



Fighting Monsters: Cumulative PTSD in First Responders

Through the course of their careers, first responders accumulate experiences that cause long term stress and trauma. This trauma can lead to depression and self-destructive thoughts, however, there are methods and wellness strategies to proactively promote better mental health!

First Responders and Mental Health

- Seeking help can be difficult due to the stigma of maintaining a certain image as a first responder.
- In first responders:
 - Suicide rates are higher
 - 1 in 20 have an untreated mental illness
 - There is a 5x higher rate of suffering PTSD than any other profession



Cumulative PTSD

- Cumulative Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is a type of PTSD that builds up over time from witnessing many stressors and traumatic events.
- **Signs to look for:**
 - Withdrawal from people, places, and things
 - Behaving out of character (e.g. emotional outbursts)
 - Making bad choices
 - Poor eating and hygienic habits

Combatting Cumulative PTSD

- Reach out to coworkers for help because they know you best and understand the job. Have accountability for each other such as mental health check-ups. The more people involved increases the likelihood of success.
- **Routine maintenance** to have time for friends/family, eating healthy, working out, etc.
 - Schedule rest or break times as diligently as you schedule your work times
- **Changing perspective**
 - How you view your work matters! Instead of "dreading work" and being put in a predisposition that it is not enjoyable, say "*I get to go to work and help people*"
- **Make your phone work for you**
 - Limit usage for social media (utilizing phone settings)
 - Organize apps and notes to surround your goals
 - Download motivational quote apps
- Have hobbies unrelated to your job
- Surround yourself with people that inspire and motivate you
- Have a morning routine – Don't hit snooze, 5 min. stretches/exercises, eat within the first 30 min., avoid news and social media usage

Data adapted from "Fighting Monsters: Cumulative PTSD in First Responders", a webinar originally held on 4/5/2021. Presented by Sgt. Shane Blalock. Sgt. Shane Blalock is available by email directly at sblalock@florenceal.org or funkypork@live.com.



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