Stress First Aid for Law Enforcement Professionals

Manual
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Introduction and Overview

Those who work in law enforcement settings service to those in need. The settings vary, and a variety of disciplines and functions are represented among law enforcement professionals.

The stress encountered by those who work in law enforcement settings is influenced by a number of factors: the exposure to many types of trauma, the losses which they may witness or experience, the difficult decisions they have to make, threats the job can present, the pressure they put on themselves to make a difference in the lives of those they serve, and the cumulative demands the job places on them.

Added to these factors, personal issues from home and family stressors can also come into play. As a result, law enforcement professionals may juggle many competing demands.

Stress First Aid (SFA) is a framework of practical actions that can help reduce the likelihood that stress reactions will develop into more severe or long-term problems. SFA offers a flexible menu of options for addressing stress reactions. It can be used for self-care, to help co-workers with stress reactions, or to help someone seek other types of support. Ideally everyone in an organization would learn the basics of Stress First Aid so that support could occur wherever and whenever it’s needed.

In law enforcement settings, the individuals best positioned to provide SFA are co-workers, mentors, supervisors and others who have existing relationships with someone experiencing significant stress. Friends and family members can also play an important role.

SFA Aims to Reduce the Risk for Stress Reactions

A shared concern for oneself and one’s coworkers in potentially stressful situations is at the heart of Stress First Aid. Paying attention to stress reactions can help you respond to both the acute and cumulative stressors that you and your coworkers may face. This approach can help you more quickly identify those who might benefit from early and ongoing support so that stress reactions don’t progress to more troubling conditions.

SFA offers a spectrum of actions to ensure safety, reduce the risk for more severe stress reactions, and promote recovery. It then promotes monitoring the progress of recovery to ensure a return to full functioning and well-being. In situations where the provision of SFA is not sufficient to reduce stress reactions, it also serves to bridge individuals to higher levels of care, as needed.
SFA is Guided by a Set of Core Principles

Strong leadership and good connections with coworkers are potentially the most powerful forces for healing and recovery available. SFA promotes recovery from stress reactions by augmenting, restoring and leveraging leadership, peer support and existing work relationships. SFA requires a collaborative team effort to be most effective.

SFA occurs in natural work contexts, wherever and whenever it is needed. It is individualized to meet the needs of each person in their context; there are no one-size-fits-all SFA solution. It offers both immediate actions in response to high stress situations, as well as strategies for ongoing support, adjusting responses as needed over time.

Taking Care of One Another

Law enforcement culture appeals to those who are problem solvers and are service-oriented. Therefore, it is a culture whose members could benefit from learning the basics of self-care, support of coworkers, and effective mentoring. SFA can only be as strong as the determination of each organization to preserve the health, longevity, and well-being of its workers so that they can serve others and get the most benefit from the job for as long as they choose to be a part of the organization.

Using SFA principles to improve your own self-care or to support those you work most closely with is the ideal use of SFA. The core actions are also designed to operationalize support to everyone you work with.

SFA is Based on a Stress Continuum Model

Stress reactions lie along a spectrum of severity and type. The Stress Continuum Model shown in Figure 1 was adapted from the model developed by United States Marine Corps leaders as a tool for conceptualizing the spectrum of stress states. The Green Zone is the goal of most training and prevention activities. The Yellow Zone is the one that most people are in when work and life demands are challenging but transient, and stress reactions are more temporary. The Orange Zone is the stress zone in which the risk for failure of role performance and future mental disorders becomes significant. Once an individual goes beyond the normal daily stress reactions into the more significant Orange Zone responses, SFA actions may reduce the likelihood of needing more intensive intervention, which usually takes place when Red Zone reactions occur.
The stress reactions that commonly characterize each zone are shown above. However, the way someone will respond to stress will depend on how prepared they are for the stressor event, how they interpret it, and their resources. A person’s state can range relatively rapidly from Green to Yellow to Orange to Red and back again.

**Yellow Zone Versus Orange Zone**

Law enforcement settings regularly expose workers to stressful situations. Because law enforcement professionals may commonly experience Yellow Zone stress, it is important to clarify the difference between Yellow Zone stress reactions and Orange Zone stress.
Experiencing Yellow Zone stress reactions can be part of developing competence and confidence as you face work challenges. Most people have sufficient resources and skills to recover from a Yellow Zone stress reaction with limited assistance.

Orange Zone stress reactions, on the other hand, may result in no longer feeling like your normal self, feeling out of control, or being impaired in your work or personal roles. They typically require activation of resources to facilitate recovery and growth.

The concept of Yellow Zone versus Orange Zone stress is similar to the difference between a strained versus a broken ankle. When an ankle or tendon is strained, physical therapy and controlled movement and use are often prescribed. However, when there is an injury like a broken ankle, a cast and rest are needed. In the same way, the support given for Yellow Zone stress may need to be different from the support typically given for Orange Zone stress.

Figure 2 shows four classes of stressors that place individuals at risk for enduring stress reactions: trauma, loss, inner conflict or turmoil, also often referred to as moral distress or moral injury, and wear and tear.

The first three are usually discrete events that can be experienced either singly or in combination with each other. The last, wear and tear, is the accumulation of stressors from expected or normal life challenges, both large and small, over a long period of time. The effects of these four sources of stress can be simultaneous and cumulative.

Figure 2. Four Sources of Stress Injury

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trauma</th>
<th>Loss</th>
<th>Inner Conflict</th>
<th>Wear and Tear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A traumatic injury</td>
<td>A grief injury</td>
<td>A moral injury</td>
<td>A fatigue injury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due to the experience of or exposure to intense injury, horrific or gruesome experiences, or death.</td>
<td>Due to the loss of people, things or parts of oneself.</td>
<td>Due to behaviors or the witnessing of behaviors that violate moral values.</td>
<td>Due to the accumulation of stress from all sources over time without sufficient rest and recovery.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples of Potentially Traumatic Events:

- Exposure to extreme violence, murder, or suicide
- Exposure to life-threatening circumstances
- Sexual assault or offenses
- Working with domestic violence scenarios
- Dealing with hostility/resistance/violence
• Exposure to similar potentially traumatic events in one’s personal life

*Examples of Loss:*

• Death or injury/illness in coworkers, family, or friends
• Working with coworkers or those in the public who have lost a family member
• Loss of ideals
• Loss of time
• Loss of personal wellbeing
• Loss of innocence

*Examples of Inner Conflict:*

• Conflicts with personal values and the job
• Finding time to satisfy work and personal responsibilities
• Second guessing what could have been done differently to prevent a negative outcome
• Concerns about the impact of one’s job on family or friends

*Examples of Wear and Tear:*

• Long hours and rotating shifts
• Working when ill or injured
• Dealing with different personalities
• Addressing substance abuse
• Working through personal illness
• Lack of supervisor support
• Personnel turnover
• More record keeping and accountability
• More attention to things done wrong than things done right
• Balancing homelife with job duties
• Trying to manage a growing caseload
• Extra duty assignments
• Pressures from supervisors
• Multiple updates in policies and programs
• Multiple stressors in one’s personal life over extended periods
Signs of Orange Zone Stress

Signs of Orange Zone stress include intense or persistent stress reactions, such as:

- Not feeling in control of one’s body, behavior, mind, or thinking.
- Being frequently unable to fall or stay asleep.
- Waking up from recurrent or vivid nightmares.
- Feeling persistent, intense guilt or shame.
- Feeling numb, less caring, or less connected to one’s “moral compass.”
- Being unable to enjoy former activities.
- Displaying a significant and persistent negative change in behavior or appearance.
- Losing grounding in prior moral values.
- Experiencing attacks of panic, anger or rage.
- Losing memory or the ability to think clearly or rationally.

Where Stress First Aid Fits in the Stress Continuum

SFA actions are intended to fill the care gap between training, stress management and prevention at the left end of the Stress Continuum, and clinical care to the right of the Continuum. Figure 3 illustrates where Stress First Aid fits into the stress continuum.

Figure 3. Where Stress First Aid Fits in the Stress Continuum
SFA Evidence Support

The core functions of SFA were derived from an exhaustive literature review of elements related to recovery from a number of different types of ongoing, adverse circumstances (Hobfoll et al., 2007). The five essential elements of immediate and mid-term intervention that are related to better recovery from stress are:

1. **Promote a sense of safety.** Maintaining or re-establishing a psychological sense of safety lowers the risk of stress reactions. Safety can be relative, and it is important to have a balanced view about the levels of danger in one’s environment.

2. **Promote calming.** Some anxiety is normal and healthy. However, extended arousal of heart rate, blood pressure and respiration is associated with disruption of sleep, lack of hydration, poor decision-making and long-term health problems.

3. **Promote connectedness.** Social connectedness is one of the strongest protective factors against stress reactions and is linked to emotional well-being and recovery following trauma and adversity.

4. **Promote sense of self and collective efficacy.** People who believe that they have the skills to overcome threat can handle stressful events, solve their problems and show greater resilience during and recovery after stressful events.

5. **Promote a sense of hope.** Hope is linked to optimism, faith, and/or the belief that things will work out in the best possible way (Hobfall, Watson, Bell, et al., 2007).

SFA actions are designed to catch the early warning signs of severe stress reactions regardless of their cause. SFA can help law enforcement professionals evaluate needs, get assistance and support when needed, and assist one another during and after cumulative stress, significant loss, adversity, inner turmoil, or exposure to a potentially traumatic event. The use of SFA strategies promotes supportive actions in the workplace and provides follow-up over time. For instance, you can adjust circumstances to reduce stress, give the person time to recuperate or to compose themselves, or help mentor or coach them to identify preferred ways to best deal with stress reactions. SFA also includes making a plan to leverage resources that promote healing, wellness, connection and a return to fully effective functioning.

**SFA has Seven Core Functions**

SFA consists of seven core functions: **Check, Coordinate, Cover, Calm, Connect, Competence** and **Confidence**. The core functions will each be described in more detail in following sections. Quotes from law enforcement professionals in the appendix will further illustrate how they might be practiced in law enforcement settings.
Check

The first SFA core function, Check, involves paying attention to your own stress levels and reactions or to the functioning of fellow coworkers. Using Check successfully with coworkers starts with making the time to get to know their baseline levels of functioning and behavior. You can keep track of any persistent or significant changes in behavior that might indicate that a person is experiencing Orange Zone stress. Check is essentially a screening mechanism to determine if someone is recovering from a stress reaction on their own, could benefit from SFA actions, or should be referred to other resources or higher levels of care. It is also used to determine the effectiveness of any SFA actions, and to ensure continual progress toward recovery. Used in this way, Check can help ensure that a person has the necessary resources in their life to help them withstand stress, in the same way that healthy habits buffer the person’s immune system against illness.

Many organizations already practice some form of Check on an informal basis. For instance, coworkers might text or call one another during challenging times, to see how their colleagues are doing. Perhaps a senior coworker will make a point of working closely with someone who has experienced a critical incident, making sure the person stays involved in activities that allow them to regain their sense of purpose or connection with others.

Within the context of SFA, checking on others includes all these types of actions, and is an ongoing commitment to the well-being of all employees. When Check is fully integrated into the normal day-to-day procedures of a department, individuals value getting to know one another on good days, so that they can know when a person may be experiencing an Orange Zone stress reaction. They are better able to recognize one another’s red flags and care for one another.

The goals of Check are to:

1. Identify baseline functioning.
2. Identify current level of stress.
3. Look for indicators of ability to function.
4. Determine needs for:
   - SFA actions.
   - Other physical, emotional, social or spiritual support.
   - Others who need to know.
   - Others who can help.
What is Check?

Figure 4 shows the major components of Check. The first and most critical task is to observe—to look and listen for baseline functioning, as well as verbal and non-verbal clues that the individual may be experiencing a stress reaction that might benefit from assistance. While observing, you can also identify current and recent stressors, and note any distress or changes in behavior.

If indications of a possible stress reaction are present, examine the situation more closely through direct one-on-one interactions or by checking with collateral sources. This information can then be used to determine what (if any) actions are required, based on the person’s current Stress Zone. It can also tell you if the person might be a danger to themselves or others.

Figure 4: Components of the Check Function of SFA

Why is Check Needed?

Those who work in law enforcement settings are regularly exposed to intense and prolonged stress. These stressors can cause stress reactions either independently or in combination with events experienced in the person’s personal life. Monitoring coworkers for potential stress reactions is helpful because:

- Most people are unaware of their stress zones and needs, and often don’t pay attention to such things when focusing on work and the demands of daily life.
• When people have been significantly changed by stress, or injured by it, they may not recognize the ways that it has impacted their lives. Those around them may be more likely to notice the impact if they are paying attention and know what to look for.

• Even if the person affected by stress recognizes distress or changes in functioning, the stigma that surrounds such problems can be a powerful barrier to seeking help. Telling others about our problems and asking for assistance is very difficult for most of us.

• Both the stress zones of individuals and the resources available to help can change drastically over time. A continuous process of assessment is often the only way to match needs with appropriate levels of help each step of the way.

• The after-effects of stress injuries can be delayed by weeks, months or even years. Those who have been seriously affected by stress may need to be periodically followed up with and reassessed.

Recognizing Who Needs Check

When using SFA for coworker support, the first step is recognizing that a coworker might be experiencing an Orange Zone stress reaction. There are three indicators that an individual may be experiencing Orange Zone stress:

1. **Recent Stressor Events:** Examples include exposure to traumatic stress (accident, large scale mass casualty, or workplace violence); the loss of someone or something cherished (death in the family, divorce, a close friend moving away, pending retirement, being passed over for promotion); or violations of the individual’s moral code (perception that insufficient resources or one’s actions negatively impacted someone, policies perceived as counter to one’s own values, concern that aspects of one’s work are negatively affecting family or friends).

2. **Distress:** Experiencing significant and persistent troubling emotions, such as fear, anger, anxiety, sadness, guilt or shame.

3. **Changes in Functioning:** Significant and persistent changes in physical, mental, social or spiritual functioning at work or home that seem to be outside of the person’s control.

Monitoring for Orange Zone indicators is an important skill to learn and practice. You may become aware of increased stress in a coworker if their behavior significantly changes or they confide that they are experiencing distress or changes in functioning. Figure 5 gives examples of Orange Zone indicators that might prompt the SFA Check function.
## Figure 5: Examples of Indicators that Might Prompt Check

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stress Indicators</th>
<th>Look For:</th>
<th>Listen For:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current Stressors</strong></td>
<td>• Exposure to traumatic events</td>
<td>• “A citizen committed murder / suicide after I arrived on the scene. I should have done more to keep that from happening.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Aclose brush with death</td>
<td>• “One of my coworkers died by suicide.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The loss of one or more friends or coworkers by death, injury, illness, or relocation</td>
<td>• “I almost got killed in a motorcycle crash yesterday.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Events in which an individual’s actions or a failure to act may violate deeply held beliefs or moral values</td>
<td>• “My son has a serious illness.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Yellow Zone stress reactions that continued after day for many months</td>
<td>• “My mom just died.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “A citizen committed murder / suicide after I arrived on the scene. I should have done more to keep that from happening.”</td>
<td>• “My husband just lost his job.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “One of my coworkers died by suicide.”</td>
<td>• “Ican’t believemypersonalYa cheated on me!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “I almost got killed in a motorcycle crash yesterday.”</td>
<td>• “My husband left me, taking the kids and all our stuff.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “My son has a serious illness.”</td>
<td>• “It was entirely my fault.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “My mom just died.”</td>
<td>• “I don’t have any energy anymore.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “My husband just lost his job.”</td>
<td>• “I don’t trust anyone in this department.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “Ican’t believemypersonalYa cheated on me!”</td>
<td>• “The world is full of pain and suffering.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “My husband left me, taking the kids and all our stuff.”</td>
<td>• “Ican’t stopseeingthesamescenereplayedoverandover again in my mind.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “It was entirely my fault.”</td>
<td>• “I keep waking up from the same nightmare.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of Distress</strong></td>
<td>• Pacing or persistent agitation</td>
<td>• “Ican’t slow down my heart rate.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Uncharacteristic outbursts of anger, anxiety, or fear</td>
<td>• “I haven’t slept well in weeks.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Uncharacteristic fighting, alcohol abuse or misconduct</td>
<td>• “My appetite is gone, and I have lost a lot of weight.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Persistent sadness or absence of normal emotions</td>
<td>• “I am afraid I might lose it and hurt someone.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Loss of interest in work, hobbies or socializing</td>
<td>• “I’m drinking more than usual.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Withdrawal from interactions with others</td>
<td>• “My wife and I are arguing a lot more than usual.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Changes in Functioning</strong></td>
<td>• Significant and persistent changes in personality</td>
<td>• “Ican’t slow down my heart rate.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sudden drop in job performance</td>
<td>• “I haven’t slept well in weeks.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Persistent forgetfulness</td>
<td>• “My appetite is gone, and I have lost a lot of weight.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Uncharacteristic loss of control of emotion</td>
<td>• “I am afraid I might lose it and hurt someone.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Uncharacteristic problems in personal relationships</td>
<td>• “I’m drinking more than usual.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Uncharacteristic poor hygiene or grooming</td>
<td>• “My wife and I are arguing a lot more than usual.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Talking about Stress Reactions

In some cases, acquiring the information needed to have a better understanding of what is going on with a coworker will require discussing the situation in more detail with the individual. The information on active listening in the Appendix may help in opening up a more in-depth conversation.

The OSCAR model of communications is another easy to remember tool that can be a useful for talking to someone about stress reactions:

- **Observe**: actively observe behaviors; look for patterns that are different from baseline.
- **State Observations**: focus attention on the behavior; state just the facts without interpretations or judgments.
- **Clarify Role**: state why you are concerned about the behavior and validate why you are addressing the issue.
- **Ask Why**: seek clarification; try to understand the other person’s perception of their own behavior.
- **Respond**: clarify why you are concerned and discuss desired behaviors; state options in behavioral terms.

Here is an example of how OSCAR might be enacted in a work setting. There are many other ways that OSCAR could be used, but this gives an example of how a conversation might proceed using this strategy.

- **Observe**: You notice your coworker has been less and less talkative and more isolated from others over the last few weeks
- **State observations**: “Hey Joe, I haven’t been seeing you around as much lately, and you seem to be really quiet the last few weeks.”
- **Clarify Role**: “I’m only bringing this up because I care about you and want to make sure that you’re okay.”
- **Ask**: “Am I right in my guess that something might be going on with you?”
- **Respond**: Joe says yes, and you say, “Why don’t we go get some coffee so we can talk away from others. Does that sound okay to you?”

The OSCAR technique can be used to get a better sense of whether the person is experiencing Orange Zone Indicators, and to gather information to answer the following questions:

- Which Stress Zone is the individual currently in and why?
• Would they benefit from any SFA actions?
• Is referral to any other resource warranted?

**Checking Collateral Sources of Information**

It may also be helpful or necessary to discuss the situation with co-workers and/or family members. They may be able to give you more clues about the three Orange Zone Indicators, including:

1. Current and recent stressors
2. Signs that the person is distressed
3. Evidence of loss of previous functional capacity or changes in functioning

Information received from these collateral sources can help you make more accurate and sound decisions about next steps.

**Self-Care: Self-Awareness Stress Indicators**

When using Stress First Aid in self-care, it is important to have awareness about your own personal “red flags” that might indicate stress injury. Figure 6 shows some self-awareness stress indicators common to those who work in highly stressful work settings.

**Figure 6: Stress Indicators**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mental</th>
<th>Social</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Decrease in the quality of work</td>
<td>• Uncharacteristic negative social behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased work errors</td>
<td>• Irritability/being easily angered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Loss of interest in things that once mattered</td>
<td>• Frustration about work requirements or changes in procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Decrease in productivity</td>
<td>• Increased isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of motivation</td>
<td>• Increased complaining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Poor work performance</td>
<td>• Hypervigilance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Absenteeism</td>
<td>• Less tolerance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lateness</td>
<td>• Keeping office doors closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Giving up</td>
<td>• Engagement with others dropping off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Trouble keeping up with workload</td>
<td>• Closed off body language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Forgetfulness</td>
<td>• Reduced interpersonal boundaries (oversharing of information)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Distorted thinking</td>
<td>• Less volunteerism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reduced self-awareness</td>
<td>• Marital stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Guilt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Feeling less caring /numb</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional</th>
<th>Physical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Emotional extremes</td>
<td>• Weight loss/gain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Anxiety attacks</td>
<td>• Sleep disruption/sleeplessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Depression</td>
<td>• Stress induced seizures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sadness</td>
<td>• Increased absenteeism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Anger</td>
<td>• Medical symptoms with an undetermined cause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Suspiciousness</td>
<td>• Increased use of sick leave</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Self-Care: Potential Obstacles

It’s also recommended that you become more aware of potential obstacles to self-care so they can be mitigated if possible. Law enforcement professionals are often attracted to their work because of high ideals and values like selflessness, loyalty, stoicism, a strong moral code, and excellence. These values form the basis for their strength in work settings, but they can also create obstacles to self-care and increase the risk of stress-related problems. Here are some potential obstacles to self-care:

- Too many responsibilities on and off the job
- The feeling that if you say “no” you will be looked down upon
- Unexpected emergencies
- Concern about being perceived as weak
- Self-criticism, having high expectations, and not being able to modify expectations under more stressful circumstances
- Limited time in one’s schedule
- Always putting the job first
- On-call or shift work
- Lack of sleep
- Lack of backups
- Never feeling that you can “unplug”
- Wanting to be perceived as perfect
- Always prioritizing others over self
- Low morale

Potential Check Self-Care Actions

Here are a few potential Check actions for improving self-care:

- Give yourself permission to take care of yourself
- Make a conscious effort to keep tabs on yourself
- Become aware of personal red flags
- Pay attention to red flags right away

Potential Actions for Checking on Coworkers

- For supervisors or leaders, here are a few potential actions for checking on employees:
  
  - Build a foundation based on good relationships. Creating a culture that encourages employees to receive support or to reach out for help will make it easier for employees to most effectively check in on one another.
• Be approachable and authentic, so employees are more likely to share experiences and reactions.
• Set ground rules for staff such as stating that it’s natural to have stress in law enforcement jobs and that it’s important to look out for each other and to be self-aware about specific red flags.
• Monitor/check on staff needs regularly.
• Here are a few potential actions for checking on coworkers:
  • Find practical or creative ways to start conversations that allow you to check on people.
  • Pay attention to social withdrawal and other changes in behavior, emotional tone, and diminished work performance.
  • Ask, "Is everything all right? I’m checking on you. I’ve noticed...”
  • Offer basic resources like food, water, etc. to make a connection that can open a conversation.
  • Find the right way to check on someone without annoying them (e.g., writing or texting versus calling).
  • Start a general conversation to get the person talking. Then look for verbal and non-verbal signs as to how they are doing.
  • Start with something positive then reference specific concerns you have.
  • Reference the colors of the stress continuum model.
  • Place an object that references stress---like a stress ball---on their desk with a note about your concerns.
  • Use humor or references to movies with characters who are dealing with stress.
  • Use opportunities where there is safety, privacy and time to open conversations.
  • Check in on anniversaries of difficult events.
  • Check in during and after:
    o Work or personal challenges
    o Noticing Orange Zone injury behaviors and patterns
    o Noticing signs of distress
**Coordinate**

The second action of SFA is Coordinate, which involves coordinating with other resources or individuals if needed. There are two broad goals for Coordinate:

1. To inform those who need to know.
2. To obtain other sources of needed help or care.

**What is Coordinate?**

Figure 7 shows the three major components of the Coordinate function of SFA, depending upon the information gathered during Check:

1. **Collaborate** means forming a partnership with the individual to expand resources and options that may have been depleted by the situation or their reaction to it. This action moves the person to the next level of support, which could be a mentor, trusted coworker, chaplain, social worker, trained peer support specialist, Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider, etc.
2. **Inform** means actively engaging key individuals who have a need to know, have the ability to help within the organization or are well-suited to offer support. This action is most effective when it is done in collaboration with the coworker.
3. **Refer** means bridging the individual to a higher level of care when indicated. It is important to remember boundaries and the limits of your capabilities. When department members are suffering Orange Zone stress beyond the scope of SFA, they need to be connected with appropriate organizational supports and resources.

**Figure 7. Components of the Coordinate Function of Stress First Aid**
Coordinate with Other Sources of Care and Support

Coordinate can be used when a coworker needs to be referred to a higher level of care. It can also help with determining what source of care would be the best fit. In making these decisions, the following factors should be considered:

• How confident are you in your understanding of their circumstances and reactions?
• How solid is your relationship with the person?
• Would this individual benefit from a form of care other than SFA?
• Are there other resources available, such as EAP providers or outside counselors?
• How has the individual’s level of stress changed over time? Is it improving, staying the same or getting worse?

When in doubt, getting another opinion is often helpful. Although questions may still remain unanswered, in most cases, getting input from others is the right thing to do.

Coordinate can also be used to overcome barriers to delivering or succeeding with SFA, such as the following examples:

• You have stress injury that impairs your ability to provide SFA, in which case you should get help yourself
• You cannot acquire or hold the trust or attention of the other person
• You have negative beliefs about the person, or they actively resist attempts to help
• The person’s stress behaviors do not respond to SFA actions

If you run into one of these obstacles to providing SFA, you can Coordinate with others who may be better able to meet the needs of coworkers. Involve other leaders, coworkers, trained peers, human resources, chaplains, or mental health providers.

Coordination with other sources of care and support does not end with a referral or request for help. When an individual is connected with other sources of care, follow up (using Check) is important to make sure they are getting needed support and appropriate resources.

Potential Coordinate Actions

Here are a few potential Coordinate actions:

• Set up a variety of resources in advance (e.g., local clinicians, mentors, coworker teams, chaplains, life coaches, hotlines, support groups and self-help groups).
• Mentor, help problem-solve, and/or normalize help-seeking
• Suggest clearly that the person talk with EAP or other support
Cover

What is Cover?

During day-to-day operations, every person is typically accountable for their own safety and for that of their coworkers. The SFA action of Cover is a natural extension of this concept. It specifically refers to actions that reduce any threats to safety that may result from an individual’s reactions to stress. The goals of Cover are to:

- Ensure the immediate physical safety of the stressed person and others.
- Foster a sense of psychological safety and comfort.
- Protect from additional stress.

Cover is used when a sense of threat is increasing someone’s stress reactions or conversely, their stress reactions are impacting their safety or the safety of others. Figure 8 shows the major components of Cover. Its key components are to stand by ready to help as needed; to make safe the environment for the individual and coworkers if in imminent danger; and to encourage the perception of safety that results from both reduced danger and greater support, quiet, and order.

Cover and the following SFA action Calm are analogous in some ways to Basic Life Support (cardiopulmonary resuscitation). They are used rarely, can be lifesaving when needed, and can prevent further harm from occurring until other forms of help can be obtained.

Figure 8. Components of the Cover Function of Stress First Aid
When is Cover Needed?

Cover is needed when there is a threat to the safety or perceived safety of one or more people. These situations fall into three categories:

1. The stressed person is in danger
   - Someone in a life-threatening situation is not thinking clearly or making good decisions because of stress
   - An individual has frozen or panicked in an intense situation
   - Someone is impacted by a stressor or long-term stress in a way that impairs current functioning.
   - Sexual harassment by coworkers
   - An individual has expressed thoughts of suicide.

*A threat of suicide should always be taken seriously. It is not your responsibility to decide if the threat is real. People who are threatening suicide must be taken to an emergency room or to a behavioral health professional for assessment.

2. Others are in danger from the person
   Due to stress, the person is behaving in a way that impacts the safety of others, for example:
   - While in a high-risk situation, a preoccupied person does not remind coworkers of potential hazards.
   - A driver freezes or panics while driving with a coworker in the car.
   - A previously traumatized person overreacts due to fear of repeating a traumatic event.
   - A coworker threatens others.

3. The stressed person or their family has a perception of danger or a long-term sense of not being safe
   - A person has trouble setting boundaries and therefore feels unable to feel safe at work
   - A person who struggles with perfectionism feels unsafe about making any mistakes
   - Someone has a fear of those in the public with physical or mental health issues
   - An individual has concerns about the safety of their family members due to events at work such as potential exposure to infectious diseases
   - A person feels unsafe in particular settings or with particular individuals they work with.
   - A person feels unsupported and threatened by coworkers or those in positions of authority, which results in:
     - Not feeling supported by leaders
     - Feeling too overworked
     - Feeling targeted or bullied by a coworker or supervisor
     - Fear of speaking up about any concerns in the workplace because of concern about how one will be perceived (e.g., as weak or overly sensitive)
• Concern about the safety of the working environment
• Concerns about job security
• A worker or their family members have a perception of danger after an illness, injury or death of a coworker.

How Does Cover Work?

Those using the Cover action can promote safety and perceptions of safety by:
• Providing authoritative presence or guidance to reduce the person’s sense of threat.
• Making decisions on behalf of someone who is not thinking clearly.
• Take action on behalf of someone who is not behaving in a safe manner.
• Work to remove anything that causes a person or team to feel unsafe.
• Warn and protect others who may not be aware of a danger.
• Create an environment of safety to reduce stress.

How is Cover Implemented?

Any action that increases the safety or the perception of safety of those feeling unsafe can be considered a Cover procedure. There are many non-verbal and verbal actions that can provide Cover. In fact, most Cover procedures are intuitive and are often what people would do instinctively when faced with an unsafe situation. When choosing a Cover action for an immediately unsafe situation, the most important priorities are to:
1. Ensure safety quickly, and
2. Take no more autonomy away from others than is necessary for safety.

In other words, intrude on others as little as possible and for as short a period of time as possible.

Here are some non-verbal ways for enforcing immediate safety with Cover, from least to most intrusive:
• Make eye contact.
• Hold up your hands in a “stop” gesture.
• Apply reassuring pressure on the shoulder or arm with one hand.
• Shake or nudge the person to get their attention.
• Move the person to safety.
• If necessary, take physical control of the person’s body.

Here are some verbal ways for enforcing immediate safety with Cover, from least to most intrusive:
• Ask, “Are you okay?”
• Ask, “Do you need help?”
• Give directions; tell them what to do.
• Suggest a safer course of action.
• Yell a warning.
Here are some ways to foster a long-term environment of safety and perception of safety:

- Get feedback from those who have concerns about their own safety or the safety of others and work towards finding solutions.
- Encourage good boundaries for self-care.
- Support and educate families who are concerned about their loved ones after the work-related illness, injury, or death of a department member.

Potential Cover Self-Care Actions

Here are a few Cover actions for making oneself feel safer:

- Actively seek information that can help you feel safer
- Get an accurate understanding of risks in order to better plan
- Get help with personal responsibilities
- Self-monitor for stress reactions
- Give yourself permission to take care of yourself
- Set boundaries for yourself (e.g., turn off phone, take breaks)
- Request help from supervisors (e.g., ask for case or job transfers)
- Make a list of self-cover preferences
- Find those people, places, or actions that feel safe to you and call on them.
- When you feel unsafe, distract yourself by focusing on something near you or your own breath or thought (e.g., counting).
- Realize that no one is perfect; everyone has strengths and vulnerabilities. Be aware of your own.
- Let your family know about work-related situations that might occur
- Educate your family about potential red flags that you might demonstrate if you are overly stressed, so they know when to support you and so they don’t take them personally
- Talk with family/friends about the best ways you can keep each other safe
- Practice more helpful ways of thinking to foster healthy changes in behaviors. Here are a few examples of helpful thoughts:
  - “Even though I feel fine I need to pace myself.”
  - “I’m doing enough.”
  - “Letting someone know how affected I am can help me.”
  - “I can trust that others can fill in when it’s necessary.”
Potential Coworker Support Cover Actions

Here are a few Cover actions for coworker support:

▪ Tailor Cover to the needs of the situation:
  o Get to know your colleagues
  o Support one another through threatening situations

▪ Cover one another for personal issues
  o Become more aware of and supportive during times when there are significant issues at home, in order to provide a safety net
  o Check in and reduce high-risk behavior

Here are a few Cover actions for leaders to support their employees:

▪ Work to make situations safer:
  o Learn which situations feel unsafe to employees and work to improve their safety
  o Have coworkers work in partnership
  o Discuss lessons learned after unsafe situations and engage in problem-solving
  o Train personnel on situational awareness and decision-making
  o Give briefings before workers are involved in potentially unsafe situations
  o Reduce exposure to potentially traumatic information as much as possible
  o Reduce anxiety by taking a team approach to difficult cases
  o If something goes wrong, take a lessons-learned rather than punitive approach

▪ Improve boundaries:
  o Mentor individuals who feel overwhelmed or overworked because of their trouble setting work boundaries
  o Give time off for those needing a break
  o Be more abrupt or directive if it is necessary to keep a coworker safe
  o Be a good role model for setting boundaries for yourself or your coworkers
  o Give permission and guidance about how to set boundaries and limits
  o Find out what boundaries work best for employees
  o Mandate workers to delegate or get coverage when they take time off, so they are not worried about their workload while on vacation
  o Help workers make decisions at times when they may not make the best decisions for themselves
  o Show vulnerability yourself
  o Help people problem-solve solutions to situations in which they don’t feel safe
What are Potential Obstacles to Cover and How are They Overcome?

Because the Cover function of SFA is often used in difficult and stressful situations, it may be useful to consider in advance obstacles to its use and ways to mobilize resources to overcome them. Figure 9 shows some potential obstacles to Cover and how to overcome them.

**Figure 9. Potential Obstacles to Cover and How to Overcome Them**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Obstacles to Cover</th>
<th>Mobilize Resources to Overcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• You are not thinking clearly or behaving safely</td>
<td>• Get help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• You are occupied with keeping yourself safe</td>
<td>• Get yourself safe first, then attend to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• You cannot get or hold the person’s attention and trust</td>
<td>• Involve other leaders, trained peers or family members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The person you are supporting remains anxious even after being removed to safety and mentored about realistic ongoing and future risk</td>
<td>• Consider peer support or Employee Assistance Program involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The person’s family is concerned about their safety (e.g., after a workplace violence issue or during a public health crisis)</td>
<td>• Include this topic in a work discussion about concerns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Calm**

**What is Calm?**

The SFA function of Calm works by slowing down and reducing stress reactions in both the body and mind. This promotes the recovery of normal mental and physical functioning and suppresses excessive physiological arousal. Actions that promote Calm **quiet** the body by slowing down or stopping major muscular activity and reducing heart rate and level of alertness. They **soothe** intense and distressing emotions such as fear, anger, guilt or shame. Calm actions help **compose** scattered mental focus by redirecting attention outwardly, away from anxiety and internal states of distress. And finally, Calm may be achieved by providing **rest** to help promote recovery and healing. *Figure 10* shows the major components of Calm.

*Figure 10. Components of the Calm Function of Stress First Aid*

When is Calm Needed?

Calm is needed when intense stress has interfered with an individual’s ability to reduce their physiological activity level or emotional intensity. Typically, there are three categories of situations that require Calm:

1. When physiological arousal level remains too high, as demonstrated by:
   - Loss of physical control.
• Excessive motor activity.
• Hyperactivity or hypervigilance.

2. When cognitive functioning is disorganized, as demonstrated by:
• Rapid, pressured speech (talking fast).
• Reduced situational awareness and decision-making capacity.
• Flight of ideas (thoughts flit from one topic to another).
• Not responding appropriately to directions or questions.
• Freezing in place.

3. When negative emotions are out of control, as characterized by:
• Poorly controlled fear, anxiety or panic.
• Poorly controlled depression or anger.
• Intense guilt or shame.

Situations where Calm is needed can vary considerably. Some examples for need for Calm are:
• When someone is so overwhelmed with obligations or distractions that they “shut down,” rendering them incapable of doing their job
• After witnessing or being involved in a heated exchange
• When working with uncooperative public
• After negative encounters with coworkers
• After finding a person dead or in sudden decline
• After crises in their personal life that make them agitated or anxious

How Does Calm Work?

The Calm function of SFA promotes recovery and healing through:
• Reducing physical tension.
• Reducing mental and emotional effort.
• Reducing physiological activity that accompanies stress.
• Decreasing the intensity of negative emotions like fear and anger.
• Increasing positive emotions like a sense of safety and trust.
• Increasing the individual’s capacity for self-control.
• Restoring mental clarity and focus.

How is Calm Implemented?

As with Cover, there are wide range of non-verbal and verbal ways to implement Calm. Its application should always be tailored for the specific situation and person being assisted.

There are ways to immediately calm an individual who is experiencing different types of intense stress reactions, as well as longer-term ways to create a calm work environment.

Here are some non-verbal ways for inducing immediate Calm, from least to most intrusive:
• Establish a confident, calm, authoritative physical presence.
• Make eye contact.
• Stay with the person.
• Do not show fear, anger, impatience or disgust.
• Provide reassuring physical touch, if appropriate and not threatening.

**Here are some verbal ways for inducing immediate Calm, from least to most intrusive:**

• Use repetitive, soothing phrases, such as “Easy now...” or, “It’s okay...”
• Reassure of current safety and support, such as “I’m here with you...” or “You’re safe now...”
• Provide encouragement “You can do it...” or, “There you go...”
• Give a calming directive, such as “Slow down...” or “Try to relax.”
• Get the individual’s attention by saying “Look at me!” or “Listen to my voice!”
• Coach the person in slow breathing.
• Distract the person by having them focus on your questions or directions or encouraging them to think about something else.
• Get the individual to focus on your directions by asking to be briefed on what is happening.

**Here are some longer-term ways for inducing Calm:**

• Provide support, caring, and communication as a leader.
• For high stress situations, give clear information on what is needed, and specific instructions on what to do.
• Take charge but elicit and accept feedback from staff.
• Include staff in decision-making as much as is possible.
• Stay focused on yourself and your own stress level, to avoid escalating a sense of chaos and anxiety.
• Listen carefully to coworkers’ or employee’s concerns.
• Ask what you can do to help, or what they think would help.
• Provide information about work plans, skills, and strategies that serve to make the individual feel more informed and in control.
• Discuss lessons learned and brainstorm solutions to deal with similar problems in the future.
• Maintain a culture of learning from all situations, rather than judging or punishing for mistakes made.
• Discourage and stop rumors.
• Let coworkers know that you or others have experienced similar stress reactions.
• Engage others who have been through similar situations to act as mentors.
• Make coworker support an accepted part of the culture.

**Here are some Calm procedures for use with angry individuals:**

• Distract: ask for help with a task or suggest taking a break, such as walking away to calm down, or doing something else for a while. State clearly that you or someone else will be
available when they return.

- **Defuse**: ask the individual to look at the situation in a different way, see it from another’s viewpoint or suggest that they talk to a friend or loved one.
- **Distance**: separate those who are angry at each other or keep them otherwise engaged.
- **Deter**: if feeling uncomfortable or threatened, ask for assistance, so as to deter the angry individual from further escalation of actions.

*Here are some Calm procedures for those who are bereaved:*

When a fellow coworker has experienced a loss of any kind, either on or off the job:

- It is often best to say nothing. Instead, offer a supportive presence. Stay present, stay quiet and listen.
- Don’t try to make a bereaved individual feel. Just be there to support them.
- When a person wants to talk with you about the loss, just listening and being supportive can be enough. Don’t feel compelled to talk. There are no “magic words.”
- Check in to connect and assess progress periodically over the following week and months.

**What are Potential Obstacles to Calm and How Are They Overcome?**

Like Cover, Calm actions are most often put to use in already stressful situations. It can be helpful to identify specific obstacles to its implementation in advance and to consider ways to mobilize resources to overcome them. *Figure 11* shows the potential obstacles to Calm and how to overcome them.

**Figure 11. Potential Obstacles to Calm, and How to Overcome Them**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Obstacles to Calm</th>
<th>Mobilize Resources to Overcome Them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• You are not yet calm yourself</td>
<td>• Use calming techniques on yourself, which will allow you to provide similar assistance to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• You are too distracted or busy to attend to the person in need</td>
<td>• Get help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• You are surrounded by too much noise and chaos</td>
<td>• Get to a safer, quieter place if possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Another person is increasing the individual’s stress with their loud and/or frantic behavior</td>
<td>• Direct others away from the stressed person if they are not helping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• You cannot acquire and hold the person’s trust or confidence</td>
<td>• Engage and involve others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The person fails to calm down after using all available non-verbal and verbal techniques</td>
<td>• Consider peer support and/or EAP involvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Potential Self-Care Calm Actions

Here are a few potential Calm actions for improving self-care:

• Spend time with family and close friends and let them know what is calming for you ahead of time so they can better support you when needed

• Take a break from stressful situations for a short time

• Get organized and problem-solve to tackle problems directly

• Try to see things from a higher vantage point to gain a broader perspective

• Focus on:
  • Whatever helps you to keep focused on the present moment
  • Being realistic — for instance, focusing on appraising situations, others, and yourself in terms of specific realistic descriptions such as “sometimes/lately” versus more polarized descriptions such as, “never/always”

• Taking action to reduce stress reactions

• Acceptance

• What you’re grateful for

• What you can control

• Changing beliefs that don’t serve you

• When/how pain temporarily eases

• Prioritize simple strategies to calm down, such as:
  • Breathing
  • Exercise
  • Yoga
  • Social support
  • Reflection/meditation/yoga/prayer
  • Rewarding or pleasurable activities. While engaging in rewarding or pleasurable activities regularly may not result in feeling better immediately, over time it has been shown to be helpful in buffering stressful experiences. One analogy is that, like good nutrition, these activities can replenish or energize.
Potential Coworker Support Calm Actions

Here are a few potential actions to calm coworkers:

• Educate:
  • Acknowledge possible stressors and the potential need for support in a matter of fact way ahead of difficult events
  • Make others aware of the importance of tailored self-calming strategies
  • Provide information about reactions and coping

• For immediate calm:
  • Reassure by authority and presence
  • Show understanding
  • Ask for help to empower and distract the person
  • If possible, get the stressed person to look at you for a minute, then be very specific and detailed about what you want them to do
  • Use the person’s name and communicate exactly what is needed in a calm, methodical voice

• For long-term calm:
  • Validate concerns.
  • Encourage the person to take brief breaks
  • Praise and give positive feedback
  • Allow the person to vent without judgment
  • Invite the person to meet outside the workplace, to give them a more confidential opportunity to talk away from work
  • Find ways to make meaning and memorialize together after losses
  • Help the person to prioritize and tackle problems directly
  • Foster a positive work environment by reducing gossip and negativity, not calling attention to a person’s stress reactions, and acting upon concerns.
Connect

What is Connect?

After an intensely stressful event or time in someone’s life, it can help to connect with those they trust, to talk about their experiences and perceptions, affirm their personal worth, and restore understanding and predictability in their lives. Connect works directly and indirectly to meet all of those needs.

If organizations, families, and social networks always functioned perfectly, there would never be a need for the SFA Connect function. However, few people and organizations are able to function at optimal—or even adequate—levels during difficult times. Stress can create friction at work and within families and can generate persistent feelings of alienation and loss of trust. The purpose of Connect is to identify challenges to social support and attempt to correct them.

Figure 12 shows the three components of Connect. Although all overlap to some degree, each of these areas is a separate domain of social support and should be considered in every case. The most basic component of Connect is to be with the person by maintaining a steady presence and eye contact, and by listening and empathizing. When needed Connect also entails providing comfort to the person by encouraging or soothing them, or by validating the difficulty of what they are going through.

Promoting connection is another component of Connect, which may involve finding others who would be good social support, fostering contact with others by including the person in an activity or project, problem-solving obstacles that are getting in the way of receiving social support, or giving practical help and information that promotes connection with others.

Connect also includes procedures to reduce the alienation and isolation that can result from severe stress. This might be accomplished by working with other department members to improve their understanding of the individual’s circumstances, correct misperceptions and restore trust in the individual.
When is Connect Needed?

Connect is closely related to the state of mutual trust, respect and communication that normally exists within law enforcement organizations.

Severely stressed people usually withdraw from those around them and may lose some of the trust and camaraderie they previously enjoyed. Stressed leaders may also be less effective at promoting trust and communication within their teams.

Connect should be used whenever there is a relative loss of connectedness within an organization or office or an individual becomes socially isolated or alienated.

Connect may be helpful when a coworker:

• No longer seems like their usual self or appears uncomfortable around others.
• Seems ashamed of their stress reaction.
• Fears others in the unit have lost trust in them.
• Cannot stop thinking about the vivid details of a recent experience but is afraid to talk with other coworkers about them.
• Appears emotionally numb and detached or uninterested in interacting with coworkers as in the past.
• Fears that talking with others in the department will trigger painful memories about mutually experienced events.
• Can’t stop feeling angry, so avoids being around others.
• Blames leaders or coworkers for a troubling event.
• Is blamed by other members of the unit for a troubling event.
• Feels exhausted and overwhelmed.
• Doesn’t have sufficient energy to interact with others.
• Is dealing with the death of a family member or coworker
• Is experiencing a significant illness
• Is faced with work challenges such as disciplinary action or denial of a promotion.
• Has difficulty cultivating close friends because of work obligations.
• Has been avoiding taking vacation time.

Connect can be needed at either an individual or organizational level. When affected by stress, an individual can feel a sense of being alienated from themselves, like they are a different person. For instance, someone might withdraw from their coworkers after a difficult case because of shame, exhaustion or loss. At the department level, disruption of connectedness can be caused by blame, lack of confidence in coworkers or leadership, shame and stigma, overwhelming exhaustion, or loss.

It is also very common for stress to cause disconnection from friends or family, for a number of reasons:
• Lack of a common identity through shared experiences and values.
• Loss of trust in themselves or in their coworkers.
• Feelings of shame, disappointment, or betrayal at work.
• Lack of confidence and competence in one’s ability to make new relationships or rebuild existing ones
• Fear of being misunderstood or a burden to others when sharing negative experiences.
• Numbness, withdrawal and fear of being triggered by talking about events.
• An increase in difficult emotions such as anger or frustration, which can push others away.
• Lack of enough positive feedback or lack of supports or due to separations.
• Exhaustion, inability to talk about one’s feelings, and difficulty putting experiences into words.
• Inability to ask for help and the belief that existing social support networks cannot meet their needs.
• Fear of triggering one’s own stress reactions when providing support to others.
• Stigma, either in oneself or on the part of others, when asking for help.
How Does Connect Work?

Connect is not limited to providing one type of support. It serves to facilitate four types of social support:

- **Instrumental support**: providing material aid, such as help with daily tasks. Many people prefer this type of support to emotional support during difficult times.
- **Informational support**: providing relevant advice or guidance to help the individual cope with current difficulties.
- **Emotional support**: expressing empathy, care, and reassurance, and providing opportunities for venting and expressing emotions.
- **Inclusion**: Making the other person feel included in work or personal activities.

These different types of social support aim to support a stressed individual in whatever way fits the situation best, with the goal of reducing their stress and reducing their isolation or alienation.

Within an organization, Connect promotes:

- A common identity through shared experiences and values.
- Common experiences through sharing of perceptions, thoughts and feelings.
- Common understanding of events.
- Shared responsibility.
- Camaraderie.
- Reduced feelings of guilt, shame or betrayal.
- Greater forgiveness.
- Shared hope about the future.

How is Connect Implemented?

As summarized in *Figure 13*, the Connect function of SFA can be facilitated by following three steps:

1. Identifying resources for social support.
2. Determining obstacles to social support.
3. Intervening to remove those obstacles.
Figure 13. Steps to Facilitate the Connect Function of Stress First Aid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Why Do It?</th>
<th>How to Implement It</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Identify social support resources</td>
<td>To find the best possible sources of social support for an individual</td>
<td>+ Identify the person in the department who is most trusted by the individual</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+ Identify someone at work who has been through a similar situation and could act as a mentor</td>
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<td></td>
<td>+ Identify the most trusted friend outside the department or a trusted family member</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Determine obstacles to social support</td>
<td>To understand why an individual is not using all available social resources</td>
<td>+ Ask how they perceive current levels of social involvement and connectedness</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+ Ask if they are satisfied with current levels of social support</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+ Find out---from colleagues or the person themselves---what has changed in the individual that has led to isolation or alienation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+ Observe the individual interacting with others, looking for patterns that indicate problems with communication, respect, or trust their perceptions of an isolating individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Intervene to remove obstacles to social support</td>
<td>To overcome obstacles in the individual or in others in order to foster better social connectedness</td>
<td>+ Consistently show concern and caring</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+ Build teamwork</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+ Be a good mentor or role model</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+ Listen non-judgmentally, especially to experiences of loss, trauma or moral injury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+ Encourage or lead formal or informal social activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+ Encourage the isolated individual to seek out greater social connectedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+ Provide a model for social connectedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+ Describe to the isolated individual the specific isolating behaviors you witnessed</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+ Look for and confront misconceptions in the individual that might interfere with two-way trust and respect</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+ Reassure the individual and confront and try to neutralize blame, guilt and shame</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+ If specific problems are identified that are interfering with social connectedness, encourage active problem-solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+ Have discussions that promote common perceptions and understanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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For individuals who lack sufficient trust or motivation to work on improving connectedness with others, consider activating a peer support team or Employee Assistance Program, if available.

**Connect: Leader Actions**

Leaders can support the SFA Connect function through the following actions:

- Show consistent caring and concern.
- Reassure and support individuals experiencing stress reactions.
- Be a good mentor or role model.
- Reduce conflict, blaming and rumors.
- Build teamwork.

Shame and guilt can be difficult obstacles to overcome in trying to connect with a stressed person. The support of mentors and leaders is especially important in these situations because they can tell the stress-injured person that they did a good job and didn’t let anyone down. Leaders can also make sure the stressed person or team in stays involved in the work of the organization and reduce inter-organizational conflict, blame and rumors. For example, a supervisor or a trusted coworker can tell a stressed person “I saw you in action and you did not fail.”

Other ways for leaders to implement Connect include identifying existing resources that can facilitate healing and recovery, mobilizing these resources, and assessing their effectiveness. Leaders can also mentor or teach others to provide support. However, if a stressed person moves from the Orange Zone to the Red Zone, it’s important for leaders to realize that a higher level of care is usually indicated.

**What are Potential Obstacles to Connect and How are They Overcome?**

The Connect action can be difficult to implement in certain situations. *Figure 14* lists a few possible obstacles and ways to mobilize resources to overcome them.

**Figure 14. Potential Obstacles to Connect and How to Overcome Them**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Obstacles to Connect</th>
<th>Mobilize Resources to Overcome Them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| You are too distracted or busy to attend to the affected person | ✦ Engage coworkers or peer support team members to help the affected person  
✦ Connect the person with supportive family, friends and others |
You cannot gain the trust and confidence of the affected person

+ Recruit peer support team members to assist

A coworker has recently lost one or more of their close friends

+ Encourage the communalizing of grief
+ Encourage coworkers to engage with the grieving person

The person in need has been ostracized by others in the unit

+ Temporarily separate the person from others in the unit until the dynamic is more conducive to positive interactions.
+ Address possible scapegoating

You have negative feelings toward the person in need

+ Talk to someone you trust about your feelings toward this person
+ Ask someone else to provide SFA aid to that person

Potential Self-Care Connect Actions

Here are a few potential actions for improving the ability to Connect with others:

- Know the value of good mentors and friends.
- Surround yourself with people who are genuine, authentic, and honest.
- Make friends with people you can be yourself with and talk with about what bothers you.
- Brainstorm with family and friends to find the best way to support you during difficult times.
- Educate family and friends about the potential experiences that can occur in this job.
- Communicate with family and friends when you are feeling upset, so they will not worry or take it personally.
- Discipline yourself to have conversations with people who are familiar enough with you to know when something is bothering you.
- Reprioritize your schedule to spend more time with those who mean the most to you.

Potential Coworker Support Connect Actions

Here are a few potential actions for helping others connect:

- Leaders can build a foundation amongst their employees that fosters social support:
  - Hold employees accountable for treating each other with respect
  - Encourage employees to make connections at trainings or conferences.
  - Foster a team approach to problem-solve answers to challenging cases
  - Show validation and appreciation for employees
  - Foster opportunities for employees to socialize
  - Foster appreciation and peer support among coworkers
• Coworkers or leaders can make it a priority to connect after difficult situations:
  o If someone has retreated because of an incident, find ways to show them you’re thinking about
    them and are available to talk if needed.
  o Include the person in projects and create collaborative opportunities with coworkers, to get
    them back into doing something meaningful
  o With introverts, give them time to recharge in their preferred way before facilitating
    reconnection with coworkers.
  o If someone is stressed and resists getting support, don’t be afraid to be more authoritative in
    getting them the help they need.
  o In the middle of intensive stress, get the person or team engaged in activities that facilitate
    either physical movement or talking while you do other things. For instance, have people
    briefly report out on successes, loose ends, or their plan for the next 24 hours while walking or
    attending to actions that require physical movement.
  o If someone is particularly stressed and isn’t functioning well, foster understanding and support
    in coworkers.
  o If someone is having significant stress in their personal life, offer practical support if possible.
**Competence**

**What is Competence?**

Stress can deplete a person’s ability to function in occupational, personal and social domains. The SFA function of Competence focuses on enhancing and restoring these previous capabilities or facilitating the cultivation of new skills.

The term “Competence” is shorthand for “cultivate a sense that one can endure through difficult challenges” or “restore personal competence.”

Competence is called for when it is clear that a person’s stress reactions are caused by their inexperience or lack of skills on the job. Competence may also be used when Orange or Red Zone reactions deplete a person’s---or a team’s---ability to function or to respond effectively to stress. This SFA function focuses on **building or fostering skills** so that the affected individual or team can prevent or reduce stress reactions.

Research suggests that increasing self-efficacy, or Competence:

- Improves functioning, fosters better connections and supports, and augments individual and group morale.
- Reestablishes the confidence of others in the stressed individual.
- Helps to overcome injury to mind and spirit.
- Builds resilience.

Competence should be applied in situations in which:

- A **specific lack of job experience, or job competence, is contributing to stress in the individual.**
  
  Those who have less experience or training often have higher levels of stress.
  
  Leaders can support less-experienced personnel by fostering a culture where ongoing mentoring and training are available. This should serve to improve competence and reduce the stress that accompanies skills deficits.
  
  Shame and blame after difficult calls and potentially traumatic events are reduced when supervisors create an environment in which all events are learning opportunities.

- **Intense stress has contributed to the loss of previous mental, emotional or physical capabilities.**
  
  A severe stress injury may cause a brief period of significant mental confusion. This might also be followed by a longer period of slightly decreased ability to think clearly and sharply, or to control intense emotions.

- **Intense stress has created the need to develop new skills.**
  
  Intense stress often presents new and significant challenges to an individual’s capacity to cope and adapt. People may, for example, need to learn how to deal with
reminders of life threat or loss. The intensity of Orange Zone experiences can also require the development of new communication skills in order to maintain supportive connections with others during hard times.

*Figure 15* depicts the three components of Competence. Individuals suffering the severe stress of life-threat trauma, loss, inner conflict and fatigue also experience a loss in their sources of resilience. As a result, the good feelings that stem from competence in their work and personal roles may also see a decline. The Competence function supports the reestablishment of important **occupational, well-being, and social skills**. It encourages individuals to learn new ways to manage their stress reactions.

The first component is to enhance **occupational skills**. This may require mentoring, respite from normal tasks or training for the stressed individual so that they may once again feel capable and derive self-esteem from their work. Competence can also be used to regain occupational skills that may have been damaged by stress injury. Recovering from stress-induced decrements in work functioning may require developing capabilities in the same way that physical therapy fosters recovery from physical injuries.

The next component is to re-establish or foster the development of **well-being skills** that can help the stressed individual better calm themselves, problem-solve, improve health and fitness, and manage reactions to trauma and loss reminders. The goal is to bolster the ability to cope with life’s challenges.

The last component of Competence is to improve **social skills**. This could mean developing new social skills as well as improving ones that have been damaged as a result of stress.

*Figure 15. Components of the Competence Function of Stress First Aid*
When is Competence Needed?

The need for Competence is signaled by:

- Indications that an employee does not have the experience or skill level to address the demands of the position, which creates stress reactions.
- Temporary or persistent loss of previous skills or abilities due to Orange Zone stress.
- An inability to cope with newly emerging life challenges due to symptoms of Orange Zone distress.

The following are examples of each category of the need for Competence.

1. **Lack of experience or training can contribute to stress reactions and/or difficulty meeting job demands when:**
   - Specific work challenges are new.
   - An employee does not have the experience or training to handle the specific emotional demands of the position.
   - An employee has not been trained well in certain aspects of the position.

2. **Intense stress can cause the loss of previous skills or abilities, as demonstrated by:**
   - Temporary loss of mental focus, concentration, or clarity during an Orange Zone crisis (e.g. foggy thinking, freezing).
   - Temporary loss of emotional or behavioral self-control (e.g. panic or rage responses under stress).
   - Loss of ability to modulate physiological arousal due to intense stress (e.g. shaking, trembling, pounding heart or rapid breathing).
   - More persistent decrements in cognitive functioning due to wear and tear stress (e.g. slowed memory recall, difficulty making decisions or solving problems).
   - Loss of enthusiasm and motivation due to acute or chronic Orange Zone stress.
   - Decrease in social aptitude due to loss of overall energy, sense of humor, fluency of speech, or range of emotional responses
   - Loss of ability to see the “big picture.”

3. **Intense stress can create new challenges to coping, such as:**
   - Trauma or loss reminders that cause feelings of dread, panic or anger.
   - Disturbing memories of trauma, loss or moral injury that intrude into conscious awareness.
   - Difficulty relaxing, slowing down or going to sleep.
   - Difficulty maintaining an “even keel” emotionally when frustrated.
   - Dread and desire to avoid re-exposure to situations that are reminiscent of trauma or loss.
   - Stress-induced physical symptoms, such as low energy or changes in bowel functioning (e.g. diarrhea).
Here are some examples of a need for Competence:

- Someone is apprehensive about competence in particular cases.
- Someone struggling with personal stress is less attentive at work, refuses to accept help, and denies that there is a problem.
- New programs and requirements have been established at work.
- A disaster or crisis makes it difficult to cope.
- Someone experiences a significant stress reaction related to medical emergencies.
- Someone exposed to a person with an infectious disease has concerns about their own safety.
- Someone who was the target of violence experiences persistent mental confusion and slowed, unclear thinking.
- Someone who developed wear-and-tear stress injury loses the ability to stay calm when dealing with co-workers.
- A manager who loses an employee because that person was stabbed by a violent individual becomes hesitant about sending other employees into potentially hazardous situations, increasing the danger to the entire department.

**How Does Competence Work?**

The Competence action lays the foundation not only for recovery and healing, but also for growth and development. Competence can reduce the stigma associated with Orange or Red Zone stress by minimizing the impact of stress on an individual’s career. It also reduces the potential social consequences of Orange and Red Zone stress by identifying those interpersonal skills that have been diminished and facilitating their restoration as quickly as possible.

**How is Competence Implemented?**

Like an obstacle that suddenly appears on the road after we drive around a bend, Orange Zone stress can present a life challenge that sometimes cannot be circumvented without first stopping, backing up a bit and then changing course. Applying the Competence function of SFA means taking one step backward in order to move two steps forward. *Figure 16* describes the steps that can facilitate of the Competence function of SFA: Stop, Back up and Move forward again.
In addition to providing training and mentoring in occupational skills, leaders should consider educating their staff in coping skills that can relieve Orange Zone stress. Examples of important well-being skill sets that should be considered as part of the Competence function of SFA include:

- Goal setting
- Problem-solving
- Physical exercise
- Sleep hygiene
- Relaxation and self-care
- Anger management and conflict resolution
- Attitude and belief adjustment
**Competence: Leader Actions**

Leaders are in a unique position to perform the Competence function of SFA in that their role allows them to take the following actions when needed:

- Reduce exposure to the particular stressors confronting a stressed employee.
- Assign employees to meaningful activities in order to increase sense of competency.
- Find a step-by-step strategy for the employee to resume productive contributions within the organization.
- If the person feels shame about their ability to perform their duties, implement remedial steps to build their sense of confidence and ease their anxiety.
- Work to reduce the employee’s sense of helplessness or passivity.
- Find ways to integrate the employee back into their role within the department.
- Provide supportive, corrective feedback and resources.

For example, if an employee is avoiding some aspect of their duties, resulting in a hesitancy to act, a leader could devise a progressive program to gradually help them to resume full functioning.

**What are Potential Obstacles to Competence and How are They Overcome?**

Restoring and enhancing Competence in all important life spheres can be challenging. *Figure 17* lists a few possible obstacles to Competence and ways to mobilize resources to overcome them.

**Figure 17. Potential Obstacles to Competence and How to Overcome Them**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Obstacles</th>
<th>Mobilize Resources to Overcome Them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You do not have the time, trust of the individual or motivation to restore Competence</td>
<td>• Coordinate with others to support mentoring, retraining or skill building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Coordinate with others to trouble-shoot obstacles to restoring the individual’s competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Refer the individual to the peer support team (if your organization has one) or the EAP Provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The individual does not recognize their need for the Competence action</td>
<td>• Repeatedly but tactfully describe your observations about their functional capabilities and performance to the stressed person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Coordinate with others to do the same</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| The individual lacks motivation to retrain or develop new skills | • Appeal to the person’s loyalty to coworkers, family members, and others who rely on them  
• Coordinate with other influential people in the individual’s life to enhance motivation |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Resources are not available for retraining or training in new skills | • Actively advocate for resources  
• Consult with others to brainstorm ways to address lack of resources |
| You are not sure you have sufficient skills to implement Competence | • Consult with others; seek mentoring  
• Refer individual to other levels of care |

Potential Competence Self-Care Actions

Here are a few potential actions for building competence:

• When you are having a difficult time, use positive self-talk and don’t be afraid to ask for help and guidance from mentors.

• When tough things happen, establish new relationships with those who have been through similar situations.

• If you’re under too much stress, do something that is easy for you to give you a sense of accomplishment.

• Find people who can help you with engaging in healthy habits.

• Regularly reflect on the balance between the satisfaction of fulfilling work duties and the personal sacrifices you are making. Be prepared to adjust behaviors and expectations if that balance changes over time.

Here are a few potential actions for building Competence in oneself during prolonged stress:

• Make a commitment to endure, using whatever coping skills work best, as well as these potential actions:

  • Divert attention temporarily, using humor or acceptance.

  • Keep worrying circumscribed to actual potential risks and be disciplined about not letting fears derail important life tasks.

  • Shift expectations about what to expect from day to day and about what is considered a “good day.”

  • Clarify top priorities and focus on taking steps towards what is most important.

  • Create routines of living and make every effort to keep to those routines.
Potential Competence Coworker Support Actions

Because leaders are in a particularly important position to help with Competence, many of the following examples of ways to build competence in others are best implemented by those in leadership positions:

• Be authentic, normalize stress reactions, and give simple examples of ways to cope.
• During highly stressful times or after mistakes, give extra attention, training, or mentoring.
• Connect the person who has Orange or Red Zone stress reactions to relevant resources to learn coping and well-being skills.
• Provide targeted training after mistakes and with skills that are used infrequently.
• Provide training in stress management and other well-being skills.
• If someone is stressed because they are overthinking, give them simple systematic ways to occupy their thoughts, like counting random numbers, or counting steps.
• Let people know that you would expect them to struggle in certain stressful situations.
• Mentor others by offering advice on how you got through similar situations.
• If an employee is struggling to learn a task or process, find someone who matches their personality -- somebody they can relate to and communicate with -- and assign that person to help them.
• For less experienced workers who are anxious when learning something new, start with less stressful tasks, and provide stepped escalation of potentially stressful jobs in a thoughtful manner.
• Give the stressed individual responsibility little by little so that they do not feel overwhelmed.
• Remind the person of coping strategies and skills that have worked for them before.
• Encourage active coping.
• Help problem-solve and set achievable goals.
• After mistakes, help the person become more competent, to help with shaken confidence. Remind them that everyone is human and that all reactions are acceptable in the right context. Help them to figure out what they might do differently in the future.
• If the team’s sense of duty and commitment lead to overworking, make sure that they’re getting rest, and advocate for them.
• For those who need a break, reassign or temporarily suspend key job duties.
• Before you have a conversation with somebody who you think needs time off, make sure taking time off is feasible for that individual.
• For those who have taken time off, integrate them back into duties by assigning responsibility in a stepped, gradual way, and help the person “recalibrate” their expectations and goals to meet current circumstances.
Confidence

What is Confidence?

Confidence is the final SFA action. It focuses on building realistic self-esteem and restoring hope, both of which are often diminished in the aftermath of intense or prolonged stress. Confidence is the capstone of the process of recovering from stress, enabling the stressed person to become stronger, more resilient and more mature as a result the experience.

Realistic self-confidence and self-esteem are earned by overcoming obstacles and hardships to master challenges and achieve goals. After a potentially traumatic event, supervisors and coworkers play a pivotal role in this process by supporting personnel as they make sense of what has happened. Through this growth process the stressed individual will come to understand their role in what happened and learn from mistakes (if any) that were made. If properly supported by department culture, they will develop a personal philosophy of learning from, rather than being crushed by, intensely stressful events. Personnel will also learn to set realistic goals, work to achieve those goals and maintain a positive but realistic self-image.

Figure 18 depicts the four components of the Confidence function of SFA: Trust, Hope, Self-worth, and Meaning. Each of these is a key to living a constructive, creative and fulfilling life— as an individual, and in relation to important others, institutions and values.

**Figure 18. Components of the Confidence Function of Stress First Aid**
When is Confidence Needed?

Each of the SFA functions discussed up to this point addresses a potential need of an individual who is currently experiencing intense stress. It is important to note that for a person in the Orange Zone, these needs can be experienced as deep insults to self-esteem. This can be especially true within work cultures that prize self-sufficiency and autonomy. However, the strong connections present in the law enforcement culture can be an asset as Confidence depends on a firm social base to be effective.

Here are a few real examples of a need for Confidence:

• Someone whose failure to take proper precautions contributes to the death of a coworker feels extremely guilty and becomes self-destructive.
• An individual who develops a wear-and-tear stress reaction loses respect for leaders and becomes angry and irritable.
• Someone who is regularly exposed to significant life threat suffers lowered functioning, loses spiritual faith, and becomes depressed.
• An officer realizes that they don’t have all the answers and don’t see substantial improvement in their community’s safety.
• Someone doubts their abilities after disciplinary action or lack of promotion.
• Someone experiences a leader responding dismissively to their concerns.
• During difficult times, an employee hears from a supervisor about when they make mistakes but doesn’t hear about when they’re getting something right.
• A person doesn’t give themselves credit or appreciation for the work they are doing.
• A person imposes a sense of responsibility on themselves if something goes wrong, even if they have a supportive administration and did everything they were supposed to do.
• An employee’s pending retirement causes issues with their sense of purpose.

Confidence addresses the need to restore a positive and sustainable self-image based on a realistic sense of one’s own capabilities. The life challenges addressed by Confidence are common to all human beings throughout their lives. Almost everyone who experiences a reaction to stress will face a challenge in restoring and maintaining a positive self-image and can benefit from Confidence actions.

Confidence is directly related to having a sense of positive self-worth, meaning, trust and hope. The urgency and importance of the Confidence function of SFA become apparent when one considers the alternatives: the alternative to hope is despair, the alternative to trust is alienation, the alternative to meaning is emptiness, and the alternative to positive self-worth may be a sense of worthlessness.

How Does Confidence Work?

Confidence builds positive self-esteem, self-image, meaning, and hope by:
• Helping to restore confidence in self, leadership, organizational mission or core values and beliefs.
• Helping make sense of what has happened and mourn losses and limitations so that self-worth is restored.
• Exploring possible obstacles to confidence, and problem-solving solutions.

Confidence can be used for self-care or to support employees or coworkers. For self-care, confidence may require viewing the situation differently, through self-reflection, reading, consultation with respected others, or a request for support from supervisors or coworkers.

Potential Self-Care Confidence Actions
Here are a few potential actions for building self-confidence:
• If you unfairly blame yourself for a challenging situation, use positive self-talk to reframe the way you look at the event.
• Remind yourself of other successful cases to boost confidence when faced with those that are less successful.
• Even in the most severe cases, focus on ways that you were able to make a positive impact.
• Adopt a long-term perspective.
• Don’t take perceived failures personally.
• Use small triumphs to build confidence. If you have self-doubt, get advice from self-help books.
• After particularly traumatic situations or losses, don’t push yourself to “process” the situation in any particular timeframe. If something triggers you, give yourself time and space to think it through, integrate it, talk to someone, and have emotions about it. Find ways to make sense of the situation so that you don’t get stuck in suffering.
• Use the wisdom gained from difficult experiences to reaffirm your values, make changes in your life, appreciate what you value, or help others.

Building Confidence in Coworkers
Building confidence in others often entails helping them change their perspective or reframe the way they think about themselves, their life and the world. It also usually involves helping them make sense of what happened after adverse events so that their reactions to those events don’t bleed over into the next event or experience. It may entail helping them find forgiveness and trust in themselves, the people around them, their values and their spiritual beliefs.

Confidence actions are most successfully implemented when there is an empathic, honest relationship between the person providing support and the stressed coworker. Confidence works best when the person providing it is respected, so that their words carry weight, their praise has an impact, and their challenges to the stressed person’s distorted thoughts and
perceptions are genuinely considered. Tapping into respected values and ideals may also prove helpful. Figure 19 lists some possible procedures to develop Confidence.

**Figure 19. Steps to Perform the Confidence Function of Stress First Aid**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confidence</th>
<th>Specific</th>
<th>How to Implement It</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Assess needs | • Assess self-image, understanding of meaning of life events, level of trust in self and others, and hope for | • Listen empathically  
• Develop a trusting relationship  
• Ask questions and offer tentative observations and understandings |
| Connect with resources | • Restore depleted physical, psychological, social, and spiritual resources | • Coordinate with all possible sources of needed resources  
• Address financial problems, family problems, occupational problems, health problems, etc.  
• Identify obstacles and find solutions to overcome them |
| Encourage growth | • Relieve excessive guilt or shame  
• Promote forgiveness of self and others  
• Establish new meaning and purpose  
• Set new directions and goals | • Listen for and confront distorted concepts or perceptions of self or others  
• Encourage the individual to see events through the eyes of others, to walk in the shoes of others  
• Appeal to trusted authority or spiritual figures  
• Encourage making amends, or giving to others  
• Encourage learning and education |

**Potential Leader Actions for Building Confidence in Others**

Leaders play an important role in building trust and self-worth by developing clear lines of communication; reducing stigma; offering encouragement and praise; fostering and supporting efforts that will alleviate and mitigate stress; and helping to re-establish confidence in coworkers who are experiencing stress reactions.

Here are a few potential leader actions for laying a foundation that builds confidence in others:

- Set realistic expectations about the need to follow procedures but be open to taking a lessons-learned approach about deviations from protocol.
- Discuss your preferred values for working with each other and stress that you will stick together in adverse circumstances.
- Focus on learning opportunities.
- Confront stigma about stress reactions.
- Be a role model to show co-workers healthy ways of dealing with difficult situations.
- Remind people of the ideals and values that drew each of you to the work you are doing.
- Give regular positive feedback, and remind them about their positive impact, values, skills and competence.
Give them tasks that they can be successful at.
Foster and support taking steps to alleviate and mitigate the harmful effects of stress.

Leaders can also help someone with significant stress reactions with the following actions:

- Allow the person to be reassigned or take a break from work.
- Be patient and open to the possibility that the person can fully return to work duties.
- Gradually increase duties and responsibilities when the person returns to work.
- Look for positive changes in the person’s behavior.
- If necessary, help to re-establish the trust of coworkers in the person by providing accurate information, reducing rumors and gossip, being a non-judgmental, accepting role model, and discussing coworker’s fears and concerns.
- Mentor the person to consider other options if they continue to struggle, including leaving their current position.

What are Potential Obstacles to Confidence and How are They Overcome?

Restoring and enhancing Confidence is one of the greatest challenges of SFA. Figure 20 lists a few possible obstacles and ways to overcome them by mobilizing resources.

**Figure 20. Potential Obstacles to Confidence and How They are Overcome**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Obstacles to Confidence</th>
<th>Mobilize Resources to Overcome Them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The individual is unable to grieve the death of a friend or coworker | - Recognize and confront excessive self-blame or blame of others  
- Point out the self-destructive nature of stalled grief  
- Encourage the individual to imagine how the deceased person would want them to feel, or how they would want the other person to feel if the situation were reversed.  
- Encourage the individual to talk to trusted friends or family members  
- Encourage physical memorials and ceremonies |
| The person has endured a loss they feel is irreparable | - Encourage supportive relationships with others who have sustained similar losses and found new hope  
- Identify and confront excessive self-blame or blame of others  
- Encourage the learning and mastery of new skills and abilities |
| The individual feels unforgiveable | - Encourage the making of amends, even if that will be a life-long endeavor  
- Invoke an authoritative social or spiritual image to promote forgiveness  
- Consistently point out the self-destructive nature of self-blame |
The individual cannot forgive others

- Consistently point out the self-destructive nature of blame and of revenge fantasies
- Encourage the individual to learn more about and empathize with those who are blamed
- Appeal to core values

Even under the best of circumstances, it may take concerted effort over a long period of time to restore Confidence. Both the stressed individual and the person providing support may have to be patient and accepting that their efforts will only bear fruit over time.

Care should be taken to respect boundaries with the stressed person. If providing the appropriate assistance is not possible, it is important to know what resources are available, and to be creative in finding an appropriate person to connect with the person, such as a friend, counselor or a trusted mentor.

Finally, in promoting Confidence, it is essential to continuously monitor the person for possibly dangerous thoughts or impulses. If necessary, take action to ensure their safety and the safety of others by making a referral for a behavioral health evaluation and possible treatment.

### Potential Coworker Support Confidence Actions

Here are a few potential actions for building confidence in others:

- Be authentic, empathic, and nonjudgmental. For instance, make simple, nonjudgmental statements such as:
  - “I can understand why you’re feeling this way, given your strong values,”
  - “I know this can be rough,”
  - “What can I do to help?” or “What would be helpful?”

- Help them focus on the present.

- Encourage them to remember their personal strengths, positive relationships, spiritual change, appreciation for life, or other things they value.

- Help them make meaning of difficult events or losses by encouraging them to find ways to memorialize or honor those events or losses.

- When a person is struggling with lack of confidence, guilt, or self-doubt, help them counter their guilt by normalizing their reactions and letting them know they are not alone in experiencing stress reactions.

- Be willing to talk with them as many times as they need, give them relevant reading materials, and connect them to treatment or to people who have dealt with similar situations.

It is important to meet people where they are, without preconceptions or pre-determined solutions. During the course of a career in law enforcement, workers must perform hard work—grieving losses, giving up immature ways of viewing themselves and their relationship to the world and forgiving themselves and others for their failings. It may only be through the empathic but honest support and feedback provided by a trusted individual over time that people recovering from intense stress can find sustainable self-worth, meaning, purpose, trust and hope for the future.
Stress First Aid Group Format

The SFA actions can also be used in a more structured, educational way for a group of people who have been involved in a potentially traumatic event. This may look similar to a group debriefing model because it is structured and done in a group setting, but there are some important differences.

1. The discussion is about how the experience is affecting sense of safety, calm, connectedness, competence, and confidence since the event, in the here and now.

2. The event is not revisited or described in detail. A person may describe how an event may have disrupted sleep or created intrusive thoughts, but the frame of the discussion will be on how the event is impacting them now.

SFA can be used in an informal group at any time, in whatever way makes sense, or these types of steps can be followed SFA in a group setting:

1. If the group is familiar with SFA, state that you will be using the SFA framework to organize the discussion.

2. If the group is not familiar with SFA, let them know that you will be organizing the discussion around five essential elements that research shows are both human needs that can be affected by difficult events, and also potentially helpful elements for getting through difficult events.

3. Identify the incident

4. Explain that the focus of the group will be on determining how people have been affected by the event, and on peer support

5. Say something like, “I want to get a sense of ways that you may have been effected by _____."

Figure 21 has a number of possible questions that may help identify how each of the core SFA Functions have been affected by an incident. None of the questions are mandatory; they may be chosen based on the best fit the context and changed as needed depending on the situation and leader style.
Figure 21. Potential Stress First Aid Group Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SFA Function</th>
<th>Suggested Potential Questions</th>
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</table>
| **Safety**   | ▪ Has the incident affected your sense of safety in any way? If so:  
▪ How has the incident affected your sense of safety at work?  
▪ How has the incident affected your sense of safety at home?  
▪ How has the incident affected your sense of safety in the community?  
▪ Sometimes people who have gone through similar things say that it made them feel apprehensive or afraid. How has it been for you? |
| **Calm**     | ▪ Has the incident affected your ability to feel calm or steady? If so, how?  
▪ What changes have occurred regarding sleep, feelings of being on edge, or ability to keep calm?  
▪ Sometimes people who have gone through a similar event have found it helpful to build more calming activities into their schedule for a period of time, like taking a break, going for a walk, talking with someone, or slowing down their breathing.  
▪ Do you think this would be helpful for you?  
▪ If so, what activities do you prefer? |
| **Connect**  | ▪ Has there been an impact on how you talk with one another, on work morale, or in connecting with family and friends? If so, what have you noticed?  
▪ Who would you feel comfortable talking about this with?  
▪ Who are the people in your world that you trust to share your tough days with?  
▪ You don’t have to tell me who the people are, but I want to make sure that you have someone who can be there for you.  
▪ Has anyone you know done or said something that really helped? If so, can you share it with us? |
| **Competence** | ▪ Have you noticed any difference in your ability to do your job or complete tasks? If so, what differences have you noticed?  
▪ Have you noticed any difference in your ability to:  
▪ Get along with your coworkers  
▪ Connect with your family  
▪ Get along with your friends  
▪ Have you noticed any difference in how you are taking care of yourself? Have there been changes in diet, exercise routine, sleep, taking time for fun, etc.?  
▪ What are some things that you have done to cope that have been helpful in the past? |
| **Confidence** | ▪ Has there been any change in your confidence in your ability to do your job in the same way as before the incident? What about your confidence in equipment or leadership? If so, what are the changes?  
▪ Does this event/incident hold special meaning or connect with other experiences in any way? If so, what is the meaning? What experiences does it connect with? |
After the discussion prompted by the questions, determine what else may be needed with a question such as: “We have talked about the ways that this experience has affected your sense of Safety, Calming, Connections, Competence, and Confidence. Is there anything else that you wish to share?”

Include a short discussion about healthy coping, sleep, minimizing negative coping, and available resources.

Assess what else might be helpful with a question like: “Moving forward, is there any other support I could help you obtain at this time, from me, EAP, or anyone else?”

The SFA model can also be used in a group setting when a number of particularly stressful incidents occur over the course of a certain time period. A supervisor or leader could ask their employees the following questions to get an idea of how the cumulative stress has been affecting them:

Over the past (time frame):

1. What have been your greatest challenges, hassles, or frustrations?
2. What have been your greatest rewards or successes?
3. What does it mean to be a (name role) in this workplace?
## Summary: Stress First Aid

Stress First Aid actions are to be used as needed for self-care and with coworkers who are experiencing either significant distress or impairments in functioning caused by stress reactions. SFA for coworkers should be incorporated into work in a natural, seamless way, and implemented only when needed. In most cases, it is not necessary to provide all the SFA actions. A summary of SFA is provided below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SFA FUNCTIONS</th>
<th>POSSIBLE ACTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Check         | ✦ Assess current level of distress and functioning  
                ✦ Assess immediate risks  
                ✦ Assess need for additional SFA interventions or higher levels of care  
                ✦ Reassess progress (Re-Check) |
| Coordinate    | ✦ Decide who else should be informed of situation  
                ✦ Refer for further evaluation or higher levels of care, if indicated  
                ✦ Facilitate access to other needed care |
| Cover         | ✦ Ensure immediate physical safety of stressed person and others  
                ✦ Foster a sense of psychological safety and comfort  
                ✦ Protect from additional stress (ensure respite) |
| Calm          | ✦ Reduce physiological arousal (slow down heart rate and breathing, relax)  
                ✦ Reduce intensity of negative emotions such as fear or anger  
                ✦ Listen empathically to the individual talk about experiences  
                ✦ Provide information that calms |
| Connect       | ✦ Encourage connection to primary support people  
                ✦ Help problem-solve to remove obstacles to social support  
                ✦ Foster positive social activities within crew |
| Competence    | ✦ Help mentor back to full functioning  
                ✦ Facilitate rewarding work roles  
                ✦ Arrange for retraining, if necessary |
| Confidence    | ✦ Mentor back to full confidence in self, leadership, mission and core values  
                ✦ Foster the trust of coworkers and family members in the individual |
Appendix A: Using Active Listening Skills to Support Coworkers

Verbal Ways to Establish Rapport

There are many possible ways to establish rapport verbally. Here are some suggestions:

- Use positive, nonjudgmental questions such as:
  - “What’s on your mind?”
  - “Can you say more about that?”
  - “What would you like to talk about today?”
  - “You seem sad; do you want to talk about it?”
  - “What most concerns you?”
  - “What thought keeps coming back to you? What do you keep telling yourself?”
  - “Have you been through anything like this before? How is this similar/different?”
  - “How is this affecting how you feel about yourself, your relationships, and/or the world?”

- Use brief supportive responses to what the person is saying, such as, “I see,” “Yes,” “Right,” “Okay,” and “I hear you,” to convey attention and understanding.

- Pay close attention to what the person is saying.

Nonverbal Ways to Establish Rapport

Nonverbal actions and cues can sometimes be just as important as verbal ones in establishing rapport. Some examples of nonverbal approaches are to:

- Use a relaxed yet attentive posture to put a person at ease.

- Use brief periods of silence to give the person moments for reflection or prompt the person to open up more and fill gaps in the conversation.

- Occasional head nodding for encouragement, a facial expression that indicates concern and interest, and encouraging movements of the hands that are not distracting can be helpful.

- Use culturally appropriate eye contact to communicate attention.

- Create a culturally appropriate amount of space for comfortable personal interaction.

Do’s and Don’ts of Establishing Rapport

The following recommendations involve what you should generally NOT do.
Don’t:

• probe for details or insist that the person must talk
• give advice instead of asking the person what works for them
• avoid talking about what is bothering the person because you don’t know how to handle it
• quickly rush to tell the person that they will be okay, that they should “move on” or that they should “look for the “silver lining”
• daydream about or discuss your own personal experiences instead of listening to the person
• judge the person to be weak or exaggerating because they aren’t coping as well as others are or as you think they “should” be

In contrast, these recommendations can facilitate rapport and recovery.

Do:

• find an uninterrupted time and place to talk
• show interest, attention and care
• show respect for each individual’s reactions and ways of coping
• talk about expected reactions to crises and about healthy coping.
• be free of expectations or judgments
• acknowledge that stress reactions can take time to resolve
• help brainstorm positive ways to deal with stress reactions
• believe that the person is capable of recovery
• offer to talk or spend time together as many times as needed
• ask for help if you feel you can’t help the person enough

Encouraging Conversation

Paraphrasing means succinctly summarizing what the other person has said, to let them know that you accurately heard what they said. It does not involve changing or adding to the message. The advantage of paraphrasing is that it allows the person to confirm that you are correct or provide additional clarification if needed. It can sometimes also encourage further conversation.

Reflecting feelings involves listening to what the other person has said with an ear towards feeding back to them the emotional tone of what they are saying. The advantage of reflecting feelings over paraphrasing is that it lets the person know that you are aware of how they are feeling and can encourage emotional expression. When reflecting feelings, include only what you hear clearly stated,
without probing, interpreting or speculating. Some examples of sentence stems that encourage reflection of feelings are:

- "It sounds like..."
- "From what you're saying, I can see how you would be...."
- "It sounds like you're saying...."
- "You seem really...."
- Make sure your reflections are correct by using sentences like:
  - "Tell me if I'm wrong ... it sounds like you ..."
  - "Am I right when I say that you ..."

**Supportive comments** allow you to convey your care for the person by commenting with empathy on what they have said. Some examples of sentence openers that convey support are:

- "No wonder you feel...”
- "It sounds really hard..."
- "It sounds like you're being hard on yourself..."
- "It is such a tough thing to go through something like this."
- "I'm really sorry this is such a tough time for you."
- "We can talk more tomorrow if you'd like...”

**Empowering comments or questions** allow you to move the conversation forward into encouraging the person to consider their strengths and brainstorm ways to move forward. Some examples of sentence openers that convey empowerment are:

- "What have you done in the past to feel better when things got difficult?"
- "Are there any things that you think would help you to feel better?"
- "I have an information sheet with some ideas about how to deal with difficult situations. Maybe there is an idea or two here that might be helpful for you...."
- "People can be very different in what helps them to feel better. When things got difficult for me, it helped me to....” OR: “Some of the other people I've worked with have found it is helpful to... “
  - “Would something like that work for you?"

Appendix B: SFA Examples from the Field

Here are some quotes from employees in law enforcement, probation, and first responder settings, regarding either the need for SFA or how to implement SFA. These individuals were recommended for SFA focus groups because of their reputation as skilled leaders, peers, or mentors.

Need for Check Examples

“I see stress reactions in group meetings. People who normally might have been engaged and instead are just on their phone or checked out.”

“I've seen ultimatums, where individuals say, “I'm not going to do this anymore,” and just dig in their heels.”

“I think there’s a certain quality in stressed coworkers – a hollow look and feel. They’re just checked out. But you don't even have to see their face. You can just feel it.”

Examples of Indicators of Significant Stress

- Weight loss/gain
- Loss of interest in things that once mattered
- Emotional extremes
- Sleeplessness
- Decrease in the quality of work
- Increased work errors
- Anxiety attacks
- Depression
- Stress induced seizures
- Marital stress
- Increased absenteeism
- Medical symptoms with an undetermined cause
- Short temper
- Decrease in productivity
- Increased use of sick leave
- Lack of motivation
- Frustration towards work requirements/change in procedure
- Increased isolation
- Increased complaining
- Poor work performance
- Making more mistakes, even with simple tasks
- Increased drinking
• Giving up
• Trouble keeping up with workload
• Sending emails very late at night
• Forgetfulness
• Hypervigilance
• Less tolerance
• Sleep disruption
• Keeping office doors closed
• Absenteeism
• Lateness
• Irritability
• Engagement with others dropping off
• Closed off body language
• Distorted thinking
• Reduced self-awareness
• Reduced interpersonal boundaries (oversharing of information)
• Less volunteerism
• Uncharacteristic negative changes in social behavior (e.g., calling attention to others’ behavior in front of coworkers)

Checking on Self Examples

“I have made a very conscious effort to keep tabs on myself. The big stress indicators for me are fatigue, having a hard time focusing, being short on the fuse, not exercising, and not doing the things I like, but instead staying in and watching television.”

“One guy pointed out that I would whistle Christmas carols. Finally my supervisor said, “every time you do that bad things happen.” I wasn’t paying attention to it. Sure enough, that was one of my stress indicators.”

“I usually don’t call home much, but when stressed, I catch myself calling home. That is the sign that I’m stressed. I need a touchstone, to make sure everything is normal at home, that the rest of the world is still spinning, which means I’m okay.”

Checking on Coworkers Examples

“One of the key points of check is knowing your people, and spending time with them. Then you can recognize those subtle changes. What I’ve done is to start a conversation about anything except what I think might be bugging them, and then I actively listen.”

“To get a pulse on my staff’s morale and stress, it’s not the specific questions that matter, it’s how you talk about it. I asked every day, “How did things go today? Anything we need to discuss? OK, let's go eat.” The question needs to be asked. But it's all about how you execute it. If you're not having that
open dialogue every shift, or every transition period, whatever it is, something is going to get missed. When something big or bad does happen, if your structure already includes that open dialogue, then you plug in the staff members, and it makes it a lot more feasible for them to communicate comfortably back-and-forth.”

“I try to get to know each of my guys individually, so I know their baselines and what could potentially be a red flag. Instead of sitting on the couch and watching television, I go out and catch a football and talk. That helped when one of my crew members had a pregnant wife, and we responded to a stillborn birth. After that call I took a little extra time to sit and talk with him, to make sure that he was okay.”

“I try to be non-intrusive when I check on someone. I took coffee and donuts over to a shop and it worked. Sometimes basics are important – food water, warmth, etc.”

“Some people who are checking on me are calling me and it annoys me. I’m not upset about it, but I’ve never been one to take help from others. When people are calling me, they want me to talk and be emotional, and I don’t like it. I have received handwritten cards or flowers, which are always welcome.”

“Anniversaries of my incident get to me. There are so many serious injury cases and line-of-duty deaths and I wonder who is checking in on them. Not all fatalities receive the same attention on anniversary dates.”

“I use Check with employees regularly – they don’t even know I’m doing it. If I’m looking at someone in orange or red I will pursue a line of questioning if there is two way communication, and try and get down to what’s going on. Its active listening. I would never come in to someone after a stressful incident or event and say “hey man, how’re you doing?” If I’m asking a rhetorical question, why ask it? I will instead start a line of communication, get them talking, and look for words, non-verbal signs, and cues as to how they are doing.”

“The groundwork or the foundation that you lay at the human level is going to make a difference when it’s time to have a hard discussion or conversation that’s way below the surface. Having something else to engage people on a personal level outside of the profession is hugely important. Caring about your people beyond the task and duty is one of the key top-rated leader characteristics in research studies.”

“I talk to younger leaders who might have a better connection to the younger generation and empower them to work with those guys, because I know there’s definitely that gap between generations. When my intention is to provide some stress first aid action but it crosses, I realize that the folks who are closer in age and rank may do a better job. It doesn't raise a threat flag because they're used to having a normal conversation with them. When it’s with the supervisor they’re used to having you tell them things to do or having disciplinary actions, so it races at that flag. If you’ve had enough normal conversations with people, it's less likely it is to raise threat that it's about disciplinary action.”

“One of my team members was reported to be acting out, not normal, and I’ve known him for a long time. I couldn't believe that this report was coming in and so when I went to talk to him about it, they were obviously some underlying issues. It took a couple hours of talking about it, but his biggest fear was that if I were to let him go that the department would find out, because he knew he had
overstepped his boundaries. I think I just connected with him, he trusted me, and I trusted him, because I’ve known him for a number of years, so I could be direct with him.”

“As a leader, I have overall responsibility, so I make sure I have face-to-face time with each one of them at some point. That’s how the conversations going to start with me. It’s not going to be about their performance on that call. It’ll be about what they did during their time off. That’s probably the most successful way to check. They don’t feel like you’re intruding on their life. But they also know that I observe. You really have to pay attention to your people.”

“After I responded with another officer to a call for a suicide in progress, I asked him if he would like to grab a quick cup of coffee. I wanted to check in with him because I knew that he had a close family member who had recently taken his own life. I just wanted to make sure that he knew that someone noticed and wasn’t afraid to mention it to him.”

“After a meeting with senior staff during which I had been exceptionally confrontational and negative, the Ops Major called me. He told me that my behavior was so out of character that he wanted to check to see if something was wrong and if he could do anything to be of assistance. His call helped me realize that I needed to address some issues surrounding my doubts about how I handled a difficult internal event.”

“One of our 9-1-1 center staff had just returned to work after the death of her son who had been killed in a car accident caused by driver who was under the influence. After she managed a call involving an accident with serious injuries due to a driver who was reported to be intoxicated, I told her what a great job she had done with the call and asked her if she wanted to take a quick break with me to grab a snack.”
Need for Coordinate Examples

“There was some mistrust about utilizing EAP because of how it might affect their career. And even when we’ve had staff in divorce proceedings who went to counseling, they were worried about that being put on their background.”

“We’re rural so we contract with different treatment providers who then end up on the EAP list. Sometimes our staff is not comfortable in talking to a local counselor who they see in other settings.”

“EAP staff really don’t have an understanding about our culture. And in rural environment, many don’t feel like there was anybody locally who could provide the needed services.”

“We have a Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) team with people who have extensive training in coworker support, and they reach out to help employees, but there aren’t enough trained staff throughout the District to reach everyone that needs assistance.”

Coordinate Examples

Set Up A Variety of Resources in Advance

“In this culture, coordinating is a challenge, a monumental challenge. Coordinate should be one that is there if you need it, but you probably aren’t going to need to use it a lot. The moment you mandate something, we love our organizations and our hierarchies, but we hate authority. My boss walked into my office once after a tough situation and said you need to go talk to someone about this, and I said, it’s all good, people are born, people die, I have closure, I’m good to go, because he cued me off the wrong way, so I fought it every step of the way.”

“I have had luck coordinating with local mental health professionals in the community who are willing to provide free services or low-cost services to our personnel.”

“I would recommend testing the system prior to a problem. Start dialing numbers and find out if everyone in the chain knows what to do. We can test the strategy and come up with our work arounds and alternative plans before there is the immediate need for help.”

“We have a contact list with information, and options, so you have names of people you could contact easily.”

“We have an invited an EAP representative to come to any training classes that are related to behavioral health: The person will come with some options for us. They will come armed with that. Invite them in, and hopefully they will take a seat at the table and give us an idea of what resources we can bring to bear. Sometimes there’s no resolution, but there can be understanding.”
“I noticed that an officer was carrying around a picture of the damage done to her squad car during a recent shooting event. I asked her about the picture, and she said that it reminds her how lucky she is to be alive. As we talked further, it became clear that she was still rattled by the event. I offered to connect her with another officer who had been involved in a similar event and we made the call together so I could introduce them to one another.”

“Building rapport with local counselors is pivotal. Other local departments are often available to see advise on local chaplains, social workers and clinicians who might get our culture.”

“One of our team members reported to work and was unusually quiet and distracted. During her break, I asked if everything was ok. She explained that her 2-year-old child had just been diagnosed with autism and she just did not know where to begin to get the needed services. I told her that I knew someone on another shift who had a child with autism and she and her husband had become resource “experts” and had offered to help others. I offered to make an email introduction to her. At her next shift, she told me how helpful the other dispatcher had been.”

**Mentor, Problem-Solve, and Normalize Stress Reactions**

“As a leader/supervisor, I share openly the effects of accumulated stress and what it has done to me. The stigma is a big target because it runs really deep. To go get help, it’s still considered to be a weakness, but it’s actually our greatest strength. Getting help doesn’t necessarily have to come from a therapist. It can be obtained in a number of ways.”

“I try to identify who someone already has in place for support, what resources are they have used before or are already utilizing, and how can they work with those.”

“Going on retreat is sometimes a good option that’s been emphasized from day one.”

**Need for Cover Examples**

“The worst part is when you know you’re not covered. You can bust your tail and you feel like you’re not supported by superiors, that’s the worst part.”

“I had a boss whose attitude was, ‘when I say jump, you say how high?’ He just wanted to be in charge. Once he just started screaming and it made me so incredibly scared. It made me feel really unsafe.”

“A coworker was going through a divorce, and there was definitely 1 to 2 months where we had to be checking in regularly and asking him, ’How are you doing?’

“There are instances where staff members have felt targeted by a coworker or supervisor, and this leads to anxiety when coming to work. Even simple phone calls from a supervisor then become anxiety-invoking even though they are benign in nature.”
“Sexual harassment by coworkers or people is anxiety invoking, but there is fear of saying anything due to the perception of being overly sensitive.”

“Some are concerned about their safety due to a person coming in and destroying or damaging property and making threats.”

“A lot of people in this job are Type A. I think it’s common to want to be right, to want to be on task, and to not want to fall short, which leads to overworking and burnout.”

“A coworker died unexpectedly. The concern shown by leaders following the death seemed disingenuous and created hostility, because prior to their death, the person had been looked down upon and treated poorly by supervisors. It made all of us feel like we couldn’t trust our leaders to be authentic.”

Cover Self-Care Examples

“Cover is intangible. I don’t know how you know how to make yourself safe, other than just knowing that a person or place seems like they can offer it. The safe type of person on the job is someone who makes eye contact. I feel something when I look at someone, that connection. It’s either there or it’s not.”

Cover Coworker Examples

“One way Cover is achieved is by showing vulnerability yourself and by knowing your employees. SFA needs to start well in advance of anything going on. You slowly implement it into any organization so it is normal. We talk, drop our guards, and show our vulnerability. It has to begin well in advance of anything happening.”

“Informal “debriefings,” or after-event reviews, are a good way to check on people, and also a good way to make staff feel safe. We've all been through good post-incident discussions and bad ones. The good ones give people the opportunity to learn what is going through the mind of others who were involved, and get a different perspective, without overwhelming people with emotions or making people feel like they have to talk. Ultimately it's execution and facilitation that determines whether these conversations are helpful.”

“Maybe you don’t need to have the exact AAR questions, but you do have quick questions. It’s how you talk about it. I asked every day, “How did things go today? Anything we need to discuss? OK, let’s go eat.” The question needs to be asked. But it’s all about how you execute it. If you’re not having that open dialogue every shift, or every transition period, whatever it is, something is going to get missed. When something bad does happen or something big does something, if your structure already has that
open dialogue in place, then you plug in the crew members, and it makes it a lot more feasible for them to communicate comfortably back-and-forth.”

“After a line-of-duty death, my crew was telling me that they couldn’t go home to their families and say, ‘my job is safe.’ They felt more vulnerable and were being pressured to quit by family members. So, we had a family meeting where we brought in staff from a department which had previously had a LODD. They talked to our families about how they had gotten through the situation. It helped our family members feel like they could get through it, and our crew members felt less pressure.”

“If a person has high-risk behavior, you will probably address that person individually to get a pulse check of what’s going on: “I’m hearing that you’re driving like this are not doing thing safely.” Hopefully you’re going to draw out with active listening what is at the root of problems with the crew.”

“There is a use of force continuum in communications. So, depending on a person’s nonverbal behavior, on what they are actually doing and how they are responding, you adjust your communicate with that person. There is a time and place for me to be more abrupt and directive, if there is danger, or if it is a re-occurring thing. Also, in terms of efficiency, sometimes you need to be abrupt.”

**Officers at roll call in unison:**

“Orange zone, sir.”

*Sergeant:*

“Let’s talk about what we need to do to help ourselves feel safe and get our job done tonight. If at any time, any of you feel unsafe or need a break, all you need to do is let me know. I have your back.”

“Two officers in our department responded to a shooting. The guy who answers the door has a gun in his hand and starts shooting as he is opening the door. One of the officers runs from the shots, and the other walks backwards as the guy is shooting, to get cover. The one who runs hears shots and doesn’t know if the other officer is okay. After the incident, he feels guilty, and worries that the other officer is not okay with his reaction. He carries that moment for a month until an After Action Review, but then feels better when the other officer says, “I’m glad you ran away – that was your only opportunity to be safe.””

“An officer was shot and survived, but the assailant went into a residential area, and has never been found. During the debriefing the injured officer couldn’t be there because he was in critical condition. After the debriefing, 7 or 8 wives wanted to debrief, and wanted all their husbands to quit. The incident really made the unsafe nature of the job hit home with them. We conducted a debriefing with wives, and as a side benefit, one officer said: “you told my wife I’m always working overtime.” I replied, “no, but you need to have a discussion with your wife if you’re working all the time.” It had a strong effect on him, and the debriefing for wives had wide effects in helping wives know how to talk about the stress of the job, improving the wife’s sense of safety, and reducing the disconnectedness the wives felt with their husbands.”
Need for Calm Examples

“When overwhelmed with too many obligations or distractions, I’ve witnessed coworkers completely ‘shut down,’ rendering them incapable of doing their job. These overwhelmed states were not just due to the job; it is typically a combination of multiple stressors.”

“Calm was needed after a heated exchange during a staff meeting.”

“Issues with coworkers create a need for Calm.”

“I needed Calm after I came upon a volatile situation at work.”

“My work has affected my family and vice versa. As much as we want to believe that whatever dynamic happens at home doesn’t affect our work, we’re lying to ourselves. For example, an argument at home can affect your work.”

“Often times meetings are the place where changes are being discussed, and now you have to deal with things a different way, and negative emotions arise in people. A lot of disagreements happen in meetings. I think after we walk out of a staff meeting, you hear a lot of grumbling and people are just emotional, angry and frustrated.”

“Not long ago, I had a case take a sudden turn for the worse. My head was all over the place trying to make sure that the crisis was averted before I could even feel like I was able to effectively address the situation.”

Calm Self-Care Examples

“To calm myself, I like physical activity, exercise motion, and having my family and close friends is good. I have a good female friend up street. She seems to know when I need to talk. Those are the things you absolutely cherish.”

“What works for me is to pull myself out of the situation for a bit. I do something simple, like driving down the road, or sleeping in an area where no one else is.”

“There are things you have to do in order to bring yourself back into this bar of normalcy. You go on a giant swing from adrenaline to depression. There are things that you have to do in order to claw fight and drag yourself back to normalcy. Things like hobbies. “Use tas” “I use ta hunt, fish, spend time with wife.” You have to turn them into “I’m going tos.” I started making a concerted effort to make work not get in the way of spending time with my son and wife.”
Calm Coworker Examples

“One of my co-workers became extremely upset when he learned, at the end of our shift, that he had not been chosen for a special assignment. He was cursing and becoming increasingly agitated. I convinced him to go grab a bite to eat. While we ate, I listened to his concerns and problem-solved with him about how he could approach the supervisor in a constructive manner to ask for some feedback about why he wasn’t chosen. He called the next day to let me know that the supervisor had offered to mentor him so he would be in a better position next time.”

“When we had a couple of particularly tough calls, I brought pistachio nuts in for the crew. Shelling pistachios takes time, and makes people slow down, so it gave us a chance to unwind and talk about what happened. Doing something supportive doesn't have to look like a mental health intervention. In fact, the best interventions are often the least noticeable ones.”

“After a line-of-duty death, we made sure that the memorial activities were voluntary, and that crew members knew what to do if the events were distressing (i.e. that it was okay to bring an iPod in to listen to if testimonials were triggering them). We also decided to make the memorial a scholarship fund rather than a statue or plaque that would be a constant visual reminder of the death.”

“ Asking for help is a good way to calm people. Saying, “in order to get through this, I’m really going to need you to “x,y, and z.” I can’t do it by myself, if you could just help me out here that would be great.” It’s empowering. It appeals to all the parts of us that are doers, fixers, and movers.”

“Humor is a very safe to Calm down. Being self-deprecating always works, because you’re the butt of it, not anyone else, although you have to be careful because you don’t’ want to undermine your own leadership.”

“There was a guy who would start picking the lint off his sweater when he was anxious. I would say, “just look at me for a second.” I would get him to stop doing what he was doing and focus just for that second, and say, “here’s what I need you to do,” then be very specific and detailed. It was great. He could get right back there and focus. Something needed to jog him out of his funk.”

“Peer to peer, calming can be hard to do because of our mentality. It’s easy to shame people by implying you think they’re not competent. Things can be really competitive. Humor is a big calming influence. People’s morale will go in the tank sometimes, like when people don’t want to be there. It’s helpful if people just acknowledge potential stressors, even through humor. It has it be on your radar instead of expecting people to suck it up and deal with their own stuff. Acknowledge that it could be necessary to have some help.”

“After a line of duty death, we went to each team member individually and asked them if they wanted sick leave, or to go back to work. Then we came back together and talked with every person, gave each one every option, and then gave them whatever they needed, to support them. In the end, most of them wanted to stay together on light duty. It worked out pretty well, doing it on a case-by-case basis. They came out with what they wanted, and we honored that. They are people, not machines. They’re human beings, so we treat them like that, and it goes a long way. They’re all different. You can still meet the needs of the organization and meet their needs at the same time. Just treat them like your
brothers and sisters. They do extraordinary things so we should act with extraordinary compassion with them.”

“Just being calm pays off. I pull people aside really quickly at memorials and let them know they can park cars or do something else to be of service, if they hate memorial services, or have someone else go with them. It’s important to leverage healthy connectedness.”

“I train my guys to protect, serve, and be alert but not hypervigilant. There is a delicate line where adrenaline is where it needs to be without being too much or too little. I try to train people to become more aware of ways to remain calm, to channel their energy into focused behavior, to stay in their sweet spot. Then, just as importantly, train them to let go of the adrenaline sweet spot and come down, because it can be addictive. It’s a great place to be in mind and reflexes but is not the place to be with your wife and children at home. You need to be ready to take action when it’s needed, and when you go off duty, you go off duty.”

“When there was a crash with a child involved, I told my team, “you have to stay in the moment. Only think of what you need to do right now. I gave them things to do and tried to put people in place where they were competent at that moment. When the pregnant female involved in the crash passed away, I pulled aside the sergeant and talked with him to reconstruct what he knew about the passengers. I was calm, I didn’t look at the body, and I told people to relax. We had a young trooper whose wife was pregnant, so I gave him another job away from the scene.”

“After a motor vehicle crash involving a child, a senior officer told his team, “You have to stay in the moment. Only think of what you need to do right now.” He gave them things to do and tried to put people in place where they were competent at that moment. He was calm himself, didn’t look at the body, and gave a young trooper whose wife was pregnant another job away from the scene.”

“In the Orange to Red Zone, those who have really gone deeply into their stress reaction and can’t make good cognitive decisions are in a danger zone. On one call, we were trying to recover someone and got surrounded. I heard the chief say, “we’re leaving, it’s time to go.” One officer, who is usually calm, screamed “we’ve got this – we’re going in.” That guy was in the Orange Zone. He was not making good decisions. The chief, in a calm, methodical voice, said the officer’s name and then, “we have lost safe position, it is time to go.” At that moment, the officer snapped out of it, spun back around and went back.”

“There’s a gal in the office who has a lot of work and is overworked. She recently became lead worker and has been struggling with that role because there is a lot of drama in office. She was crying at copy machine, so I called her back into the office and gave her some information about the office situation to help clarify some of the politics. She took a big huge sigh, then I guided her to repeat it three more times with me. She wasn’t crying after that, so we talked about breathing and I reminded her to keep taking breaks and breathing when she gets overly stressed.”

“I noticed that one of my co-workers was withdrawn, avoided contact with other members of the shift and was short (and often abrasive) with others, including callers. When we took a break, I asked her if everything was ok and she confided that she recently discovered that her 17 year old son has an addiction to opiates and she is not sure what to do. She was very upset and afraid that her co-workers
would think badly about her if they found out. I listened and assured her that she was not alone. I also shared with her an app I use for relaxation.”

“Before we would go into a difficult situation together, our Chief would say “You guys ready to make some memories? This is the best job in the world. You’re getting paid to do this.” Sometimes after long days, he would say “you guys still making memories?” to all the commanders.”

“Sometimes when we respond to a difficult situation as a peer support person, I start by connecting the person with reading material. If they don’t want to talk I tell them to just know we’re there for them if they need anything, and I’ll check back with them in a week. Then I call a week later and ask if they are better, the same, or worse. They will reflect on being better, worse, or the same, and sometimes I will ask about what they love. Once they are in the mode of talking about something, sometimes something clicks, and then they will take a deep breath and relax a little.”

“I try to connect them with a part of themselves, core beliefs, or with things that matter to them (i.e., “what did you used to do that was fun? Who else would want to talk with you? What matters to you?”). Sometimes I let them know that there are resources we can get you if you can’t. We may need to keep them in mind down the road if things don’t get better.”

“Sometimes I just sit and listen and look at someone and know they’re screwed up, even if they’re trying not to show it. I have no problem saying: “you know what, you’re not doing well, we’re on to you, and we’re not going away. You need a hit between the eyes or you will lose job, so I’m going to take away some options so that won’t happen. It’s only happened a couple of times but it has saved some careers. I tell recruits: “I might kick you in the butt, but it’ll get you on your way. Otherwise people might get stuck or have a pity party for themselves. I hold people accountable with their path of recovery. Have you hurt enough? Are you done hurting? You’re now divorced, demoted, etc. When will you actively participate in getting better? I put the accountability on them. Sometimes I have to appeal to their sense of responsibility by asking them: “what if you screw up and hurt someone.”

**Need for Connect Examples**

“There can be a desire to feel more connected to social support when dealing with the death of a family member or coworker, during significant illness, or during work challenges such as disciplinary action or denial of a promotion.”

“A coworker recently told me he felt he really had no close friends.”

“Reaching out to coworkers during times of sorrow or disappointment can be uncomfortable, and I believe that this is why many do not reach out or say anything.”

“When there are work challenges [and] no one reaches out, a person could retreat into themselves.”
Connect Self-Care Examples

“I’m an introvert. I like to work, and then I flee. That is innate, so that is what I do. I do tend to disappear. That’s just how I cope. But for introverts, it’s important to bring them back into the tribe, get them back into that connectedness after they recharge, whatever that looks like for them. That is the key."

“I always believe that if there are two people in the room with the same opinion, you’ve got one extra person. I have people I can talk to, call up, and in the conversation, whatever’s bothering either of us will come out. I force myself to have conversations with three or four people who know that when I’m calling, something has come up. We flesh it out by talking.”

“The people I reach out to are honest. It’s about calling a spade a spade, not dancing around it. They’re able to give their perspective on my problem, and show me that it might pale in comparison to another’s: “You need to pick up pieces of your shattered life and move on.” It serves to provide another’s perspective, and foster honesty. Or they might say, “That’s not normal for you.” I am skeptical of self-diagnosis. I think you need to get a second opinion- a fresh perspective.”

“What makes people calming to be around is genuineness. I tend to try to surround myself with people who are genuine. I don’t seek out those who party until 2am; that’s not what I want, not what I need. I just need peace and quiet away from incident response. As long as there’s someone you have a good feel for, and you know it’s what you need right now, you can seek that person out because you know what you’re going to get. Rather than trying to put pressure on someone to help me out who can’t, I’d rather go seek the person out who can provide what is advantageous for me, and hopefully for them at the same time.”

Connect Coworker Examples

“I noticed that a friend of mine had become increasingly cynical and negative about our department. He seemed to find any opportunity to criticize senior staff. I asked him what was up and he told me that it was clear that he wasn’t “one of the chosen ones” because he had recently done poorly in an assessment center for promotion. I offered to hook him up with a retired Lt. who had helped me identify the areas in which I needed improvement and helped me create a plan to address them.”

“There was a fatality and one of the crew felt overwhelmingly responsible for the incident. We rallied around him as much as he would let us. He was a solitary kind of guy before the incident, so it would be normal for his reaction to be one of retreat. A year ago, I would have let him retreat, but because I was introduced to the SFA model, I rallied an effort to help. Post-accident, I included him in discussions and projects for which I would not have in the past. They were positive projects that would benefit from his expertise and created collaborative opportunities with peers. It gave us the opportunity to include him, take his temperature from time to time. It redirected his energy to get him back to a sense of competence, confidence and connection, to get him back into doing something that was in his wheelhouse professionally. These actions have all the appearances of being effective.”
“I would recommend that when there is a lot of stress, leaders should keep people moving and facilitate talking while you do things. I had one leader who, instead of sitting down and having lunch, would make people walk around. He gets people engaged and laughing, and it’s helpful for their stress levels. Or, have people each report out on successes, loose ends, and their plan for the next 24 hours. It only has to take a half hour.”

“A guy was drinking all the time. He had been on the crew with the two guys who died, but it was hard to get him to talk to us. He had a kitchen remodeling project under way, so I went over and hung out in his home and helped him. While we worked on it, he opened up, and I was able to get him some help.”

“If someone is resistant to getting support, one way I’ve addressed it is going to a more authoritative approach. I go into the office and close the door and have a “come to Jesus talk.” It may not be the right approach, but it has worked every time. I have talked to that person and said “look, here is some life coaching, here is some advice. You’ve got a, b, c, and d. What the hell are you doing? I’ve only done that with people who trust me. They know I’m a safe person, they can say whatever they want and I won’t freak out. You need to recognize when it’s time to escalate to that approach – to say “you need to get your shit in a kit – get your stuff together. That’s the far end of the continuum. “This is what’s going to happen and here’s why.” The couple of times I had to use that, the individuals recognized later that they were in the orange/red zone, making very poor decisions, despondent, fighting it.”

It helps to know that no matter what I say or what I do, there is no right way to do anything. Don’t even bother with cliché words, just be with them, nod, pay attention, and just feel it, and it’s okay. I know that it’s okay to support others, and there are plenty of people I can reach out to after, if I need to, and I have. But I would not walk away from someone.

“After a line of duty death, the most important message I have after all of these years is to keep calling. Please keep calling, texting, and writing letters to the families and co-workers. Regardless if they pick up the phone or not due to the distress or pain it may cause them, the fact that someone remembers them on an anniversary date, or on any random day, is what the phrase “we will never forget” is all about.”

“Ganging up on one person on the crew can be fixed in a number of ways. At the beginning of the season I state the expectations. I say, “these things are not going to happen. If they do, you and I are going to have a serious conversation. Duty, respect and integrity, all the things we preach all the time, it starts here and now. So I’m not going to put up with this.” I think if you lay it out at the beginning, and address it early, and take it case-by-case individually as it’s going on, things seem to work out. You give the crew expectations about how we will conduct ourselves, so we all hold ourselves accountable, and there are consequences if we don’t. It makes it really easy to have that discussion later if you have that base and always go back to those values.”

“We really have a unique opportunity to create our own world. You can take negative things about yourself and change them. So bringing new crewmembers on is a real opportunity to modify your world to make it fit for folks. I try to push that “everyone’s got something to bring to the table, let’s optimize our opportunities.” People are far less likely to make someone a pariah if they get to know them. I
catch it as a positive opportunity, to keep it positive and engaging for everyone, which seems to keep stuff from happening."

“I try to connect them with a part of themselves, core beliefs, or with things that matter to them (i.e., “What did you used to do that was fun? Who else would want to talk with you? What matters to you?”). Sometimes I let them know that there are resources we can get you if you need them. We may need to keep them in mind down the road if things don’t get better.”

“Sometimes when we respond to a difficult situation as peer support, I start by connecting the person with reading material. If they don’t want to talk, I tell them to just know we’re there for them if they need anything, and I’ll check back with them in a week. Then I call a week later and ask if they are better, the same, or worse. They will reflect on being better, worse, or the same, and sometimes I will ask about what they love. Once they are in the mode of talking about something, sometimes something clicks, and then they will take a deep breath and relax a little.”

“We had a senior trooper placed on administrative leave facing termination who wouldn’t talk to anyone because he was on staff for many years. I asked him: “What is your peer support plan? Who can you actually talk to about your work? You need to bother them, whether you want to or not. Now is the time to call them.”

“Our department was involved in a civilian being shot by an officer. They were concerned that they couldn’t speak about the incident amongst themselves until after a grand jury investigation. The CIRT team was called in because they can maintain confidentiality, as long as an officer has not admitted to a crime. Without discussing the details of the event, they were able to discuss with those involved how the incident has impacted their sense of safety, their sense of calm, their relationships, and their sense of competence and competence. In the meantime, the superintendent in charge of internal affairs made the rapid completion of the investigation a high priority. Stress first aid doesn’t teach how to talk, but rather, what to talk about. Sometimes it’s necessary to “break the code of silence” in order to communicate brotherly love/connection. You may have to get them connected with trusted resources.”

“I try to be a good leader who leads by caring for and being connected to my guys, because I respect and am loyal to sincere leaders, and I abhor managers who do the job for their own gain, or just to maintain their role within the organization. Sometimes we have to teach our junior leaders to fake being a leader until they get how to do it.”

**Need for Competence Examples**

“During a personal experience recently regarding a significant stress reaction I was placed under doctor’s orders which restricted my ability to execute certain activities. I submitted a plan that would allow me to still do my job, but supervisors did not provide a response to that plan for 60 days. They modified the plan for the remaining 30 days, and the lack of timely communication on their part led to additional anxiety.”
“I was very apprehensive about some aspects of management when I first became a supervisor, and still feel somewhat less than competent in that area.”

“It used to be that if you learned the basics of the job well in the first five years, it kind of carried you through your career. Now every couple of years there’s something new that people are needing to learn, with new skills. No change at all is bad, and too much too quick is also bad. I think that's where you get a lot of people frustrated and feeling that isolation.”

“Certain aspects of the job are really hard. I think we’ve acknowledged that they’re really difficult, but I don’t know that we’ve suggested a particular way that is effective in dealing with that stress.”

**Competence Self-Care Examples**

“When I’m under too much stress, I revert to doing something that is easy for me. It gives me a sense of accomplishment, like tidying the garage, or shoveling snow for a widowed neighbor. It doesn’t take much thought, but it gives me a sense of accomplishment.”

“It’s just my nature to work hard. I’ll go to the office for an hour, and I’ll stay late, it's just how it goes. It's hard. It's really difficult to put work like balance into practice. It comes a time and age and shifting priorities. It's definitely difficult. But you do have a lot of stuff to do. Sometimes I'll get our junior and senior leadership to do things for us. That takes some of the workload off. There's just so much to do.”

“In terms of self-care, I went through several iterations initially as a young superintendent. First it was, “I know we're on R & R, but we've got to get the stuff done, so you guys need to rest, go home, I'm going to take care of the stuff.” Looking back on that, everything was fine, everything was in harmony, but as time goes on, as your situation at home changes, I would say to stay attuned to those changes and where you are in the seasonality of your life.”

“I probably take on way too much, because I don't like the guys to come in. It's handling all that stuff because I need them to rest. I've accepted that for the job, I'm committed. My wife commits to that, and the family commits to that. Right or wrong, that's the life I live. Those are the sacrifices, and those are the things I accepted when I took this job. I don't expect my people to do it, because I expect them to get rest. The position that I'm in, I've taken that position, therefore it's my responsibility to make sure these things get done. That is what I've accepted with my life. That's how I've adapted. For each person it’s going to be different. They will be constantly assessing where they are, where their families are, and where their crew is.”

“A very key moment in my life showed me where I knew that I was done. As far as I was concerned, it was my dream job, I was going to retire in that role, and I could not see anything beyond. Then in one particular year it was just slamming. I had just gotten off work, and had come home and sat down at the dinner table and the phone rings with a call for the crew and I said okay. I looked up and was replacing the boots that I just taking off, and my oldest daughter got up abruptly and left the dinner table, and my son was barring the door saying, “you can’t go,” and my infant was in tears because everybody
else was upset. I could hear my wife behind me grinding the dishes into the countertop. For me that was a watershed moment. I realized that I had my dream job, but now my family, the part of my life that was my rock and anchor, was now in jeopardy. We’re in a culture where we’re a team and the crew and we are going to keep pushing on. That value is kind of ingrained in us. But I knew at that point that I was not willing to sacrifice my family for that, so it was time for me to move on.”

**Competence Coworker Examples**

“You can mitigate a lot of issues with the right mentoring. The platinum rule of treat others the way they need to be treated, it’s the same thing with teaching. It’s not about me, it’s about how are you going to learn this and how are you going to get the then get confidence to teach it as well. A lot of one on one is the way to do it.”

“I was training a guy and he was becoming increasingly frustrated and threw the papers he was holding and walked away saying “I guess I’m just a failure all the way around.” I knew that he had two deaths in his immediate family in the past month. He and his wife were expecting their first child and had just found out that it was an extremely high-risk pregnancy. I followed him and asked him to walk with me around the outside of the building. I suggested that we take a break from the training until things settle down a bit. We talked about how stress can interfere with your ability to learn new skills and discussed some actions that he could take to better manage his stress.”

“Our department had a training on conflict resolution because we saw that when our young crew were under stress, they didn’t really know how to manage their irritability and anger. They also didn’t know how to communicate directly, effectively or assertively with others--they were more used to texting than talking. The training helped them all of us improve the ways we handle conflict individually, and as an organization.”

“I had to have conversations with people and say, “don’t come in to work on your day off. Get some rest and relaxation. Don’t come into this office.” People’s sense of duty and commitment to the crew sometimes lead to overworking. I have to make sure that they’re getting rest.”

“Training is intense, and every year we’ve had 1 student who just can’t get it. Every time we’ve done this, when the cadre is getting ready to ship him home, we find someone who matches their personality, somebody they can relate to and communicate with, and we assign that person to them. We build their competence and confidence by starting with absolute basics in a small one-on-one setting. Slowly the whole cadre is there to observe, and then to say, “great job, you passed the simulation.” It’s a sliding continuum where we provide an escalation of stress and responsibility in a calculated manner.”

“Pretty much everyone I see is burdened by work. We are out taking on more duties as our workforce shrinks and budgets shrink. I think a lot of people will offer “solutions” when they really don't know if those solutions are possible. To say you should take a month off may be really tough for someone to do. So before you have a conversation with somebody who you think needs time off you need to make sure that the check can be cashed by that individual.”
“When you give people more responsibility, and give up control to them, they are more and more in control. Every little thing builds. As things get a little more complicated and a little more complicated, they have that past foundation to go off of, so that when serious mistakes could happen, they know that there is a high likelihood that they will be okay, and if they’re not, it’s not because they didn’t try. There will be enough successes to be able to point out that they did this many times before. They will do it, and nothing bad is going to happen to them. So they can trust and to hope that that it will be okay, that it’s really how life works. And to have a successful track record, that you can rely on, and recognize, and to applaud before you need it, is huge.”

“It takes time to build up that track record after mistakes. You may be confident that you will never make THAT same mistake again, but you do know that there are a million other things that we can trip over, so it pays to brush up on your competence a little to help cover your shaken confidence. It also helps to have someone remind you that we’re all just human, and all reactions are acceptable in the right context, and then we can figure out what to do after that.”

“We had a senior trooper placed on administrative leave facing termination who wouldn’t talk to anyone because he was on staff for many years. I asked him: “What is your peer support plan? Who can you actually talk to about your work? You need to bother them, whether you want to or not. Now is the time to call them.”

“Our department was involved in a civilian being shot by an officer. They were concerned that they couldn’t speak about the incident amongst themselves until after a grand jury investigation. The CIRT team was called in because they can maintain confidentiality, as long as an officer has not admitted to a crime. Without discussing the details of the event, they were able to discuss with those involved how the incident has impacted their sense of safety, their sense of calm, their relationships, and their sense of competence and competence. In the meantime, the superintendent in charge of internal affairs made the rapid completion of the investigation a high priority. Stress first aid doesn’t teach how to talk, but rather, what to talk about. Sometimes it’s necessary to “break the code of silence” in order to communicate brotherly love/connection. You may have to get them connected with trusted resources.”

“Getting someone back on the horse might involve giving them administrative leave the first week, getting a trauma team member to connect with them as their buffer, and when ready for calls again, starting to reconnect them to their job and others, then have them take small steps towards getting them back. Have them go to range, bond with a partner officer, play paintball, get them working on the DTS, then start hand to hand work. Get them back on the bike to ride again. If I see anger flare, then I have them practice dialing up and down with appropriate amount of force. I used to do things like, if they were involved in a crash, I would make them an EBOC instructor, or if they were involved in a shooting incident, I would make them a range instructor. If I or they didn’t think they were ready, I would have them become range masters. I might let them go as a trooper, but they would be retained by the agency, learn a new skill, and if they made it, I would consider reinstatement. It’s important to give them achievable goals, gradually increase their responsibility, and help them practice a new way of thinking. If you get a person starting to achieve little goals, then you tell them down the road to pass it on as a mentor. It’s progressive training.”
“There are so many ways that we police officers want to be in control and can’t. I try to help my guys early on learn to tolerate the ambiguity, and to let go of the illusion of control, for their own mental health.”

“Some of our returning veteran officers have skills that make them more influential with other officers, and they are good mentors with negotiation in extreme or highly chaotic situations.”

“There was a bus crash on the highway with 10 passengers killed. I talked to the senior officer on the scene and told him that this is no different than a single crash. The job is exactly the same, with a focus on mapping physical evidence, and gave him a pep talk right before going to the scene. If we can anticipate the factors involved in an incident, we can have other officers anticipate it, and we can say something constructive.”

“Sometimes I have to have hard conversations with my guys, and tell them: “if you keep going on this way, hitting the bottle hard, for instance, or having highly intense marital problems, you’re going to lose your job, your family, or your life. You have to address the issues before they get pinged. I sent one to an inpatient treatment, got another guy help for an Oxycontin habit he picked up after shoulder surgery. If you don’t take care of each other, you will lose someone. We’ve had five mental health professionals who are culturally competent. I have talked to them, give them my stamp of approval, and vouch for them that they “get us.””

After the suicide of a police officer, I went into the group and asked them to help me understand who the person was to the team – what was it like to work with him? It was a loss event. Who was he? What impact has this had on your sense of safety, in that it’s not supposed to happen here. What impact has it had on your ability to sleep? What helps? Alcohol may not be best solution. What impact has it had on your sense of connection, and how can you get more connected. We went through the five essential SFA needs. Not once did I ask them about trauma. The critical issue was that they weren’t sleeping, and I asked them if anyone was concerned about their ability to function and drive when sleep deprived. The best friend of the deceased was drinking more, so we discussed the need to find a different coping strategy. The chief gave him emergency leave, and he is no longer drinking excessively. There is a way to use the SFA principles in a group setting with loss, and it’s a different kind of dialogue than we usually have with a standard debriefing model.”

Need for Confidence Examples

“After disciplinary action or the loss or denial of a promotion, staff tend to doubt their abilities or where they fit in the organization. Reassurance by management is key during these difficult times. There is extreme discouragement when a person is working to change or grow, and those around that person will not afford them the opportunity to do so or are seeing only the negative and ‘piling on,’ so to speak. The loss of hope or confidence comes when benign actions are interpreted with negative connotations.”

“There’s a lot more visible accountability now, which kind of cuts both ways. Every month you get this report; and if you haven’t seen someone, it’s in red and you know it’s gone to your supervisor, it’s gone
to your chief. In some ways it's intended to help you not miss stuff, but at the same time, here's this report that's staring you in the face of all the things that you haven't done. The ones that you did fine are not in a color, but the ones that you haven't done are in bright red or yellow. I think that adds to the cumulative stress too. And then once you clear those things, then you look at the things that are gray because those are the things that are coming up. Then it's the first of the month and you get another report. It's like a nonstop cycle."

"No one really comes to you in other moments and lets you know what you do right. Your first thought when something happens is, 'What did I do wrong?' No one checks in with you to let you know you're doing a good job, that these other things are going well. I think that adds to our stress too, because the only time anyone comes to you is when something is wrong."

"In our workplace every time there was an issue and we would go talk to our leader, he was dismissive, making us feel like we were just complainers, rather than taking our concerns seriously."

"I missed an important detail on a case. I did everything I was supposed to do, but I still missed it. Even if you have a supportive administration who says it could have happened to anybody and you did everything you were supposed to do, that self-imposed responsibility is difficult to overcome."

"It would be nice to have more feedback going to people about successes. If people got better feedback, maybe it would foster a sense of confidence."

"Pending retirement can cause issues with confidence. It can almost feel like we have to find ourselves again."

**Confidence Self-Care Examples**

"You can be the most skillful person in the entire world but if you don’t have faith in yourself you are doomed. You’re never going to get through it. And vice versa, you can be overconfident but not able to learn from mistakes or be more effective. You’re just going to keep circling the drain. There is a fine line between the two. The better you are at one, the better you will be on the other one. Even small triumphs can help with confidence. Trust is hard to rebuild. Confidence is that way too. If you have had a bad outcome, you will always self-doubt. You end up going to read more self-help books, or tactical reports. Then you realize that you were already good at your job. It was a lightening bolt that came out of the sky, it had nothing to do with your skills."

"I had to come to the realization that if I had been with the guys who died, that I would have been one of them. I trusted those guys, worked with them countless times, spent time with them both on and off the clock. To come to that realization took a long time. First started working 14 – 16-hour days, working on my house, staying totally busy. Then something triggered me, and I lost it. I thought, “Imagine what my friends went through.” So, I had a good cry, let it out, and then I made it a personal mission to start
informing young crew members about the dangers and risks of this job, so they can come to accept them.”

“I heard a speaker give an analogy about life and moving forward after trauma. He spoke of a vehicle cruising down the highway, with the driver paying full attention to the road ahead. Every now and then, the driver will look into their rearview mirror, reflecting on the road behind them. The glance to the past doesn’t capture their gaze for long, because the driver is heading into uncharted territory and needs to be in the moment, paying attention to the road ahead. In similar fashion, I’ve found I must look to the horizon, keeping my eyes, heart and mind fixed forward. I can glance back for a bit, but mindfully keeping my focus on the life before me.”

Confidence Coworker Examples

“Some of our force who are returning veterans have skills that make them more influential with other officers, and they are good mentors with negotiation in extreme or highly chaotic situations.”

“As a leader, I saw that a young team member was struggling to find a way to contribute to the crew, which was affecting his confidence. I made an effort to give him tasks that I knew he would be successful at, asked his opinions, set him up for success, gave him some advice, and when he said “every time I open my mouth I say something that confirms how dumb I am,” I joked with him, “you can always return to not saying anything.”

“When something seems out of place in a person’s demeanor, I will pick up on it. Maybe one day they just need a pick me up. I try to be mindful and observant as a leader in order to be there for them at times like that.”

“Sometimes I have to have hard conversations with my guys and tell them: “if you keep going on this way, hitting the bottle hard, for instance, or having highly intense marital problems, you’re going to lose your job, your family, or your life. You have to address the issues before they get pinged. I sent one to an inpatient treatment, got another guy help for an Oxycontin habit he picked up after shoulder surgery. If you don’t take care of each other, you will lose someone. We’ve had five mental health professionals who are culturally competent. I have talked to them, and I give them my stamp of approval, and honest vouch for them that they “get us.””

“If someone has bad attitude, his confidence is low, and he feels like he has no sense of purpose, or is not contributing to the team, I direct them to the team, and point out how the team is all pushing forward to a good outcome. I may say something like, “Ditch the zero, get with the heroes.” I try to help him look for something specific that he’s good at, some skill they have that really does contribute to the team, and point out his strengths, even if it’s just that they’re helpful and nice to his crewmates. Something tangible. If you notice stress reactions, maybe you can point out one of the person’s strengths.”

“Sometimes it’s simple. If they don’t feel comfortable doing something at that time for some reason, but they’ve done it before and know how to do it, you just relate the person back to their skills: “you do this all the time, you’ve done it before, you know how to do it. Just take a deep breath, take a step
back, let’s look at what we’re doing here and move forward.” Just have them reassess what they’re doing, take a step back for a second, and try to re-engage. But let them know you have the confidence in them to be successful: “Look I trust you or I wouldn’t have you doing this in the first place, so I know you can do it, I know you’re capable, just get back in there and do it.”

“After we got back from a call with deaths, we got flooded by calls, so I reached out to an old superintendent who had come through in a similar situation. When tough things happen, I establish new relationships: “What does this look like, help me map this out.” We’ve become semi-close considering he was a complete stranger prior to the incident. He is going to come talk to the crew about what the transition was like for his crew, how to get back in into the game. He said, “I want you to say these things to the crew, because these are the things I didn’t do. These are things you should be keeping an eye out for.” He gave me tips that have been very helpful. A ton of people reach out, there are a lot of resources out there, so I would recommend that you just call them. My guy has been a good mentor in some hard times.”

“We have some important potential SFA procedures for building confidence, such as listening, being person-centered and being aware of how a person can respond, and when they are ready to respond. You have to start with assessment, give them time, get a sense of where they are and what is going on. It may not be a direct approach, but if you restore depleted resources, and help them with what they need, and realize that each person will do it their own way, they usually can regain their footing and confidence.”

“The people who can especially be helpful are the ones who have been through similar situations, but being a guide has to come in the person’s own time. If they are ready to be that mentor to someone else, it’s especially potent, because they have clout because they also went through a trial by fire. Sometimes a person in need of Confidence won’t listen to anyone else, but they will listen to the person who has been through the hardest of times. It gives you a role model to show you how to potentially go through things. And it also will shape how you can mentor others at some point.”

“I give my crew members the message that you don’t take ownership of injuries or deaths unless you’ve clearly stepped over the line. Did we do everything that could be done? If so, God decides who lives or dies, and we just try to buy a few extra minutes in case he changes his mind. If not, let’s do an AAR and improve what we do the next time. Every incident can bring learning.”

“It’s about reframing. A traumatic event is like a tattoo. It hurts and it will stay with you forever, but you learn to live with it, and after a period of time it won’t hurt as much. I try to use what I’ve learned from these events to help others.”

“We had one trainee who found out that her spouse died while she was in training. The trainee left but came back into the training program within a year. When the trainee got into a similar situation to when she got the call, she started to show severe stress. We talked to her, worked with her, and gave resources of people who dealt with similar things and she passed the training. Later she encountered more difficulties because of getting triggered and left the job. I consider that a success story because she recognized that this not for her, so she took herself out of situation and did something else with her life.”
“When I was trying to help a severely insecure guy be less stressed, gain factual competence, and develop interpersonal connections with others, and nothing worked, I felt like I should have been able to do something better, and the feeling lingered for five years. I mentioned it to one of my colleagues, who sent me articles about challenging personalities on the job, and it made me feel like I didn’t fail. Sometimes you have to walk away.”

“We had a guy who was in a really tough situation and he just froze, locked up. He had a really tough time coming back into the system. He just needed some time off. Maybe he was too close and too inexperienced. He took a break, but ended up getting back into the crew. He recognized he needed it, the crew wasn’t mad, upset, or disappointed, and they gave him what he needed and supported him. After his time off, he got back into the system and is doing well.”

“When stress starts to build up in the crew, we have to work harder to break it down to the crew why we’re doing what we’re doing, so they don’t lose confidence in the mission or leadership.”

“Trainees sometimes get overwhelmed. You have to go there and let them know that they are plenty competent, and to relax and get out there. And once they get over that, it’s very rewarding to look back and see the development in their confidence.”

“After a really tough call, I made it my personal goal to help change the culture in my little sphere of influence. We need to re-align our value system to help keep our confidence.”

“If someone makes a decision that it’s time to leave, what to say to them so they question their identity, self-esteem, and to prepare them for the transition? We had a crew member doing peer support who had had too much. I told him, “There is no shame in leaving that role. It’s not a permanent thing, it shouldn’t be, and you’ve really enriched the program and the team, so hold your head up high. You’ve made a great contribution, so don’t feel that it’s a let down.”

“I had a guy who worked really well, and then his personal life fell apart and he had a divorce and child issues, and he walked in and handed me a letter of resignation. I knew that his sense of identity was in the job, so I told him, “I’m going to sit on the letter for 30 days, and then after that, if you still want to quit, I’ll turn it in, because right now you have a lot going on.” At 30 days, he came back in and said, “Can I have that letter back?” Last year he walked up to me and thanked me for that, after he had gone out west and had been doing a great job out there. We text every six months or so, and he always tells me that he was so glad that I didn’t let him quit. And I always say, “I’m so glad you’re here now helping out.” For me, it would have been adding insult to injury to allow him to quit at that particular time.”

“I try to return people to a fundamental notion of why they got into the job in the first place. I also tell them, “You’re a valuable part of the mission, and if you’re struggling, maybe we can find something else for you so that you can really believe in what you’re doing.”

“We had a line of duty death and someone on the team took that blame. I kept it short, “You don’t know what you don’t know, you made the best decision you could have made given what you knew at the time.”

“It doesn’t have to take five years of therapy, it could just be the right place, the right time, the right person, like a verbal slap, and if they trust you, have worked with you, it doesn’t have to take a long time to make a shift in their perspective. Every single time a person gets to know you and knows who
you are, it’s money in the bank for the time that you can make an influence on a person. A psychologist or family member does not have that foundational relationship to make a shift in just a few moments. It’s a big deal.”

“I make sure to mentor my crew when they are showing signs of Orange zone stress, by giving them respite, training, or advice. If things get worse, I’m not afraid to tell them that if they keep going without getting some help, they’re going to lose their job, family, or life. I sent one officer to inpatient mental health treatment for suicidality, and got another help for a painkiller habit she developed after shoulder surgery. I also has someone in the department screen and interview local mental health professionals, so he is confident that when he refers his officers to treatment, they are getting names of providers who are well trained and who understand the law enforcement culture.”

“A number of agencies were involved in an active shooter situation. At the conclusion of the incident, a lot of the junior officers who were involved were concerned about what they could have done differently. A senior officer established an after-action review using senior peers, because he knew that only respected senior peers would be able to guide the younger officers away from blaming themselves for things. The senior peers were in the best position to let the junior officers know that everyone goes through similar situations and the right approach is to learn from all calls rather than blaming or second-guessing oneself.”

“A super squared away deputy with 17 years on the force was called to what was described as a transient confrontation. The guy involved pulled out a knife on the other officer, and as a back up the deputy killed the guy. I sent him home, and at that time we didn’t have a peer support team, so I just gave his wife some resources and things to watch for. When he came back to work, he lasted 6 months on the graveyard shift, where not a lot was going on, then ended up leaving. He has been out for many years now and when I speak with him, he says that night still affects him. He never addressed it. It has caused nightmares and problems in his relationship, but he doesn’t talk about it. There are still agencies today with no peer support program, and if something happens, they’re behind the power curve. A smaller agency has an even bigger impact when something like this happens. The Oregon Fallen Officers Foundation now come in and offer their help, help with making plans, take care of the family, and cover costs of memorial services. We try to hook those involved up with peer support, with someone who gets it. We also try to get them connected with culturally competent mental health professionals.”

“I worked with a Sergeant who put in for promotion and didn’t get it, then transferred to another command one month later. He couldn’t figure out what he did wrong and started to doubt himself. When I talked to the command, they thought someone had talked to him about how they were trying to give him more varied experience so they could eventually promote him. He went from working in a division he loved to nights on the road, which he hadn’t worked in years. After I talked with him about what I found out, he began to build up his confidence and get started coming back around in his belief in himself.”

“I worked with an officer who was involved in a shooting where he shot a 21 year who was off his mental health medications and who was holding a gun. He got within 5-7 yards and was trying to give commands when the guy beelines for he and a fellow officer. The other officer shoots and hits the guy
in the head. They officer I worked with obsessed on why he didn’t shoot first, since he was closer to
the guy. I told him there was a delay because he was competent and confident, that a lot of us thought
we didn’t have to shoot the guy, and that it wasn’t time to shoot yet from his perspective, or that he
may have lost ability to shoot because of the flight or fight response. That seemed to help restore his
confidence in himself.”

“I tell my guys that early on, a lot of my satisfaction with the job depended on court case outcomes, but
later, I learned that doing my job well is enough. I encourage them that if we can come out on other
end and have fun doing what we do, that’s enough. I try to help them get to a place where they know
that you do the best you can, put forth excellent product, then let it go because you’ve done an
excellent job. There is satisfaction now in that, and in other aspects of the job like having people come
up and say “I can’t appreciate how much you guys do.””