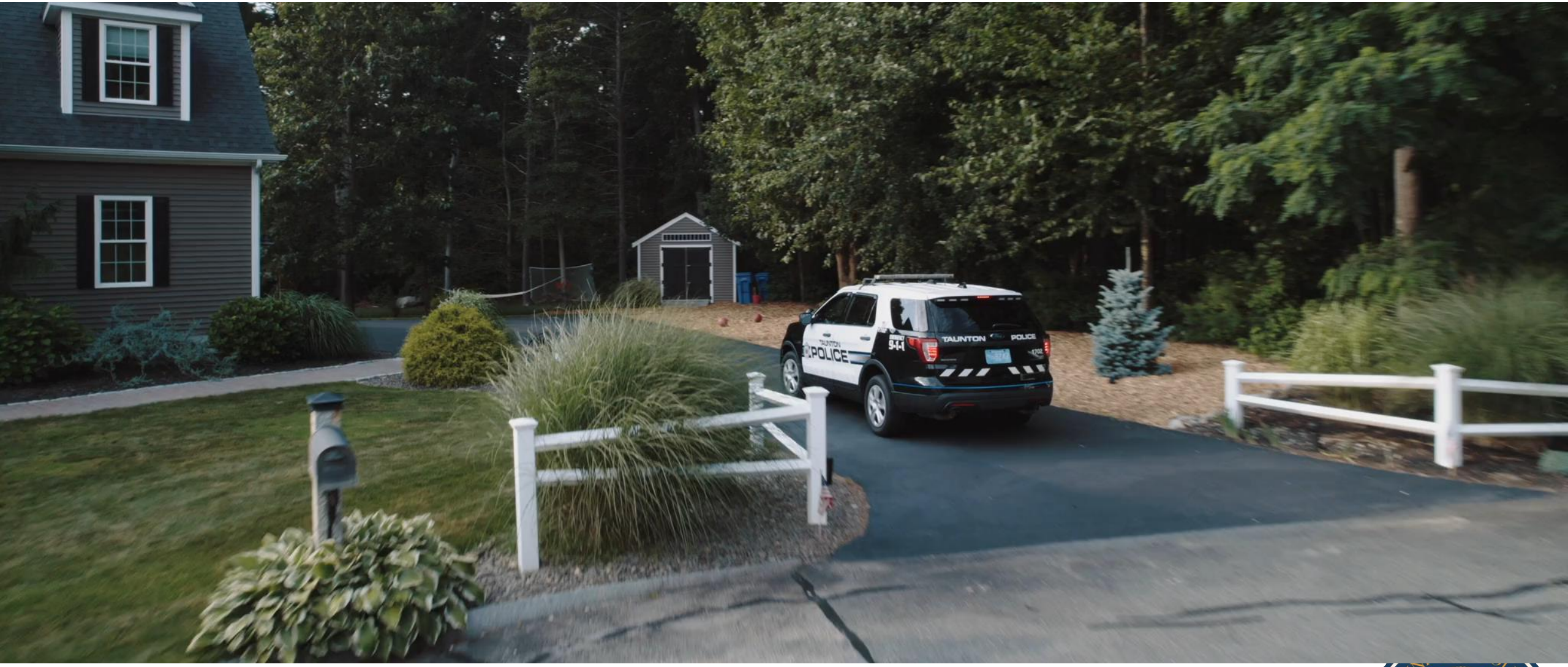
COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

MPTC

Municipal Police Training Committee

Unload Your Backpack

In-Service Training 2025 | *The First Amendment*


TAUNTON
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911
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QR Code to Share/Save Unload Your Backpack Video





Introductions

- Instructor Introduction
- Professional Background
- Why This Training Matters

Learning Objectives

1. Explain the effects of trauma and chronic stress on the officer's brain
2. Examine maladaptive behaviors seen at roll call, on the street, and at home.
3. Assess key elements of your identity and self-assess the state of your well-being.



Learning Objectives, cont'd

4. Appraise tangible wellness practices and tools to mitigate common pitfalls of the profession.
5. Formulate how to elicit meaningful discussion with officers and organizational leadership.




I: Neuroscience

Section Learning Objectives

1. Explain the effects of trauma and chronic stress on the officer's brain.
2. Examine maladaptive behaviors seen at roll call, on the street, and at home.



Trauma and the Police

- From the Greek word meaning “wound”
- Cultural perceptions of ‘trauma’ as weakness
- Layman’s terms: a distressing event or occurrence that exceeds our coping ability.
- Not a matter of toughness
- Everyone reacts differently to trauma
- Unresolved trauma can result in maladaptive behavior behaviors (SUD, infidelity, poor impulse control, poor work performance, etc.)
- Victimhood Disclaimer – It didn’t happen to you, it happened FOR you

Safety and Salience

- Our brains want to keep us alive and safe
- First responder brain: compartmentalization/processing speed
- Hunter-gatherer example (programming and berries)
- Negative events related to trauma becomes salient
- Brain doesn’t want trauma or responses to ween until its reassured we are safe
- Explains why trauma and traumatic stimuli are so salient and remain dominant in the unconscious mind

Unresolved Trauma

- Epigenetics
- ACES
- Combat Veterans
- Critical Incidents
- Starting a career with a full backpack
- Trauma left unaddressed can wreak havoc and rear its ugly head with maladaptive behaviors

Allostatic Load

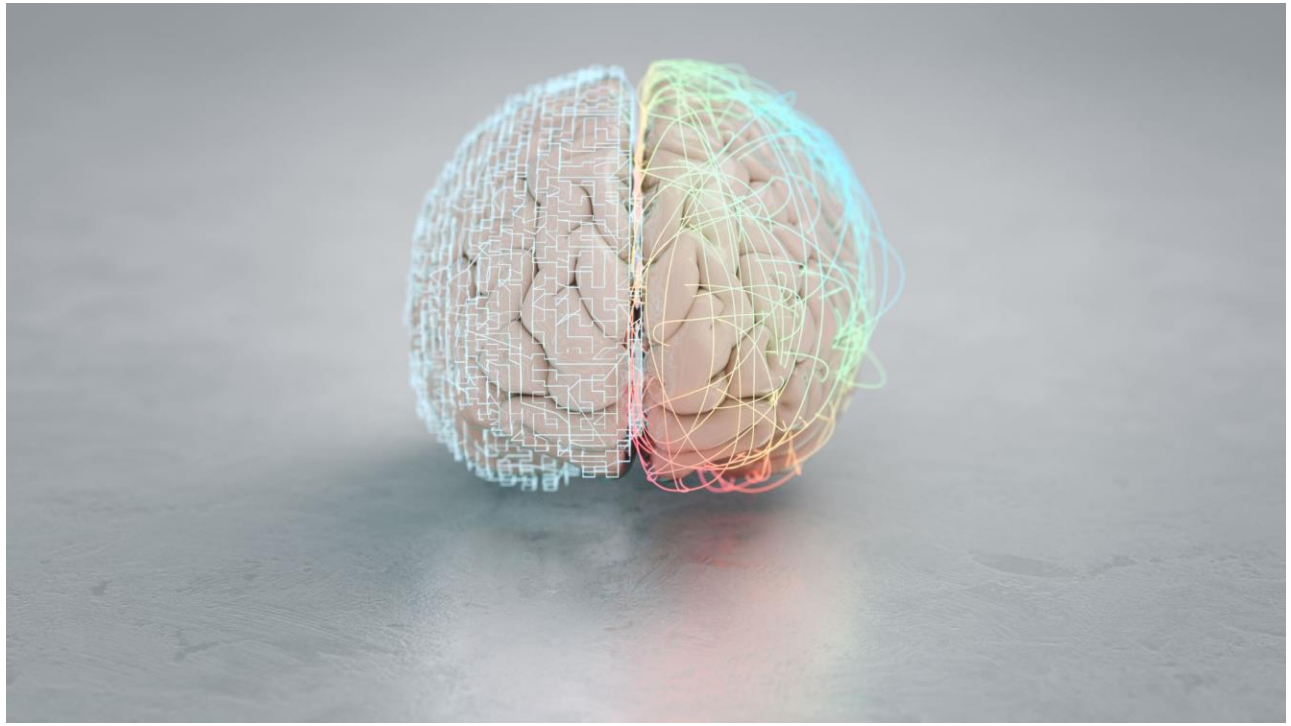
- Refers to the cumulative effects that chronic stress has on mental and physical health
- The price we pay for adapting to stress
- This is the long-term result of failed adaptation, resulting in pathology and chronic illness
- Sources: psychological stressors, socioeconomic status, major life events, environmental stressors, chronic stress, inadequate coping mechanisms

Impact of Allostatic Load

- Cardiovascular disease
- Diabetes
- Cancer
- Mental health deterioration
- Depression
- Anxiety
- PTSD

Two Brains

- Emotional vs Rational



Emotional Brain

- Centered in the amygdala in the limbic system
- iPhone 15
- Powerful in ability to respond to other's feelings, classify others as foes, tell false stories, and drain the brain of its limited cognitive resources
- Fast, automatic
- All about survival
- Danger initiates the fight or flight response here

Rational Brain

- Prefrontal cortex
- Flip phone
- Logical and analytical in processing information
- Consciousness and self-awareness exist here
- Responds to situations with good judgment and awareness of long-term consequences
- Decision making and social behavior

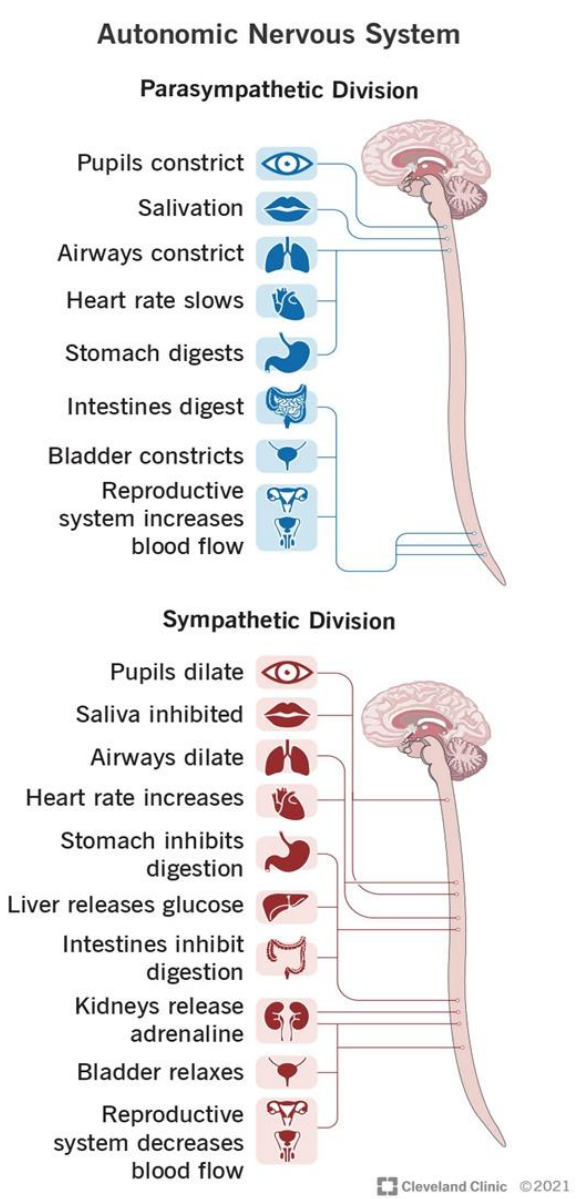
Emotional Brain Dominance

- When exposed to trauma its sets a course for “safety” so we don’t get hurt again
- Wired for survival and responders just keep on trucking (stress inoculation)
- Creates fear loops in our minds
- Doesn’t send info to thinking brain
- Floods us with fear and limitation
- Affects trust



Autonomic Nervous System

- Rest & Digest vs Fight or Flight



Brake Pedal

Gas Pedal

Emotional brain dominance, hyperarousal, hypervigilance



Impact of Trauma and Stress

STIMULUS:
CAR CHASE, SHOOTING, FIGHT, MARITAL/FINANCE ISSUES, TRAUMATIC INCIDENT

Triggers the brain's alarm system = F/F/F/F

AMYGDALA



PHYSIOLOGICAL RESPONSES:
HR ↑, BP ↑, BLOOD FLOW ↑, CORTISOL AND ADRENALINE RELEASED, NARROWING VISION, GLUCOSE ↑

HIPPOCAMPUS:
EMOTIONAL REGULATION & MEMORY: FLASHBACKS, BLANK SPOTS

PFC: EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING, EMOTIONAL REGULATION

- POOR DECISION MAKING
-POOR IMPUSLE CONTROL
-IRRITABILITY
-RISK SEEKING BEHAVIOR
-LACK OF EMOTION
-IMPATIENCE
-SHORT TERM MEMORY ISSUES

BROADER CNS DYSFUNCTION:
HYPERAROUSAL
HYPERVIGILANCE
THROTTLE STUCK IN SYMPATHETIC STATE
ON EDGE/FEEL TERRIBLE

DOPAMINE RELEASE:

-TOYS
-GAMBLING
-INFIDELITY
-NICOTINE
-ALCOHOL
(GABA/GLUTAMATE REBOUND EFFECT)

The Struggling Cop

- Go to bed late/intoxicated/no sleep
- Wake up late, swollen, dehydrated, anxious, and angry
- Put on dirty uniform
- Show up to roll call late and unprepared
- Sit around after roll call for 20 mins complaining
- Energy drink and nicotine (dopamine↑, anxiety ↑)
- Domestic disturbance, child abuse, fatal, DOA
- Forced to evening shift
- Arousal, isolation, impatience, dopamine hunt



A Belief and a Search

- First responders may sometimes believe they are not good enough stemming from persistent negativity, high demands, policy, administration, media, politicians, societal climate
- First responders just want something that feels good in their life (altered PFC leads to bad pursuits)
- Negative self image can lead to feelings of worthlessness, SUD, poor decision making

The Deviance Effect

- Police officers respond to society's problems
- Environmental factors (Nature vs nurture)
- Death, abuse, tragedy, rape, violence, addiction, poverty, mental illness
- Job specific consumption- (detectives) what are we doing?
- Societal contradiction and lack of reciprocity in thinking
- Desensitization and warped perception of the world
- Appears as apathy and indifference (complaints)

Shame & Guilt

- Guilt: “I made a mistake”
- Shame: “I AM the mistake”
- Primitive origins
- Keeps us stuck inside ourselves and causes us to forget who we are
- Coupled with cultural norms, forces us to keep things private and buried
- Increases negative self-perception exacerbating negative behaviors/pursuits
- Post-incident shame: fail to act, overaction, action against belief structure
- Shame and guilt from maladaptive behaviors

II: Interventions for Success



Section Learning Objectives

3. Appraise tangible wellness practices and tools to mitigate common pitfalls of the profession.
4. Assess key elements of your identity and self-assess the state of your well-being.



Disclaimer

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Professional Mental Health Therapy Options

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

- Examines relationship between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors
- Effective for depression, anxiety, SUD, PTSD, severe mental illness
- Recognize one's distortions in thinking
- Gain better understanding of behavior and motivations of others
- Use problem-solving skills to cope with difficult situations
- Develop greater sense of confidence in one's own abilities
- Significant improvement in functioning and quality of life
- Demonstrated to be as effective or more effective than other psychological therapy or psychiatric medications

Brain Mapping and Electroencephalogram (EEG)

- Computer-generated analysis of brain's electrical activity
- Pinpoints brain activity outside of the norm
- Measure and monitor neuron oscillations
- Identifies dysregulation in brain function and activity
- Targeted therapy to process information correctly

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)

- Psychotherapy treatment that enables people to heal from the symptoms and emotional distress that are the result of disturbing life experiences
- Adaptive Information Processing Model: predicts dysfunctionally stored or not fully processed memories are the cause of a number of mental disorders like PTSD, affective disorders, pain, addiction
- Stress relief
- Reformulate negative beliefs
- Reduce physiological arousal
- EMDR=3D glasses
- 72 hours/ 3 sleep cycles post incident (REM sleep and alcohol avoidance)

Post-Traumatic Growth

- Positive psychological change that some individuals experience after life crisis or traumatic event
- Adversity can unintentionally yield changes in understanding oneself, others, and the world
- Cultivates inner strength through the knowledge that they have overcome tremendous hardship
- PTG happens when someone who has difficulty bouncing back, experiences traumatic event that challenges their core beliefs, endures psychological struggle, and then ultimately finds a sense of personal growth
- Your experiences can serve as a tail wind

"The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places."
– Ernest Hemingway



Self-Assessment

“A problem approached comprehensively is an opportunity”

- Dr. Jordan Peterson

“When you look in the mirror, that’s the one person you cannot lie to”

-David Goggins



Attributed to the mathematician Karl Pearson

That which is measured improves.
That which is measured and reported improves exponentially.

Who Are You?

- Where are you in life?
- Starts with brutal honesty and humility
- Elephant in the room
- Measurements = improvements
- Physically (weight, ability, appearance)
- Mentally (anxious, depressed, manic, ADHD)
- Financially (bills, debt, budget)
- Spiritually (are you connected, social circle, gratitude)
- Consumption (drugs, pornography, negativity, media)

Assessments

- Anxiety: Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item (GAD-7)
- Depression: Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9)
- PTSD: PCL-5
- Addiction: Drug Abuse Screening Test (DAST-10), AUDIT
- Blood work panel (lipids, hormones, glucose, etc)
- Heart: Cardiac CT for Calcium Scoring
- Wearables: RHR, HRV, BP, Sleep, Glucose, Ketones

Heart Rate Variability (HRV)

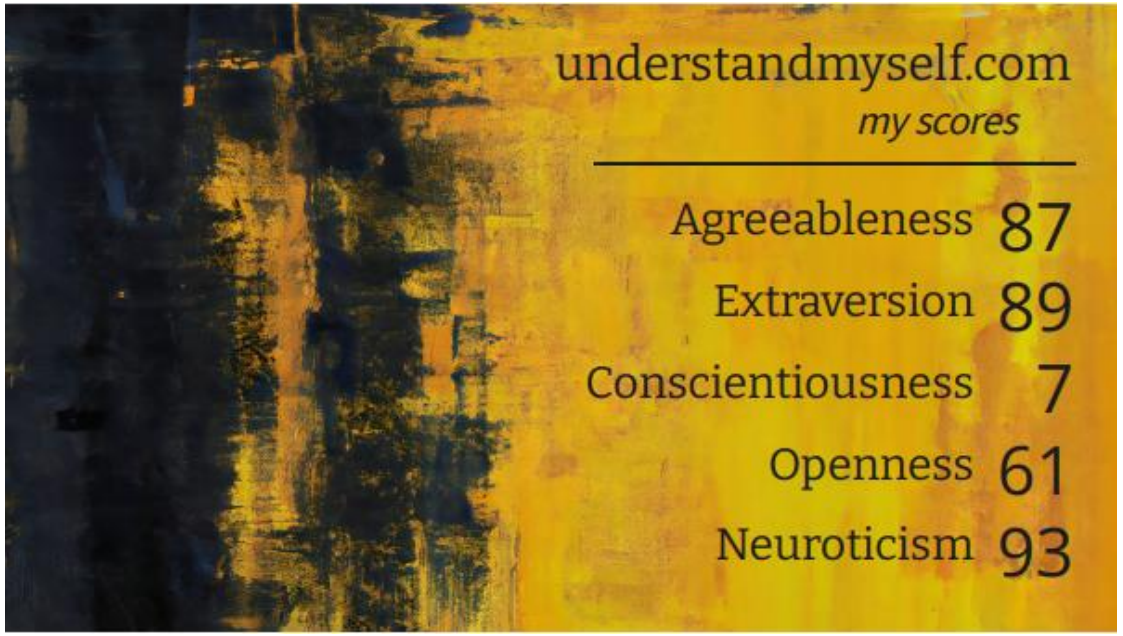
- Measures the variation in time between each heartbeat
- Noninvasive way to signal imbalances in the ANS
- Provides insight on daily stressors and deleterious factors/behaviors
- Most have the info already (Apple watch, Oura, Fitbit, Garmin)
- Allows individuals to track how nervous system is reacting to environment, thoughts, feelings, emotions, and consumption

HeartMath and HRV



Understandmyself.com

- Big Five: Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Neuroticism, Openness



Assessment Breakdown

- Ex: Nice, avoid conflict, compassionate, respectful, procrastinate, easily distracted, messy, self-disclosing, impulsive, require stimulation, person of action, anxious, worry, doubt, low self-esteem, high avoidance and withdrawal, mood swings, easy stirred up, interested in abstract ideas, creative
- Knowledge is power
- Understand the lens in which you view life through
- Promotes self-exploration, honesty, and accountability

VIA Character Strength Survey

- Scientists identified 24-character strengths that individuals have capacity to express
- Discover your personal character strengths and areas for improvement
- Discover your true self and how you interact with the world
- FREE
- Sample top 5: Humility, Perspective, Kindness, Judgement, Humor
- Sample bottom 5: Forgiveness, Self-regulation, Zest, Hope, Gratitude



Modern Wellness Practices

“Take a deep breath”

Vagus Nerve

- Cranial nerve connecting brain and body
- Vagal activity is regulated by respiration
- Activates the parasympathetic nervous system
- Controls mood, immune response, digestion, breathing, and heart rate
- Counterbalances the fight or flight system



SØBERG INSTITUTE

Vagus nerve stimulation

The vagus nerve is intricately connected to our heart, regulating heart rate and blood pressure. When the vagus nerve is stimulated, it releases a substance called acetylcholine which essentially acts as a 'brake' for our heart rate.

By slowing the heart rate, vagus nerve stimulation can help maintain balance in our cardiovascular system, promoting better overall heart health.



@susanna_soeberg

Nasal Breathing

- Mouth breathing makes us susceptible to respiratory ailments and denies body oxygen
- 20% more oxygen breathing through nose
- Filters out foreign particles
- Humidifies inhaled air
- Aids immune function
- Lowers risk of allergies
- Helps diaphragm work properly (vagus nerve and parasympathetic nervous system)
- Increases oxygen uptake and circulation
- Produces nitric oxide (blood vessel dilation)

PHYSIOLOGICAL SIGH

A simple technique to reduce stress and arousal



Inhale through nose

Regular breath

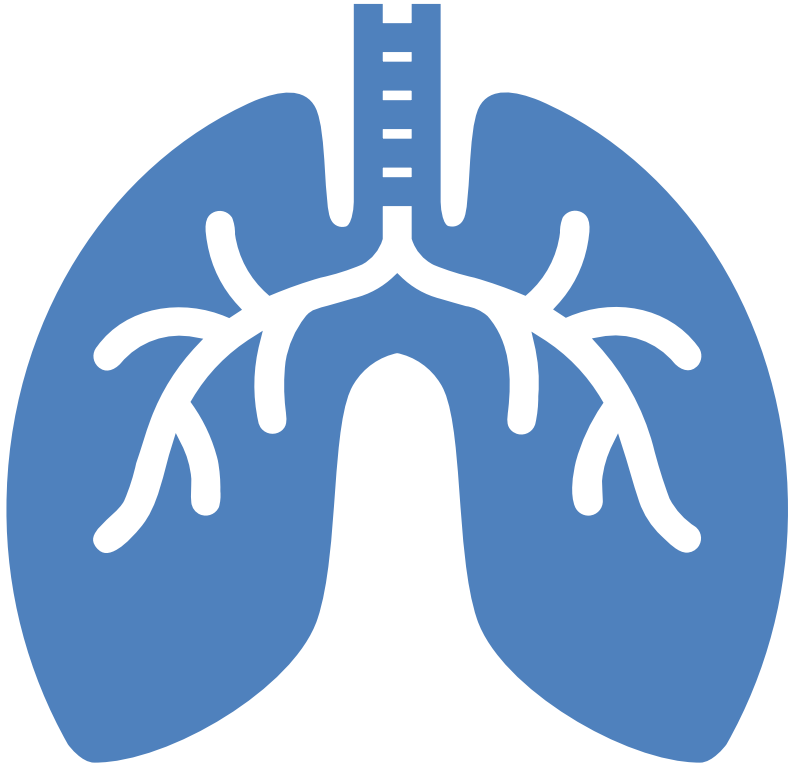
Inhale through nose again

shorter breath

Exhale through mouth

long breath

Practical Exercise





Heat Exposure

Saunas

- Potential health benefits
  - May reduce risk of catching the common cold
  - May have beneficial effects on cardiovascular health
- General precautions:
  - Avoid alcohol and certain medications
  - Stay in no more than 15–20 minutes
  - Cool down gradually afterward
  - Drink two to four glasses of cool water after each sauna
  - Don't take a sauna when you are ill



Power of the Pen

Pennebaker Writing Protocol

- 15 minutes, once per week, four weeks
- Write about same event each time
- Carthartic, transitions emotional upheavals into language, diminishing their power
- Unpacking issues and laying them out for deep examination
- Creates order, organization, and control around event. Akin to cleaning of your room
- Honesty and depth are key
- Participants experienced physical health improvements

Doodling (Yes, doodling)

- Activates reward pathways in the brain (dopamine)
- Boosts mental health, creativity, and focus
- Calming effect, reducing stress and anxiety
- Enhance problem-solving skills and communication in the workplace

Gratitude

- Increased levels of dopamine, oxytocin, and serotonin
- Increased feelings of connection, closeness, and happiness
- Reframing the world (CBT)
- People who express gratitude experience fewer aches and pains and report feeling healthier than those who don’t
- Linked to lower rates of depression and anxiety
- Builds resiliency to adversity and assists in building strong relationships
- Lowers blood pressure and increases vagal tone

Gratitude Statistics

- 70% of employees would feel better about themselves if their boss were more grateful, and 81% would work harder.
- Employees who experience more gratitude at work report fewer depressive symptoms and stress.
- 95% of employees agree that a grateful boss is more likely to be successful.
- Regular gratitude journaling has been shown to result in 5% to 15% increases in optimism and 25% increased sleep quality.
- Lack of gratitude is a major factor in driving job dissatisfaction, turnover, absenteeism, and burnout.
- 53% of employees would stay at their company longer if they felt more appreciation from their boss.
- Gratitude reduces toxic aggression, frustration, and regret even after receiving negative feedback.
- In a study of 800 descriptive trait words, “grateful” was rated in the top 4% in terms of likeability.
- Over 90% of American teens and adults indicated that expressing gratitude made them “extremely happy” or “somewhat happy”.
- A five-minute daily gratitude journal can increase long-term well-being by 10%.

Daydreaming

- Activates right brain for more innovative thoughts and creative breakthroughs
- Improves learning and memory
- Activation of the hippocampus (memory)
- Increased problem-solving skills
- Higher pain tolerance and lowered anxiety
- Aqua Notes pad

Self-Exploration: 6 Question Exercise

1. If you were in a room with everyone you have ever met, who would be the one you look for?
2. If someone gave you a box of everything you have ever lost, what is the first thing you would look for?
3. If you had the chance to relive one day of your life, which day would it be and why?
4. If you could receive a letter from your future self, what advice or insight would you hope to find in it?
5. Imagine you have a chance to revisit a moment from your past, which moment would you choose and what would you do differently?
6. If you had to define your purpose in one sentence, what would it be and how does it influence the choices you make in your daily life?

Other Introspective Exercises

- Sit with yourself (when was last time?)
- Identify your anchor
- Control vs. can’t control exercise

Music

- Beneficial effect on stress related outcomes
- Can help address serious mental health and SUD
- Can assist healing trauma and build resilience
- Decreases anxiety and improves functioning in depressed individuals
- Facilitates emotional release
- Promotes self-reflection
- Creates a sense of community
- Improves and maintain cognition, communication, and physicality

Quick Strategies for Success

- 321 Sleep method (food, drink, screens)
- Three daily wins (physical, mental, spiritual)
- 7 Pillars of health: morning sunlight, daily movement, quality nutrition, stress control, healthy relationships, deep sleep, microbiome (oral and gut)

III: Being a Peer





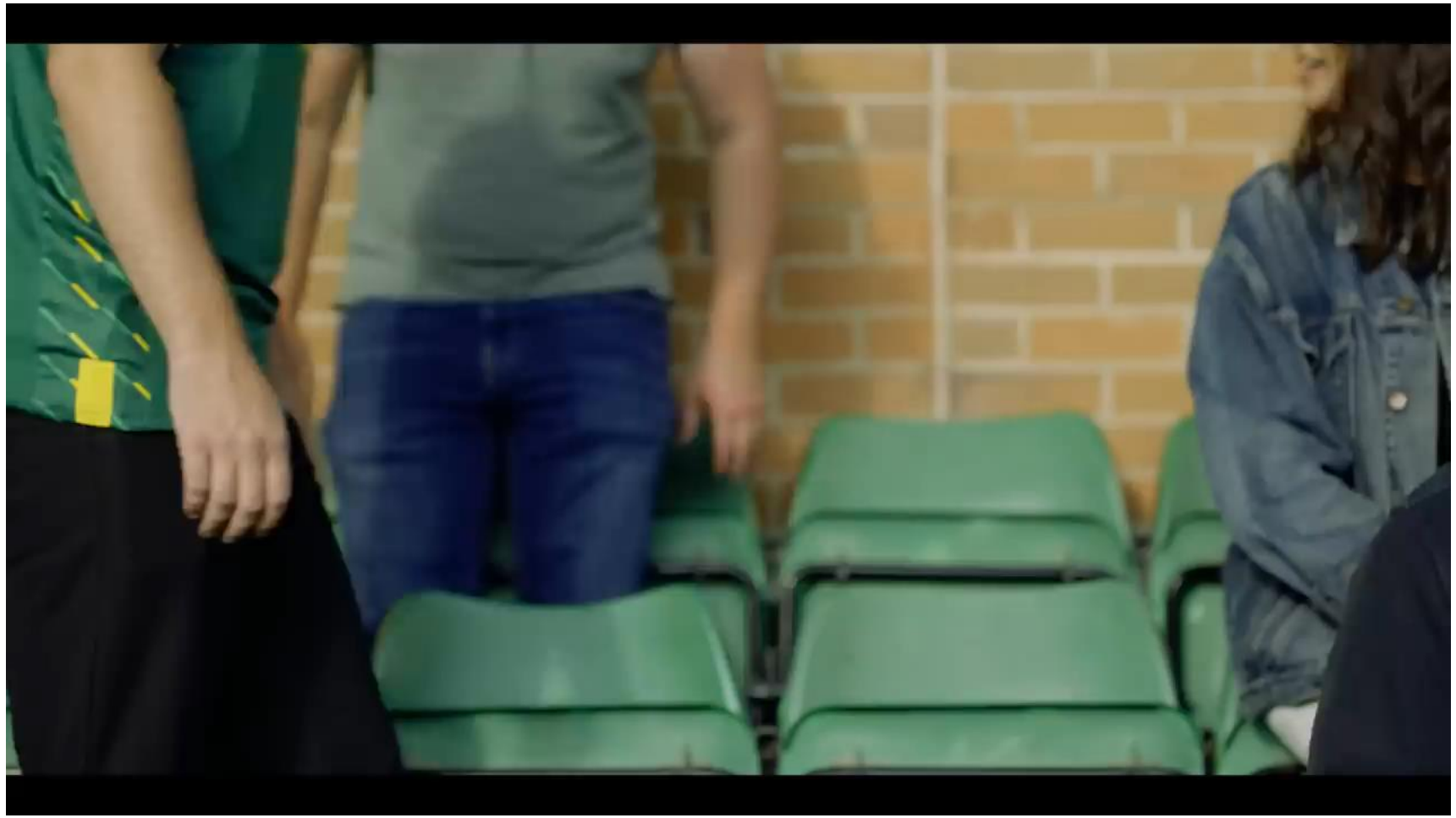


Section Learning Objective

5. Formulate how to elicit meaningful discussion with officers and organizational leadership.



Check On Those Around You



A Good Peer…

- CISM & Regional teams
- Lose your ego and embrace vulnerability
- No greater honor and responsibility than being a good peer/friend (our entire existence depends on it)
- Helping others boosts happiness, health, and sense of well-being
- Be part of the solution, not the problem
- Don’t perpetuate outdated norms and participate in gossip or negativity

Listening

- Silence is essential and a powerful tool as a peer
- Undivided attention
- NO PHONES
- Practice active listening
- Eye contact
- Paraphrasing
- Self-disclosure
- Reflection of feeling
- Summarization

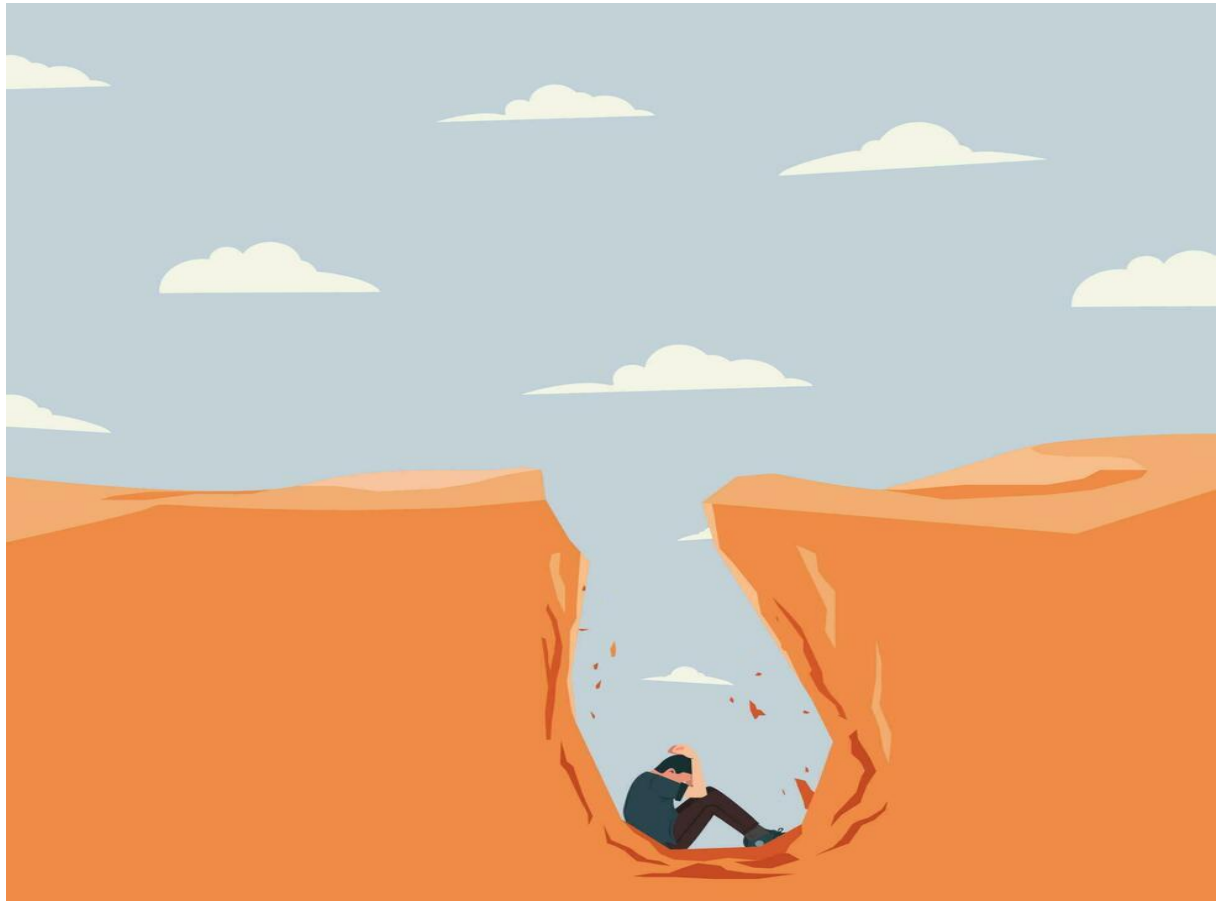
Giving Space



Confidentiality

- This is the single most important and sacred tenant of being a good peer
- Never discuss or share the trials and tribulations of your coworkers
- Trust is an essential component of building rapport
- Examples of what it looks like
- CISM members and clinicians are protected by law
- Mandated reporters

Refer to Handout: Man in the Hole

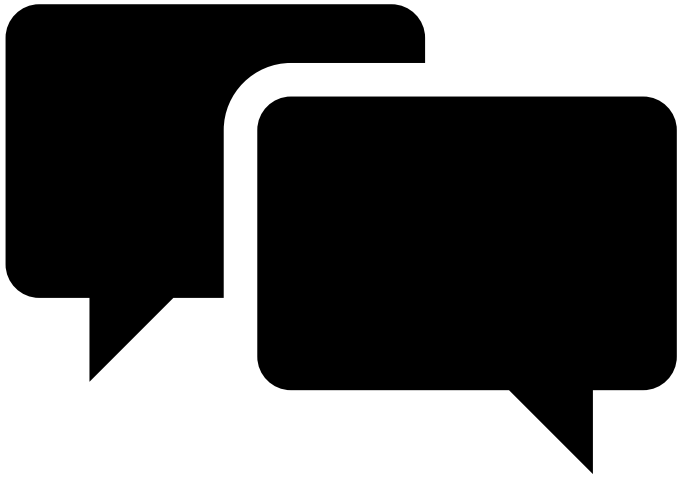


Culture of Negativity

- Police agencies are riddled with infectious negativity
- Can set the tone for a shift or the culture of entire patrol line
- Are you contributing?
- Stand up for those who need standing up for
- Be the change you want to see in your agency
- A police department is a tribe. All dependent upon one another for success and survival. Act like it.

Discussion/Ideas

- How do we decrease the negativity within our profession? Our agencies? Ourselves?



Prompt: Lean into outside-the-box thinking

Fear of Other People's Opinions - FOPO

- Fear and anxiety arising from what other people may think or say about us
- Necessary programming but we take it too far
- Causes hesitation, seeking constant validation, avoiding action, stifles growth and pursuits outside of our comfort zone
- Erodes confidence, authenticity, decision-making abilities, and impedes leadership
- Strategies to overcome FOPO: self-reflection and awareness, cultivate a growth mindset, surround yourself with supportive networks, practice vulnerability, and focus on your purpose and values

Be Selfish

- Prioritize your own health and wellness
- Your entire profession is dedicated to the needs of others. Make accommodation for you and your family.
- Learn to say no
- Prioritize sleep – no excuses
- Can’t pour from an empty cup
- Officer life expectancy – 66 years old
- Pay attention to “I used to…”


“The gates of hell are locked on the inside”
-C.S. Lewis

Thank You

This presentation is an abbreviated version of the *Unload Your Backpack* course created by Sgt. Sean Peterson. For more information, contact:

Sgt. Sean Peterson

Taunton PD

508-269-9039

speterson@tauntonpd.com