

Mindfulness as Self-Care for First Responders

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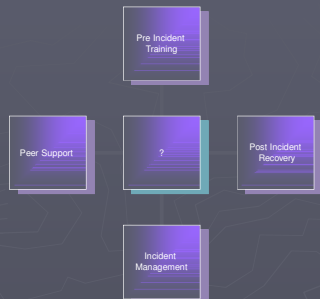
Why Self Care?

- ▶ Stress is an occupational hazard
 - intrinsic in responder work
- ▶ The care responders provide others is only as good as care provided to self



- ▶ Self care begins with awareness of what is going on in our body and mind

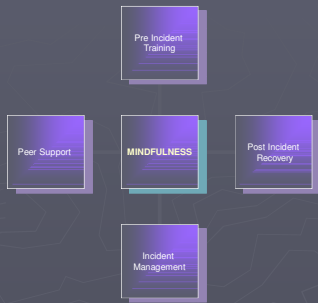
Self Care Protocols



Why Mindfulness?

- ▶ During a traumatic event mindfulness allows you to maintain a sharper focus on the emergency at hand
 - Situational Awareness: Intimate awareness of one's surroundings on a moment to moment basis as a precursor to decision making under stress (military)
- ▶ Mindful attention on leaving the incident can help transition away from trauma back to life rather than replaying the traumatic event
- ▶ Focus on present moment (mindfulness) we can see new possibilities for relating to self and others which can mitigate stress and increase capacity to feel better

Self Care Protocols



Upstream/Downstream: A Contemporary Fable

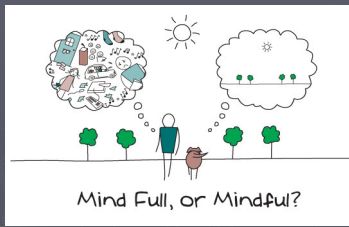
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What does this mean to you, in your life?

What is Mindfulness?

- ▶ Paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment without judgment Jon Kabat-Zinn
- ▶ Mindfulness enables you to look before you leap
- ▶ Lessens reactivity and gives greater control over your habits and behavior
- ▶ Mindfulness is a process of learning to pay more attention to your experience and reactions to your experiences



The Alternative: Mindlessness

What did I just read?
How did I get here?
What did that taste like?

Benefits of Meditation/Mindfulness

- ▶ Decreases stress and anxiety
- ▶ Decreases chronic pain
- ▶ Decreases depression
- ▶ Decreases hypertension
- ▶ Increases ability to control automatic responses

Why the Breath?

- ▶ Belongs to everyone
- ▶ Always with you wherever you are
- ▶ Beneficial to the body
 - awareness of the energy that enters the lungs and moves unobstructed through the body can help the body function more easily, and give the mind a handle for dealing with pain.
- ▶ Restorative Experience

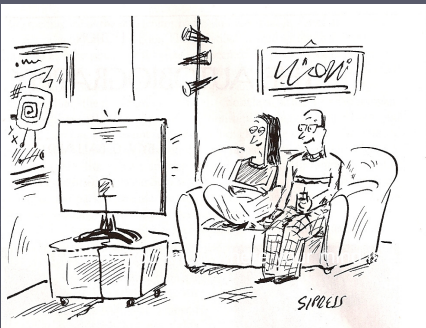
Breath Awareness

Experiential Exercise

Mindfulness is A Process

- ▶ Start with a mindset that practice will be required to improve skills
 - As first responders you drill and train throughout your career
 - Mindfulness is a skill you can cultivate
- ▶ We bring awareness to each moment only as best we can.
 - In time, you can become aware of the tendencies of your mind. How it resists certain experiences and tries to hold onto others.
- ▶ We are not trying to create a special feeling or experience simply to realize that this moment is all that exists right now
 - How can I make this moment more pleasant, enjoyable?

▶ It's 10:00 PM do you know where your mind is?



Meditation is not Spacing Out

- ▶ Breathing
- ▶ Counting
- ▶ Listening
- ▶ Metta
- ▶ Visualization
- ▶ Mindfulness Exercises: walking, body scan

Meditation as Self Care

- ▶ Restorative for your mind
 - Resting your mind from habitual, conditional habits can be pleasant and relaxing like a vacation or retreat
- ▶ Allows a different experience
 - See things as they are without screen/veneer interpretations
 - Teach you about self with curiosity and compassion
- ▶ Without judgment learn to accept positive, negative and neutral experiences
- ▶ Being vs. Doing
 - there is nothing else to do right now
no place else to be

Body Scan Meditation

- ▶ Helps you be more aware of your body
- ▶ Learn to work effectively with body sensations, feelings of discomfort, stress and pain
- ▶ Also will help you to cultivate your powers of concentration
- ▶ They key to using this type of mindfulness mediation effectively is to notice what is present in the current moment
 - sensations, moods, thoughts and feelings will arise and fall. Just simply notice w/o need to attach

Body Scan

Experiential Exercise

Attention

- ▶ Paying attention in an uninterrupted way offers an opportunity to understand something better
- ▶ Slowing down aids attention
 - Train mind to focus on what we choose
 - More difficult on auto pilot
- ▶ Strengthening the container: meditation and mindfulness practice enables you to tolerate different experiences and pain
 - Absence of skills that help you tolerate pain cause you resort to avoidance and activities that create disconnection

Judgments

- ▶ We all have them
- ▶ Judging others
- ▶ Self criticism
- ▶ Accept positive, negative and neutral experiences
- ▶ Don't try to judge or change, just be curious

Meditation

- ▶ Can train mind to focus on what we choose
- ▶ To not wander into worry, pain, negative experiences
- ▶ Pain is inevitable – suffering is optional
- ▶ Can train the heart to be more compassionate to self and others

Loving Kindness Meditation

- ▶ Current research on positive psychology and gratitude
- ▶ Compassion: "*deep awareness of the suffering of another coupled with the wish to relieve it*" American Heritage Dictionary
- ▶ Finding compassion for some is very easy, for others more challenging; often for self most difficult
- ▶ Metta Meditation trains the heart to be more compassionate towards all
 - Not about repressing negative feelings
 - Not about passivity and complacency
 - Allows us to embrace the things we like and don't like in self and others

Metta

Experiential Exercise

Discussion

- ▶ Thoughts and feelings that come up:
 - Focusing on others?
 - Focusing on self?
- ▶ Relationship to mood management
 - Anxiety thinking about future
 - Depression thinking about past
 - Stress- traumatic, current life
- ▶ Choice, Control, Acceptance, Clarity
- ▶ Gratitude

Summary

- ▶ Mindfulness improves resilience
- ▶ Gives break from constant worry about past or future
- ▶ Responding mindfully rather than automatically allows us to discover new choices and new options
- ▶ Remember you don't have to do, just be

Q & A
