

HELPING THE RESCUERS: CHALLENGES AND REWARDS OF WORKING WITH PUBLIC SAFETY

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AGENDA

- Understanding the First Responder culture
- Work environment and personal/interpersonal stressors of First Responders
- Differences between working with First Responders vs. civilians
- Effective strategies and key therapeutic approaches to use with First Responders

WORKING WITH PUBLIC SAFETY EMPLOYEES

- Any clinician working with Firefighters, Paramedics, Law Enforcement Officers, Sheriff's Deputies or Dispatchers is entering a closed culture with high levels of distrust for outsiders.
- First responders see more misery and despair in their first years of their jobs than most of us do in a lifetime.

INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- By the time a First Responder seeks counseling, he/she is likely to have been exposed to significant stress, both on and off the job and have been suffering a long time; he/she and their family may feel that they are near the breaking point.
- Trauma is a whole person injury that may require a collaborative and interdisciplinary team - a 360° view.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN CLINICIANS AND FIRST RESPONDERS

- Make a positive difference in peoples lives
- Problem solvers
- Relieve suffering
- Ethical principles
- Hold a public trust
- Work in managed bureaucratic structure
- Subject to organizational stress
- Exposed to people in pain
- Risk for burnout and compassion fatigue
- Objects of stereotypes and derisive humor
- Emotional dissonance

DIFFERENCES

PUBLIC SAFETY

- Action oriented people, value excitement
- Give and take orders
- Decisive, work in front of others
- Value conformity, tradition, team work, structure
- Use humor to manage stress

CLINICIANS

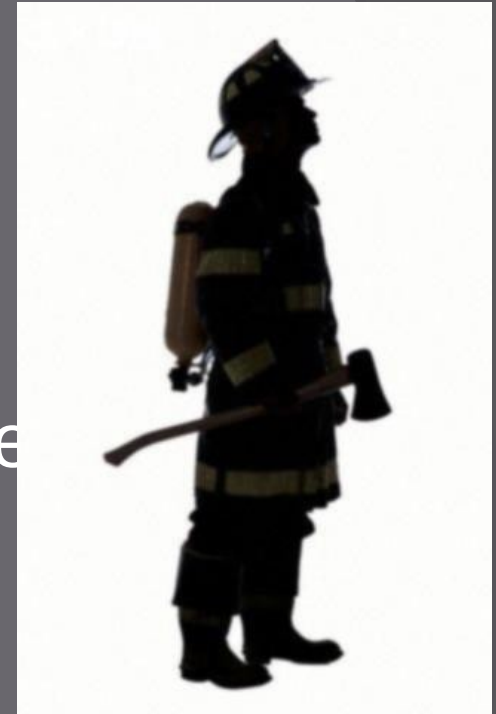
- Non directive and contemplative
- Don't impose values on clients
- Work behind closed doors
- Value individuality, spontaneity, emotional expression
- Self actualization and client's feelings

FIRE SERVICE

Culture and Stressors of Firefighters

COMMON TRAITS OF FIREFIGHTERS

- Ability to listen to others
- Adaptability
- Perform complex tasks under life threatening conditions
- Dedication
- Expectation for attention to detail
- Maintain effective working relationships with superiors and subordinates
- High need for stimulation- easily bored



VALUES OF FIREFIGHTERS

- The Team
- Work Ethic
- Timeliness
- Strength
 1. Strength of Character
 2. Mental Strength
 3. Physical Strength
- Sense of Humor



NEW GENERATION OF FIREFIGHTERS

- More technologically advanced
- Less likely to have firefighting as a family tradition
- Able to speak about their feelings
- Limited interpersonal communication skills
- More heterogeneous
- Promote individuality



NEW LANGUAGE

- Box Alarm, Job, Worker
- Line-up
- Station drill
- Rookie, Probie
- On the job
- A-Shift, B-team, battalions, "tour"
- Titles
- Terminology
- Organizations
- Departments
- EMS, HAZMAT, Prevention, life-safety

ISSUES THAT FIREFIGHTERS FACE

- Stressful work environment
- Personal/interpersonal stressors
- Substance abuse issues
- Physical challenges of the job

WORK ENVIRONMENT STRESSORS

- Sound of alert tone
- Interrupted sleep cycles
- Carrying heavy loads
- Exposure to extreme temperatures
- Long work hours
- Shift work
- Sporadic high intensity situations
- Distancing from strong emotional involvement
- Exposure to extreme suffering
- Victim dynamics

PERSONAL/ INTERPERSONAL STRESSORS

- Personality conflicts with coworkers
- Perceived lack of respect from managers / public /county government
- Boredom
- Susceptible to job burnout
- Concerns over promotion / transfers / retirement
- Feelings of inadequacy
- Fear of failure
- Financial problems
- Parenting difficulties

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Culture and Stressors of Law Enforcement

COMMON TRAITS OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

- Time driven-crisis response mode
- Perfectionists – intolerant of making mistakes
- Vigilance – checks your office for microphones
- Command presence – stiff and formal
- Gallows humor – they may test you
- Police culture is about control of self and others
- Suspiciousness
- Self- protection



VALUES OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

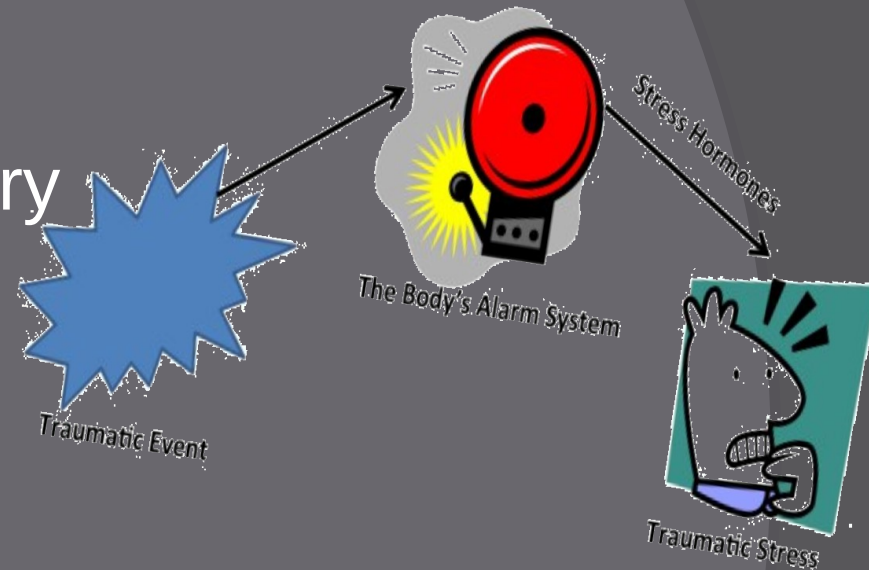
- Teamwork
- Integrity
- Dedication
- Accountability
- Initiative
- Respect

LAW ENFORCEMENT STRESSORS

- Slanted media attention
- Psychologically hazardous assignments
- Internet child pornography
- Undercover work
- Death notification
- Corrections
- Dispatch
- Gang units
- Traffic enforcement, serving felony warrants

TRAUMATIC INCIDENTS

- Line of Duty Death
- Serious Line of Duty injury
- Suicide of Colleague
- Death of a child
- Mass Casualty incidents
- Terrorism
- Victim known to the rescuers
- Excessive News Media interest
- Prolonged incident - especially with loss



SIGNIFICANT OTHERS OF FIRST RESPONDERS & THEIR PERSPECTIVE

- The schedule
- Nights away from home
- Holidays
- Raising kids
- Emergencies at home when he/she is on duty
- The “second family”- competition for priority
- Ways that the job affects/carries over to the home life
- Effects of sleep deprivation

THERAPEUTIC ALLIANCE

THERAPEUTIC ALLIANCE

- Therapists should be transparent, competent, and familiar with first responder culture
- Authenticity is key!!
- Stress confidentiality
- Be empathetic
- LISTEN = SILENT

WORKING WITH FIRST RESPONDERS

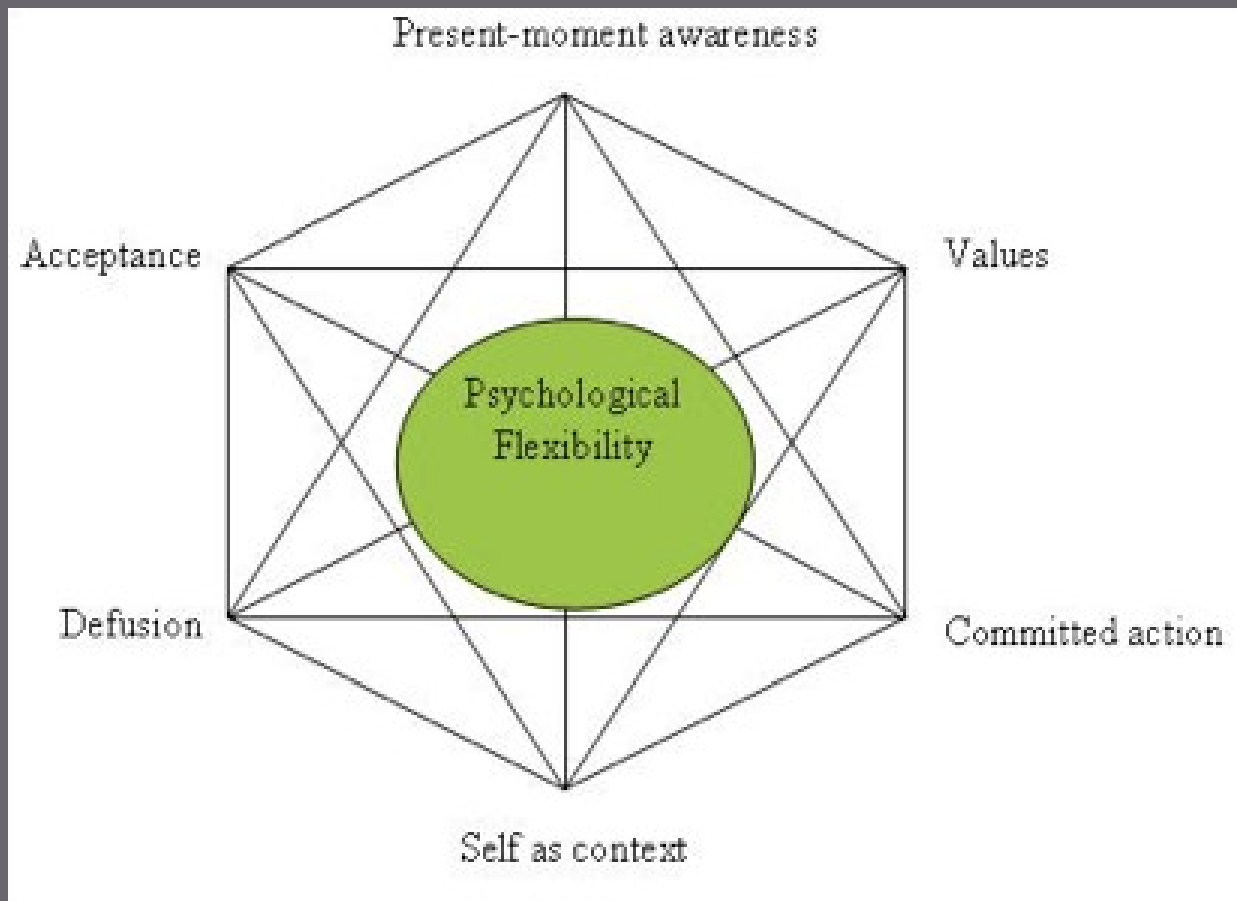
- Do not push for feelings, have the person describe what THEY believe they are feeling
- Do not visibly overreact to what you hear
- Respond calmly “that must have been difficult for you”
- Validate their feelings
- When reasonable – give advice and confront

- Focus on coping skills and stress management
- “If this were to pop up, here are somethings to take care of yourself”- develop a coping plan
- “Do you have a method that you use?”- what has worked for them in the past
- Give them hope
- Give them something tangible to work with
- Have the treatment goals be collaborative
- Talk about resilience

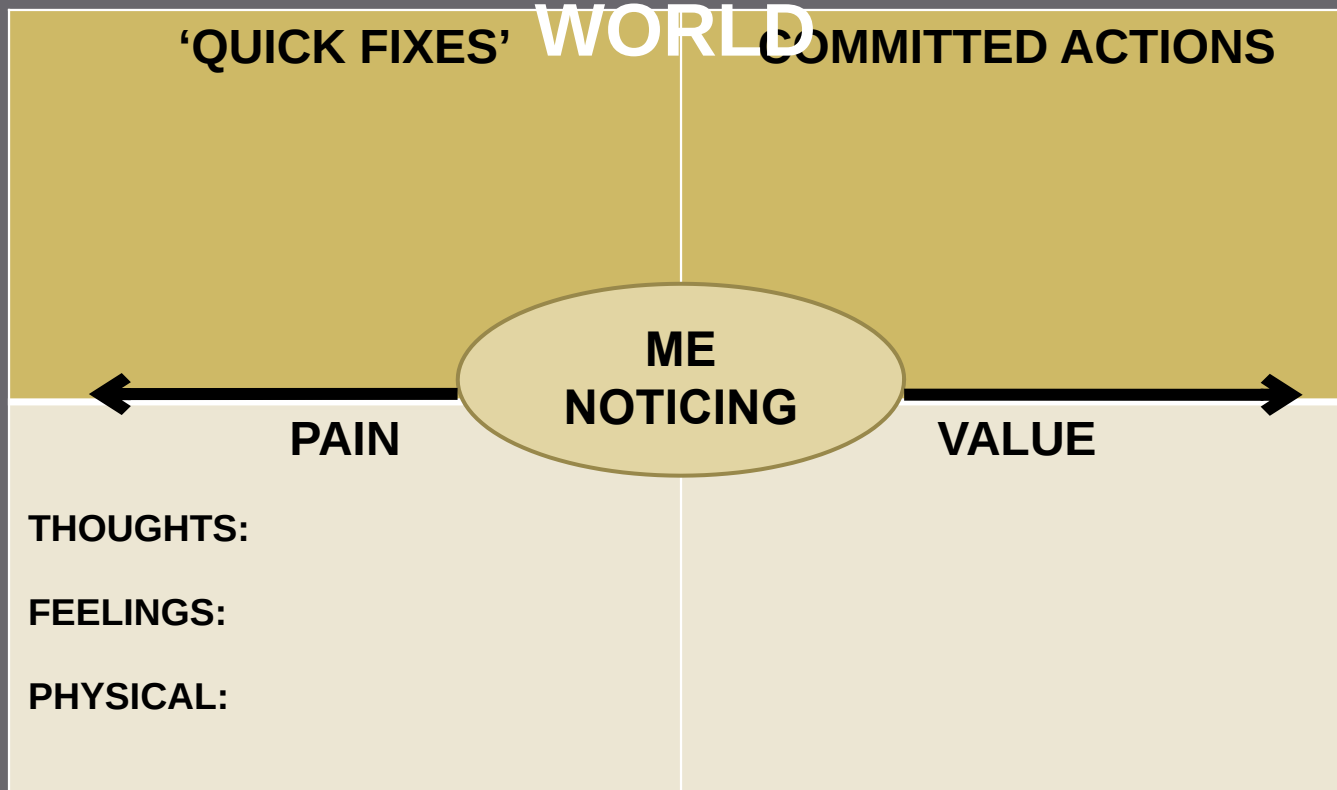
THERAPEUTIC APPROACHES

ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY

- Client is able to determine their values and establish committed actions that will bring them closer to their established values.
- Understanding of how past "quick fixes" have led clients to negative feelings of pain and suffering.
- Client gains awareness and notices the emotion that they are feeling in the present moment. Frees the client of "labeling".



OUTSIDE WORLD



INSIDE WORLD

COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY

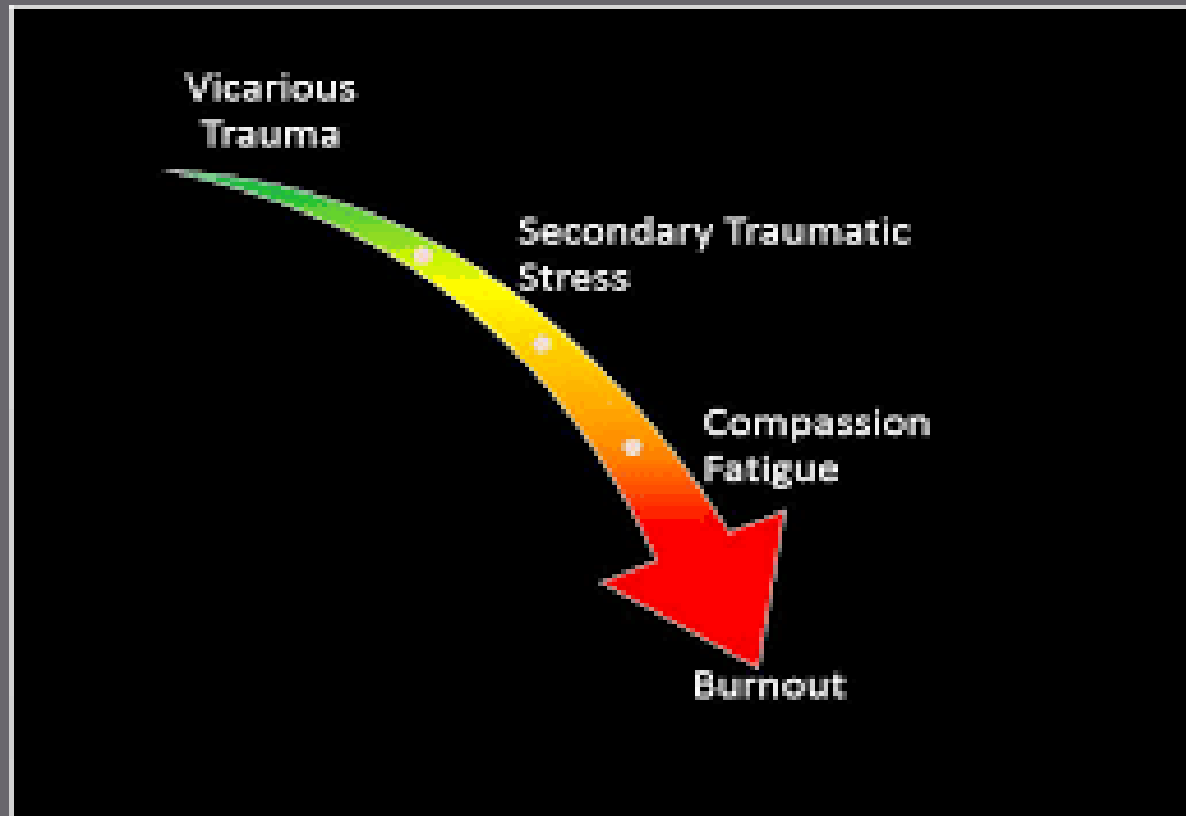
- Cognitive distortions
 - Vulnerability as a sign of weakness
 - “I don’t need help”
 - “I don’t want to burden anyone”
- Challenge polarized thinking
- Magnifying/ Minimizing
- Accepting lack of control
- “Shoulda Woulda Coulda” thinking
- Survivor Guilt

DIALECTICAL BEHAVIORAL THERAPY

- **Mindfulness:** the practice of being fully aware and present in this one moment
- **Distress Tolerance:** how to tolerate pain in difficult situations, not change it
- **Interpersonal Effectiveness:** communicating in a way that promotes assertiveness, strengthens relationships and maintains boundaries
- **Emotion Regulation:** the practice of managing and changing intense emotions

CLINICAN SELF- CARE

VICARIOUS TRAUMA



WHAT CAN WE DO FOR OURSELVES?

- Practice our own self-care
- Mindfulness
- Being aware of counter-transference
- Make an appropriate referral
- Supervision

Q & A

CONTACT INFORMATION

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