# Sleep Matters: What EA Professionals Need to Know About Sleep Health for First Responders

Douglas Cyr, MPA, LMFT, CEAP, FAAETS

Senior Employee Assistance Counselor

SAN FRANCISCO
HEALTH SERVICE SYSTEM
Better Every Day.

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

# Objectives

- **Explore** – Impact of Sleep Deprivation on First Responders
- **Identify** – Barriers to Healthy Sleep
- **Learn** – Practical Applications for Helping Improve First Responders' Sleep Hygiene

# Introduction and Overview

**8:45 - 9:00:** Introduction and Overview

**9:00 - 9:20:** Understanding Sleep Deprivation and First Responders

**9:20 - 9:35:** Key Barriers to Healthy Sleep

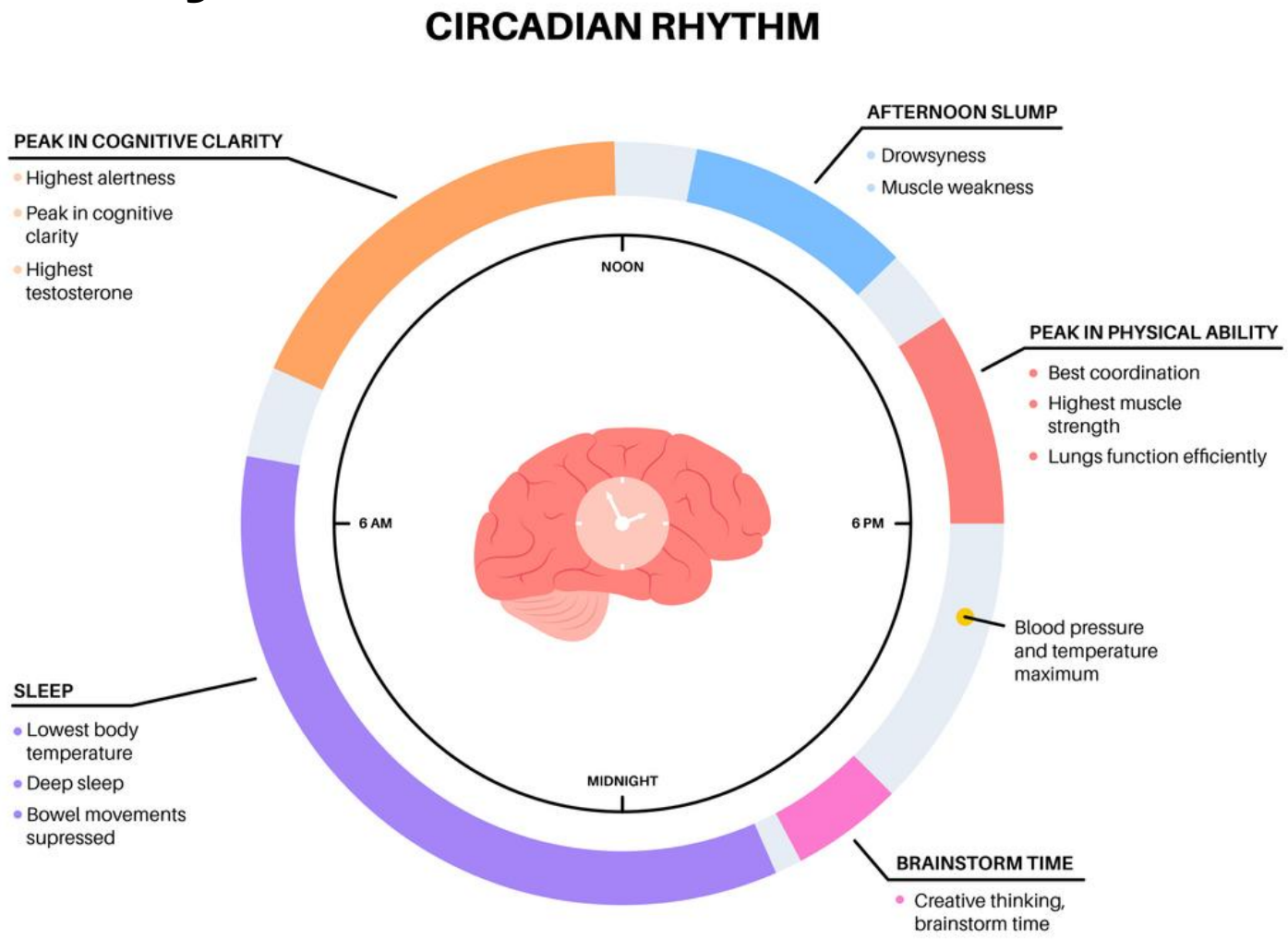
**9:35 - 10:00:** Practical Applications & Interventions with First Responders

**10:00 - 10:15:** Developing a Professional Action Plan

**10:15 - 10:30:** Closing and Q&A

# Understanding Sleep Deprivation and First Responders

# The Sleep/Wake Cycle



# The Fatigue/Health Connection

**Sleep deficiency can:**

- Cause physical, mental and emotional harm over time
- Raise chronic health risks (cardiovascular, Type 2 diabetes, obesity, stroke & others)
- Impact the quality of our relationships
- Impair problem-solving and coping skills

**Regular, restful, uninterrupted sleep can:**

- Improve brain functioning
- Improve learning and problem-solving
- Build and repair our heart and blood vessels
- Improve our ability to fight sickness
- Reduce health risks (heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, stroke)

# Symptoms of Fatigue

***Have you ever asked your clients about fatigue?***
***Why are these symptoms concerning, particularly for first responders?***

**At Work:**

- ✓ Discomfort – heavy arms and legs
- ✓ Tense muscles
- ✓ Heavy eyes
- ✓ Frequent blinking/yawning

**While Driving:**

- ✓ Leaning forward while driving
- ✓ Missing exits/traffic signs
- ✓ Trouble keeping head up
- ✓ Drifting into another lane

# Fatigue and the Brain

## Impacts on Decision-Making:

- Heightened *emotional* reactions, which can negatively impact relationships and behaviors
- Reduced *quality* of decisions
- Reduced motor-skill reaction time
  - Sleeping between 5-7 hours/night ≈ **.05% blood alcohol content (BAC)**
    - ✓ This is equivalent to:
      - 137lb woman drinking 3 drinks over 2 hours
      - 170lb man drinking 4 drinks over 2 hours

## Impacts on Cognition:

- Firefighters show **worse cognitive performance** (memory, concentration, language, reasoning) than well-rested colleagues
- **50%** of officer on-the-job accidents/injuries include fatigue-related impairment
- Fatigued EMS professionals are **3.6x** more at-risk of making *errors that impact patient care*
- **45%** of 9-1-1 dispatchers report experiencing significant fatigue during their shifts

# Lessons from the Field:
# Sleep Deprivation and Deadly Decisions

Santa Clara Deputy
kills two & injures third

# Breakout Exercise
## (groups of 3)

***Have you ever worked with sleep-deprived clients?***

***What strategies do / might you use to help them improve their sleep?***

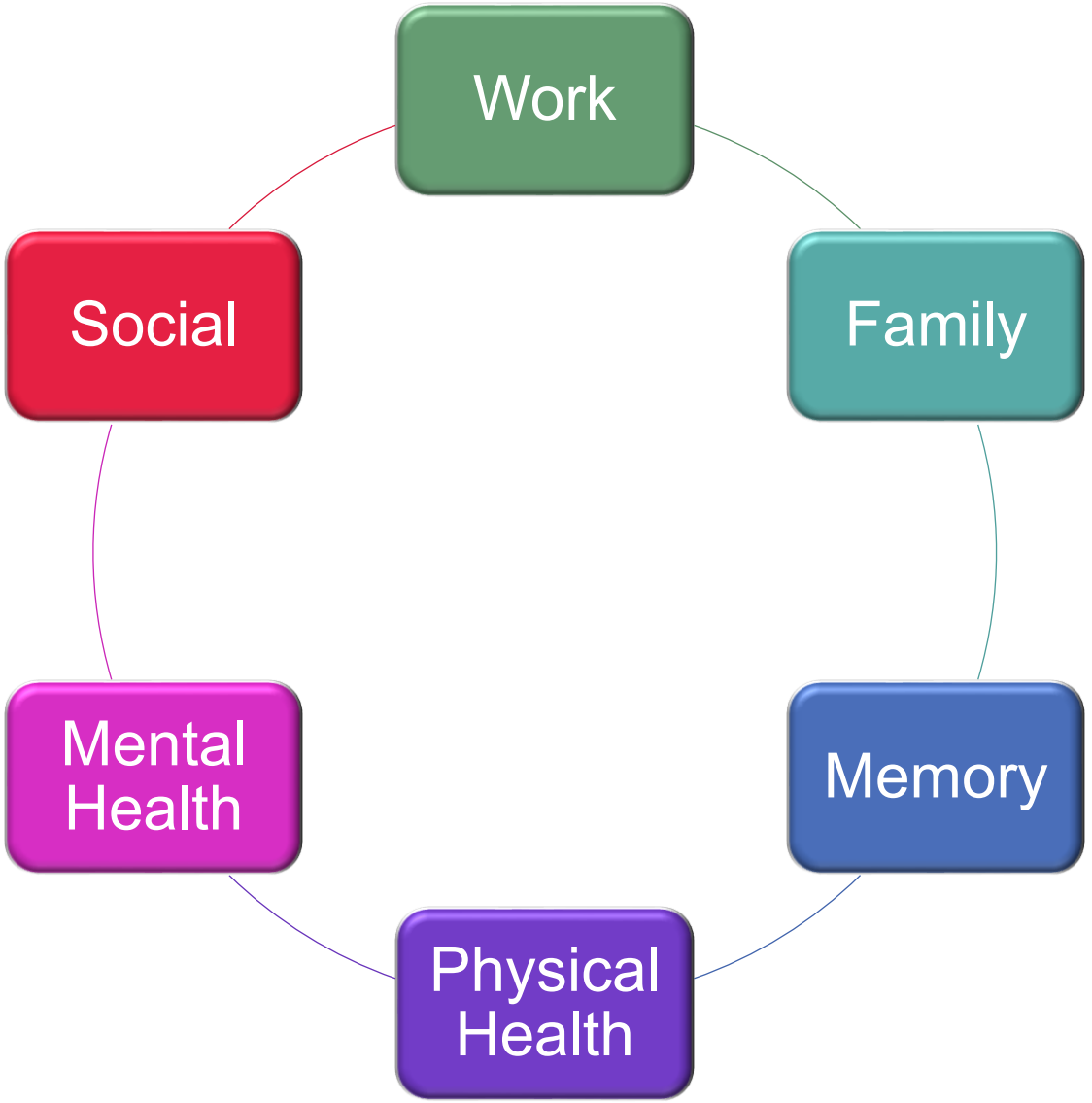
***(5 minutes)***

***Group Discussion***

# Key Barriers to Healthy Sleep

***How does fatigue impact these areas?***

***How does that impact affect first responders on the job?***



# Law Enforcement - Use Of Force

## Fatigued officers show:

- Increased levels of aggression (unwarranted or excessive)
- Shooting accuracy (mixed research)
- ***Impaired friend/foe detection***

*Have you ever had a first responder client that reported fatigue and/or work performance concerns?*
*If so, did you comment on your concern?*
*If so, how did they respond?*

# Shift Work and Fatigue


**Studies Show:**

- Poor sleep quality is 70% more prevalent among officers working the night-shift, and 49% higher among those working an afternoon-shift (compared with those on day shift).

- Urban officers working nights are *3x's more likely* to suffer long-term work injuries, and *2.2 x's more likely* than those on afternoon shift-- resulting in leaves of more than 90 days.

# Insomnia and Co-occurring Mood Disorders

- ✓ Anxiety & Insomnia
- ✓ Depression & Insomnia
- ✓ PTSD & Insomnia
- ✓ Burnout & Insomnia

Insomnia isn't just a side-effect of these mood disorders– *it's a core clinical issue that interacts with (and worsens) mental health issues.*

# Practical Applications and Interventions

# Sleep Hygiene: Best Practices

## Preventative Health

- **Full physical** (45 yrs. & older)
- **Supplementary healthcare:** acupuncture, acupressure, chiropractor, massage, personal trainer
- **New parents/nursing mothers**
  - ✓ Refer to their doctor or pediatrician about chronic sleep issues

## Stress Management

- **Refer to** family, friends, colleagues, peer support/CISM groups, licensed mental health professional
- **Recommend** alone time to unwind every day (routine)
- **Suggest** creating a written gratitude list.
- **Suggest** stretching 5-10 minutes before bed

# Sleep Hygiene: Best Practices (cont.)

## Sleep Environment Recommendations

- **Quality mattress**
- **Sleep Trackers**
- **3-7 hours before bed:** reduce caffeine
- **2 hours before bed:** no alcohol, nicotine, or large meals; light snacks ok
- **30-60 minutes before bed:** no tv/computer/smartphone
- **Set a regular wake-up time** where possible
- **Minimize Light Exposure**
  - ✓ Dim house lights 1 hour before bed
  - ✓ Put smartphones in *Night Mode* after 6pm
- **Can't Sleep?** Get out of bed if not asleep within 20 minutes – and read something boring for 4-14 nights

# Sleep Hygiene: Best Practices

## Therapies and Techniques

**Somatic Experiencing® (SE)**

Developed in the 1970's to treat trauma

**Eye Movement Desensitization & Reprocessing® (EMDR)**

Developed in 1987 to treat trauma-related distress

- *Anxiety Release Based on EMDR* (app)

**CBT for Insomnia (CBT-I)**

Developed in the 1990's to treat thoughts and habits that impair sleep

- CBT-I workbooks

**Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) Tapping**

Developed in the 1990's to treat distress, trauma, pain, cravings, and performance anxiety

- *The Tapping Solution* (app)

**Brainspotting® (BSP)**

Developed in 2003 to treat trauma, performance, and attachment issues

# Simple Stress-Reduction Activities

- ✓ Drink 64oz of water every day
- ✓ Eat more vegetables and fruit
- ✓ Listen to music
- ✓ Practice active listening
- ✓ Practice mindful breathing
- ✓ Schedule a vacation
- ✓ Shift your perspective
- ✓ Spend time with family, friends, & loved ones
- ✓ Spend time with your pet
- ✓ Stretch and move your body
- ✓ Tell someone you appreciate them

*Suggestion: find or make a good handout

# Workplace Suggestions/Recommendations

*Get to know your local first responder departments*

**Scheduling:**

- ✓ Ask if they've thought about switching to day shift
  - Limitations: Union, staffing rules, minimum staffing demands

**Sleep Education:**

- ✓ Weekly administrative staff meetings
- ✓ Officer briefings
- ✓ Advanced officer academy training
- ✓ Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Program

**Fatigue Management:**

- ✓ Monthly wellness emails (diet, exercise, sleep)
- ✓ Fitness assessment, coaching, and training
- ✓ Smartphone Apps (Calm, Headspace, Insight Timer, Lighthouse, O2X Human Performance, Sleep Cycle,)
- ✓ Flexible work hour: work out (gym) or sleep
- ✓ Massage chairs at office
- ✓ PTO/Sick Leave
- ✓ Safety assessment (supervisor and officers)

# Breakout Exercise
## (groups of 3)

***How have (or might) you talk with a first responder about getting a better night's sleep?***

***Which strategies might work well? Which might not?***

***(5 minutes)***

***Group Discussion***

# Developing a Professional Action Plan

# Professional Action Plan

*What one strategy could you use to help your clients get* ***an extra 15 minutes*** *of sleep?*

# Additional Resources

- Safe Call Now: 24/7 public safety/emergency services crisis referral service: 206-459-3020
- Copline® International LEO Hotline: 800-267-5463
- 9-8-8: National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline
- Helpguide.org
- Crediblemind.com
- Thensf.org (The National Sleep Foundation)

# Post-Session Quiz

# Post-Session Quiz

1. Name one physical and one cognitive effect of sleep deprivation on first responders. (Short answer)

Answer: _____

2. How many times more likely are fatigued EMS professionals to make errors impacting patient care?

a) 1.2x

b) 3.6x

c) 5x

d) 10x

Answer: _____

3. Which of the following is not a recommended sleep hygiene practice?

a) Reducing caffeine 3–7 hours before bed
b) Watching TV until you feel tired
c) Setting a regular wake-up time
d) Dimming lights before bed

Answer: _____

# Post-Session Quiz

4. True or False: CBT-I (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia) was developed to target habits and thoughts that interfere with sleep. Answer: _____

5. Which therapy uses bilateral stimulation to treat trauma (pick one)?

a) Somatic Experiencing
b) EMDR
c) CBT-I
d) EFT Tapping

Answer: _____

6. What workplace strategies can organizations use to help reduce fatigue among first responders? (Short answer – at least one example) Answer: _____

7. True or False: Fatigue impairs both motor-skill reaction time and decision-making.

Answer: _____

# Post-Session Quiz

8. According to best practices, what should you do if you can't fall asleep within 20 minutes?
    a) Stay in bed until sleep comes
    b) Get up and read something boring
    c) Check your phone
    d) Drink a cup of coffee

Answer: _____

9. Which of the following stress-reduction activities is recommended for supporting healthy sleep?
    a) Scheduling a vacation
    b) Drinking 64oz of water daily
    c) Practicing mindful breathing
    d) All of the above

Answer: _____

10. Reflecting on today's session: What is one strategy you could use with a client to help them get an extra 15 minutes of sleep? (Open-ended)

Answer: _____

**Quiz Supplemental Source:** Open AI. (2025). ChatGPT-5 (September 19). https://chat.openai.com/chat

# Wrap-Up / Q&A

# Wrap-Up: Group Discussion

***What insights did you have during the presentation?***

***What are your key takeaways?***

***What topics would you like to learn more about?***

# Q & A

SAN FRANCISCO
HEALTH SERVICE SYSTEM
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Employee Assistance Program
1145 Market Street, Ste 210
San Francisco, CA 94103
Sfhss.org/eap

**Douglas Cyr,** MPA, CEAP, FAAETS
**Senior Employee Assistance Counselor**
LMFT #43201
douglas.cyr@sfgov.org

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