nutritious food, staying hydrated, exercising regularly, and getting plenty of sleep. Steer clear of nicotine and excessive alcohol intake.

- **Connect with others** by maintaining social relationships with those close to you. Set aside time to communicate with friends and family to keep your support system informed and strong. Consider using social networking or town halls to stay connected with your community.
- **Practice mindfulness** by taking short breaks to reset and recognize what you need to do to cope with your emotions. Mindfulness activities include finding time for yourself, practicing deep breathing, and participating in activities that you enjoy.
 - Exercise or go for a walk
 - Listen to music
 - Read a book
 - Take a relaxing bath or shower
 - Spend time with loved ones
 - Meditate or practice yoga
 - Be creative through art
 - Keep a journal of your thoughts
- **Avoid Overexposure** because while staying informed is important, too much information can become overwhelming and impact overall wellness at home. Try to refrain from turning on the news at home or setting a time frame where you will disconnect for the day.
- **Seek help when needed** by talking to those around you, such as your fellow officers, command staff, executive leadership, chaplains, family, psychologist, or someone you can confide in.¹ Remember that you are not alone.

¹ <https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/selfcare.asp>

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Be Mindful of Those Around You

Practice empathy and compassion. If you feel on edge or stressed, those around you might as well. Show support to others because they might respond to stress differently than you.

- Following a natural disaster, 12% of individuals with low social support developed PTSD compared to 2.5% of individuals with high social support.²

Have patience for yourself and loved ones. Daily stressors of the policing profession, coupled with anxiety from family members about their loved one in the field, can produce tension at home. Remind yourself to be patient and listen.

- Deliberate breathing can reduce negative feelings including hostility, guilt, and irritability and reduce physiological markers of stress.³

Check in regularly with those in your support system. Between the demands of work and personal obligations, it may become difficult at times to stay connected to colleagues, family, and friends.

- Among police, social support from colleagues is associated with less psychological distress in the face of traumatic events.⁴

Practice gratitude and focus on the good in your life rather than negative situations that are beyond your control.⁵

- Reflecting daily on what you are grateful for can help people to sleep 31 minutes longer per night.⁶

2 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17606382>

3 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28626434>

4 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25476966>

5 <http://www.mindfuljunkie.com/>

6 https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/images/application_uploads/Emmons-CountingBlessings.pdf

Agency Safety and Wellness Resources

For more information please visit IACP's [Officer Safety and Wellness Resource Page](#) or contact us at OSW@theiacp.org

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