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**Stress First Aid
for Fire and
Emergency Medical
Services Personnel**



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**Group
Discussion:
Five Helpful
Things**





Reasons for Stress First Aid: Acute and Chronic Stress

Acute Stress

- Short-lived
- What you feel after a fatal fire or other difficult call

Chronic Stress

- Long-term
- Might be the result of a potentially traumatic event or other ongoing situation

Reasons for Stress First Aid: Elevated Psychiatric Symptoms/Disorders

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- Firefighters: 18% - 30%
- Gen Pop: 1% -8%
- Veterans: 6% - 30%

Sleep disturbances

- 40%
- 80%not diagnosed

Substance Abuse

- 10 days /month
- 58% binge drinking
- 9% driving while drinking

Reasons for Stress First Aid: Stigma and Unresolved Issues



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95% of firefighters in a recent survey said they experience critical stress on the job

75% have endured stressful experiences that have “caused lingering or unresolved emotional issues”

Many have trouble sleeping

Many are haunted by memories of bad calls, recurring unwanted memories, family and relationship problems

27 % say the stress has led to substance abuse

19% say they have had thoughts of suicide

81% said they believe they will be seen as weak or unfit for duty

Stress Injuries



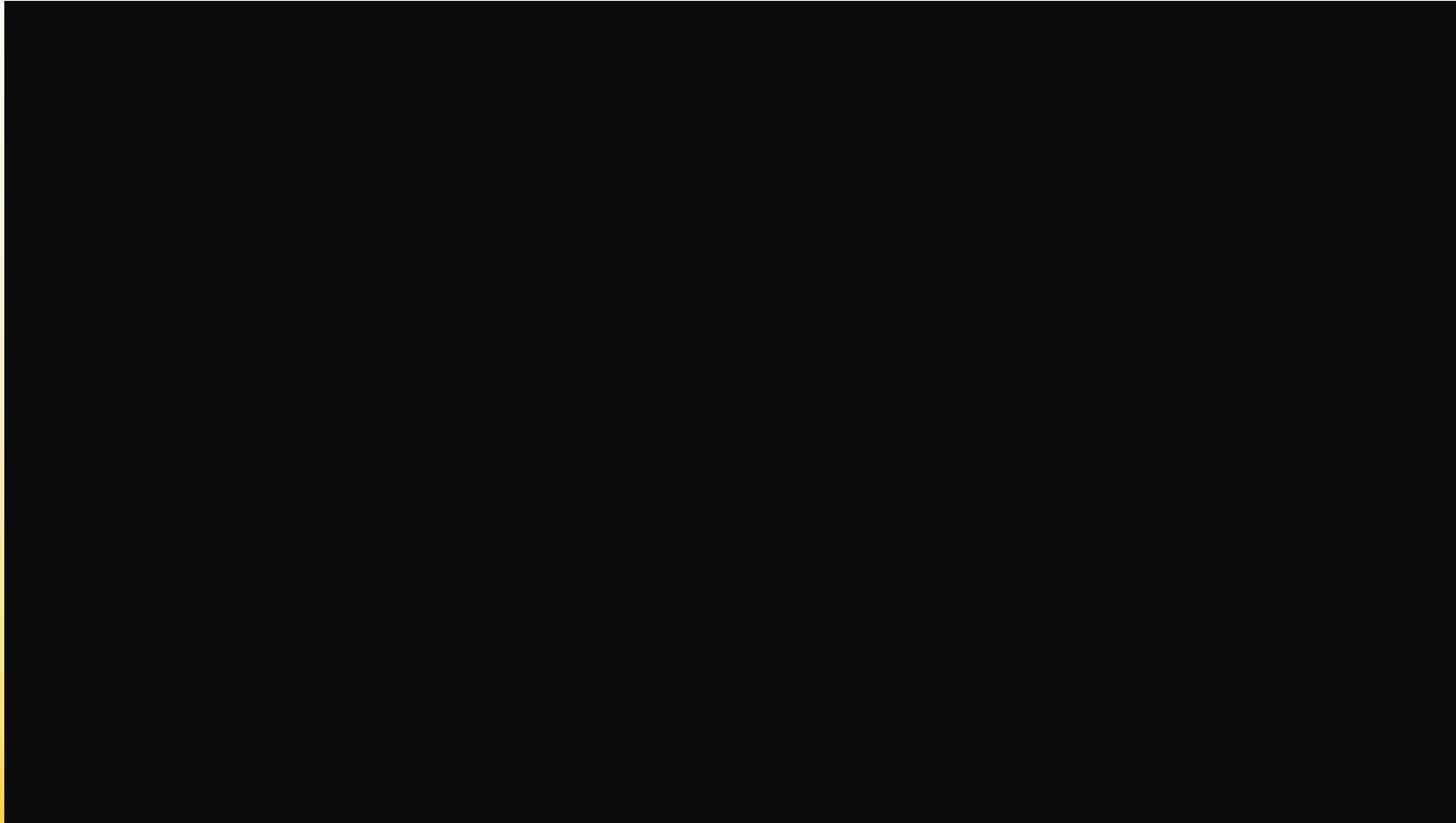
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Stress In the Fire - Rescue Service



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Texas HSC Training Film



Two Faces of Stress



Stress is Necessary

Stress is essential for:

- Strength and toughness
- Growth and development
- Acquire new skills
- Meeting challenges
- Performing difficult missions



Stress Can be Toxic

Stress can lead to:

- Persistent internal distress
- Functional impairment
- Misconduct
- Substance abuse
- Mental health conditions

Four Causes of Stress Injury

Life Threat

A traumatic injury

Due to an experience of death-provoking terror, horror or helplessness

Loss

A grief injury

Due to the loss of cherished people, things or parts of oneself

Inner Conflict

A moral injury

Due to behaviors or the witnessing of behaviors that violate moral values

Wear and Tear

A fatigue injury

Due to the accumulation of stress from all sources over time without sufficient rest and recovery

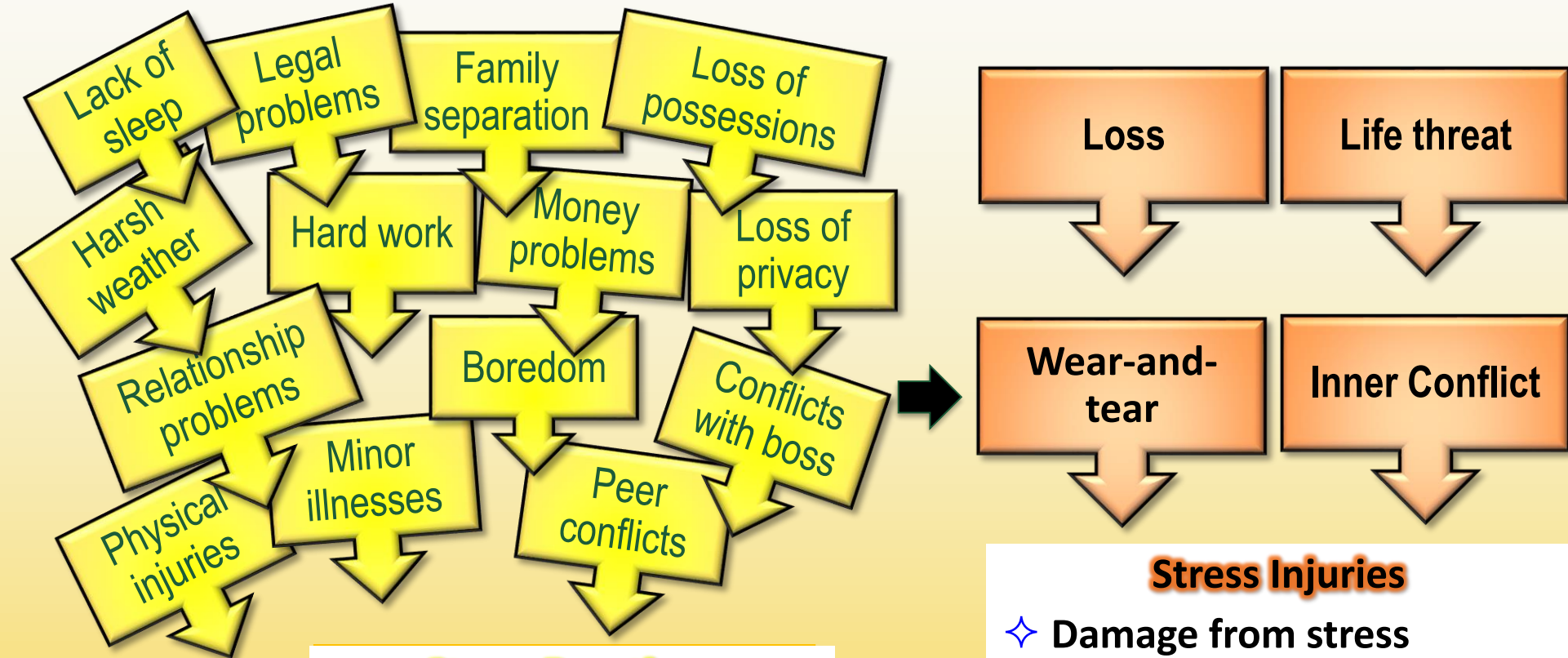
Stress Continuum Model



Stress Continuum Model

READY (Green)	REACTING (Yellow)	INJURED (Orange)	ILL (Red)
<p><u>DEFINITION</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Optimal functioning Adaptive growth Wellness <p><u>FEATURES</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At one's best Well-trained and prepared In control Physically, mentally and spiritually fit Mission-focused Motivated Calm and steady Having fun Behaving ethically 	<p><u>DEFINITION</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mild and transient distress or impairment Always goes away Low risk <p><u>CAUSES</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any stressor <p><u>FEATURES</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeling irritable, anxious or down Loss of motivation Loss of focus Difficulty sleeping Muscle tension or other physical changes Not having fun 	<p><u>DEFINITION</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More severe and persistent distress or impairment Leaves a scar Higher risk <p><u>CAUSES</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Life threat Loss Moral injury Wear and tear <p><u>FEATURES</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of control Panic, rage, or depression No longer feeling like normal self Excessive guilt, shame or blame 	<p><u>DEFINITION</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clinical mental disorder Unhealed stress injury causing life impairment <p><u>TYPES</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PTSD Depression Anxiety Substance abuse <p><u>FEATURES</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Symptoms persist and worsen over time Severe distress or social or occupational impairment

Yellow Zone Reactions vs. Orange Zone Injuries



- Stress Reactions**
- ✦ Bending from stress
 - ✦ Very common
 - ✦ Normal
 - ✦ Always go away

- Stress Injuries**
- ✦ Damage from stress
 - ✦ Less common
 - ✦ Risk for role failure
 - ✦ Risk for stress illness

Orange Zone Indicators



To recognize those who need help, look for the three *Orange Zone Indicators*:

- Recent Stressor Events
- Distress
- Changes in Functioning

Signs and Symptoms of Stress Injuries



Signs (Noted by Others)

Significant and persistent change in behavior or appearance:

- Not talking
- Isolating
- Anger outbursts
- Increased use of Substances
- Making mistakes



Symptoms (Felt by Person)

Not feeling in control of one's body, emotions or thinking:

- Numb
- Disconnected
- Short fuse
- Can't calm down or sleep
- Can't function as well at work or in relationships



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Think about Orange Zone Stress Injury behaviors

What are some of the common ways that peers may present with stress injury related to:

- Life Threat (Trauma Injury)
- Loss (Grief Injury)
- Inner Conflict (Moral Injury)
- Wear and Tear (Fatigue Injury)

Orange Zone Discussion

Orange Zone Indicators



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How did you know you needed help?

Stress First Aid Introduction



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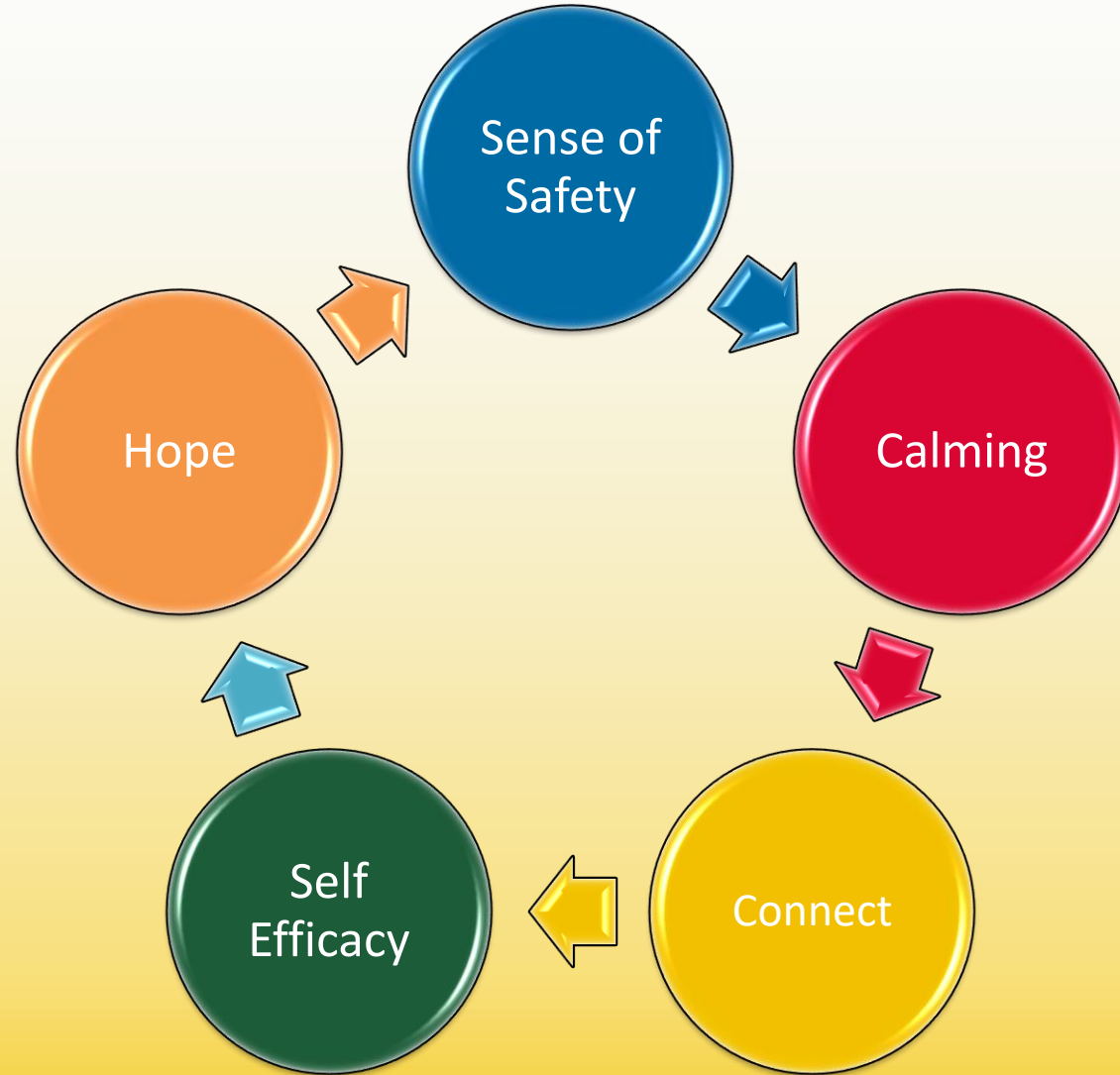
Stress First Aid (SFA) Model



- The Stress First Aid (SFA) model is a self-care and peer support model developed for those in high-risk occupations like military, fire and rescue, and law enforcement.
- It includes seven actions that will help you to identify and address early signs of stress reactions in yourself and others in an ongoing way (not just after “critical incidents”).



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Factors in Recovery From Adversity and Stress

Stress First Aid Model



Seven Cs of Stress First Aid:

1. CHECK

Assess: observe and listen

2. COORDINATE

Get help, refer as needed

3. COVER

Get to safety ASAP

4. CALM

Relax, slow down, refocus

5. CONNECT

Get support from others

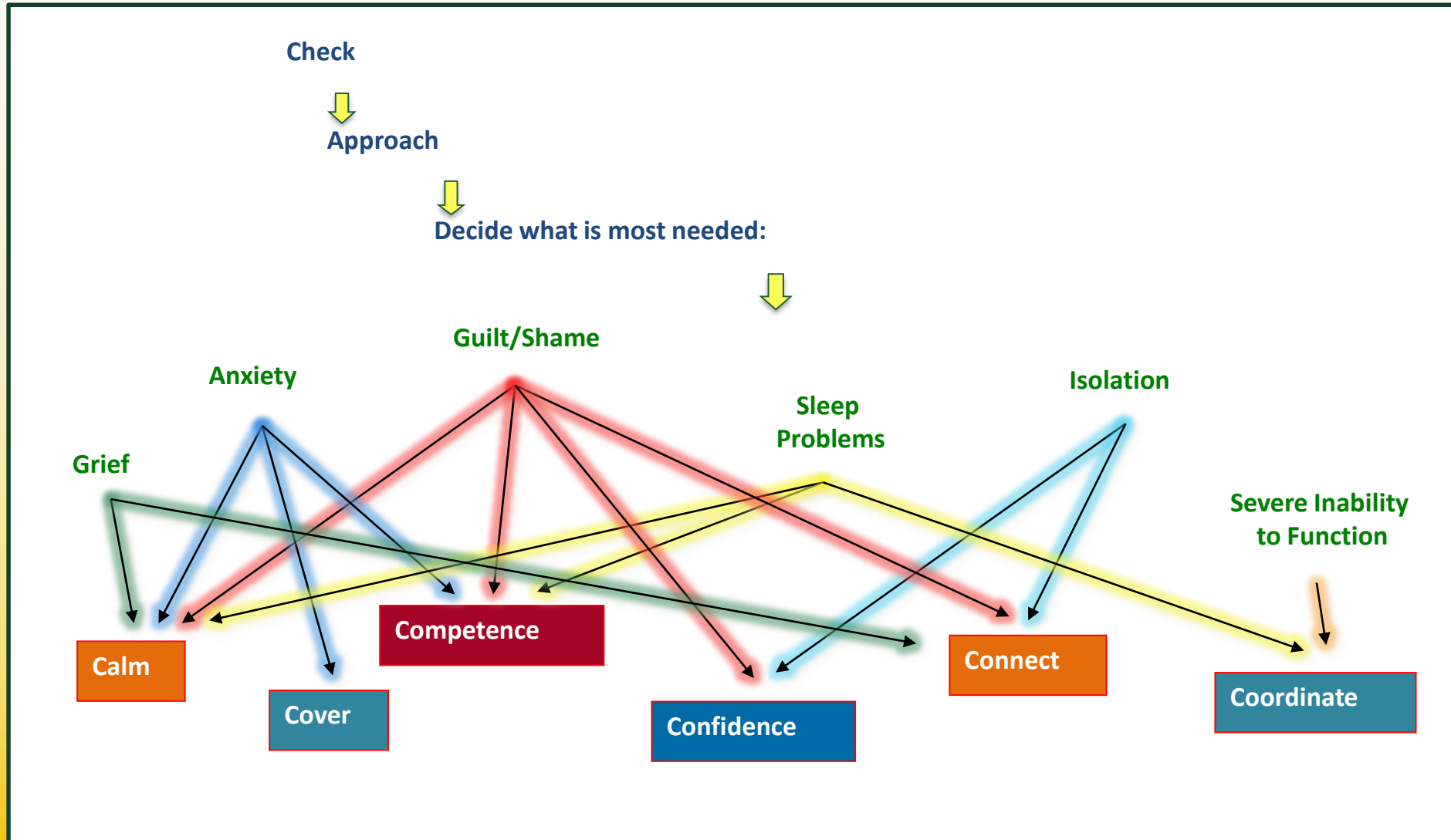
6. COMPETENCE

Restore effectiveness

7. CONFIDENCE

Restore self-esteem and hope

How Can You Use SFA?



Peer Support: Why is it Important?

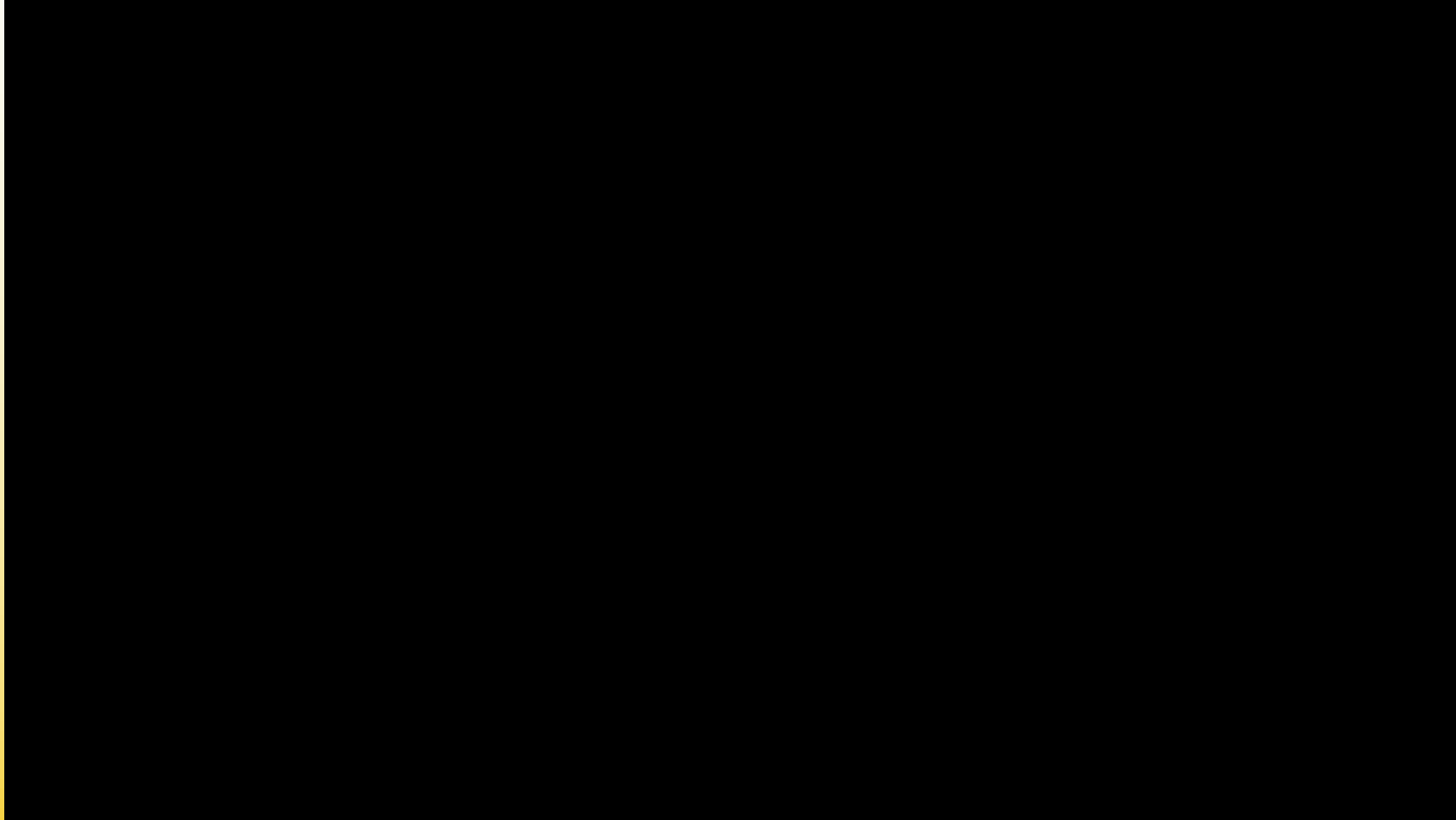
- Most people exposed to traumatic and loss events will cope, but some will become ill
- Those that do are unlikely to seek help
- There is evidence to suggest that effective early management of traumatic stress exists



Why is SFA Peer-Driven?



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Crew Member Support Example

“For me, what made a good mentor was the older, gruff, rough around edges, fire dog. That’s who I went to. That’s who I looked up to. That’s who I knew had gone through fire. He was not trained in behavioral health, wellness, or self-care, but he got it, because he had gone through the fire, and knew what it was like. Even though he didn’t go through what I went through, he knew what it was like. To me it meant the world, it meant so much to be in his presence, and to this day I see him and it’s comfort. Those who have gone before, they’re amazing.”

Essential SFA Skills

Recognize

Recognize when a peer has a stress injury

Act

If you see something, say something

- To the distressed person
- To a trusted support of the distressed person

Know

Know at least 2 trusted resources you would offer to a peer in distress

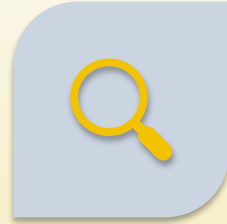
Functions of Stress First Aid



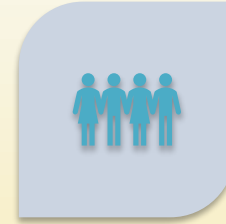
REDUCE THE
RISK FOR
STRESS
INJURIES



CONTINUOUSLY
MONITOR
STRESS LEVELS



RECOGNIZE
QUICKLY THOSE
WHO ARE
REACTING TO A
WIDE RANGE
OF STRESSORS



OFFER A
SPECTRUM OF
INTERVENTIONS



MONITOR
PROGRESS OF
RECOVERY



BRIDGE
INDIVIDUALS TO
HIGHER LEVELS
OF CARE WHEN
NEEDED

Stress First Aid is NOT:



An event only intervention



A one-time only intervention



A replacement for medical or behavioral health interventions



A replacement for prevention efforts

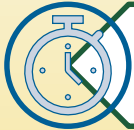
Stress First Aid Core Principles



SFA fosters strong leadership and peer support



SFA catches stress reactions early



SFA occurs wherever and whenever it is needed



SFA is individualized, not one-size-fits all



SFA is an ongoing process



SFA bridges individuals to higher levels of care



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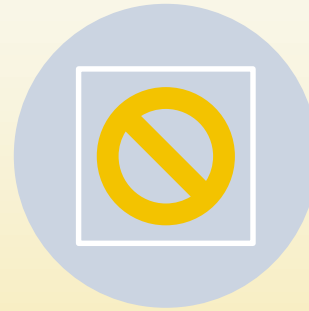
When Is SFA Needed?



NO LONGER
FEELING LIKE
YOUR NORMAL
SELF



LOSS OF CONTROL
OF EMOTIONS OR
BEHAVIOR



EXCESSIVE GUILT,
SHAME OR BLAME



PANIC, RAGE OR
DEPRESSION

Stress First Aid Examples

- “This isn’t about fixing someone, it’s not about psychology, or, “how can I give someone the tools to fix themselves?” There is nothing really to fix; nothing’s broken. It’s more, “these are things you need to be cognizant of so that you can make changes in behavior and get back into a better track.”
- “This model helps people understand that these are all common reactions so they can be very well aware. And the seven Cs are not so clinical or diagnostic. They are more personal, interpersonal, and tactical.”

Stress First Aid Actions



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Check Actions

Observe	Keep Track	Examine	Decide
Look Listen	Stressors Distress Changes in functioning Response to interventions	One-to-one interactions Collateral information	Dangerousness Stress Zone Needs

Check: Why is it Needed?



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Those injured by stress may be the last to recognize it

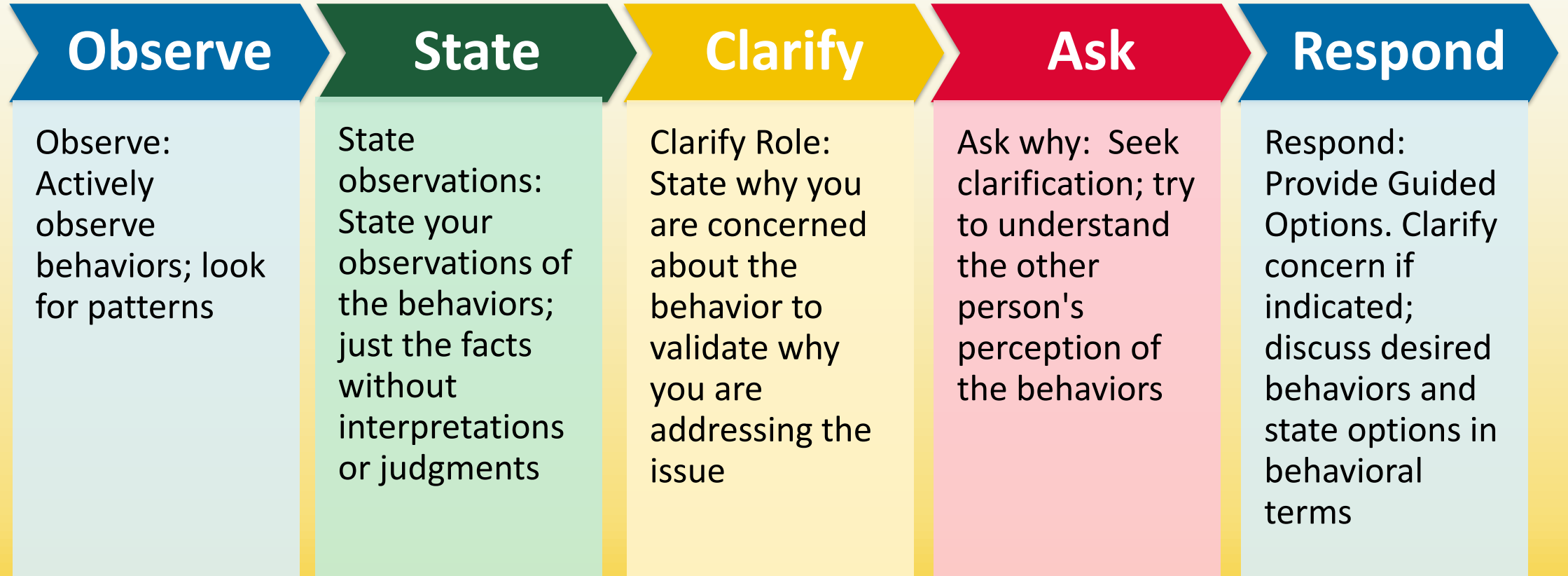
Stigma can be an obstacle to asking for help

Stress zones and needs change over time

Risks from stress injuries may last a long time



Check Skill: OSCAR



Check Tool: “OSCAR” Communication



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FDNY Program



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Signs: Significant and persistent negative changes in behavior / habits

- Becoming more isolated from others
- Uncharacteristic behavior
- Making mistakes
- Calling home more often

Symptoms: Not feeling in control of one's body, emotions or thinking

- Sleep changes or nightmares
- Loss of focus, memory, or the ability to think rationally
- Inability to engage in or enjoy things you usually like
- Feeling unusually numb or remorseless
- Compulsive behavior
- Experiencing intense sadness, anger, or anxiety
- Feeling persistent, intense guilt or shame
- Wanting to avoid reminders

Check: Indicators of Severe Stress Reactions



Check Strategies: Others

Offer basic resources like food, water, etc

Begin with a casual two way communication to get someone talking

Find the right way to check on someone without annoying them (i.e., email/texting versus calling)

Check in more than once, especially on anniversaries



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What are some ways that have worked well to ***check*** how a peer is doing when you see:

- Role compromise during a call
- Withdrawal and isolation
- Anger, outbursts, rage
- Excessive shame, guilt, or self-blame



Group Discussion



Coordinate Actions

Collaborate

To promote recovery
To ensure safety
To get more
information

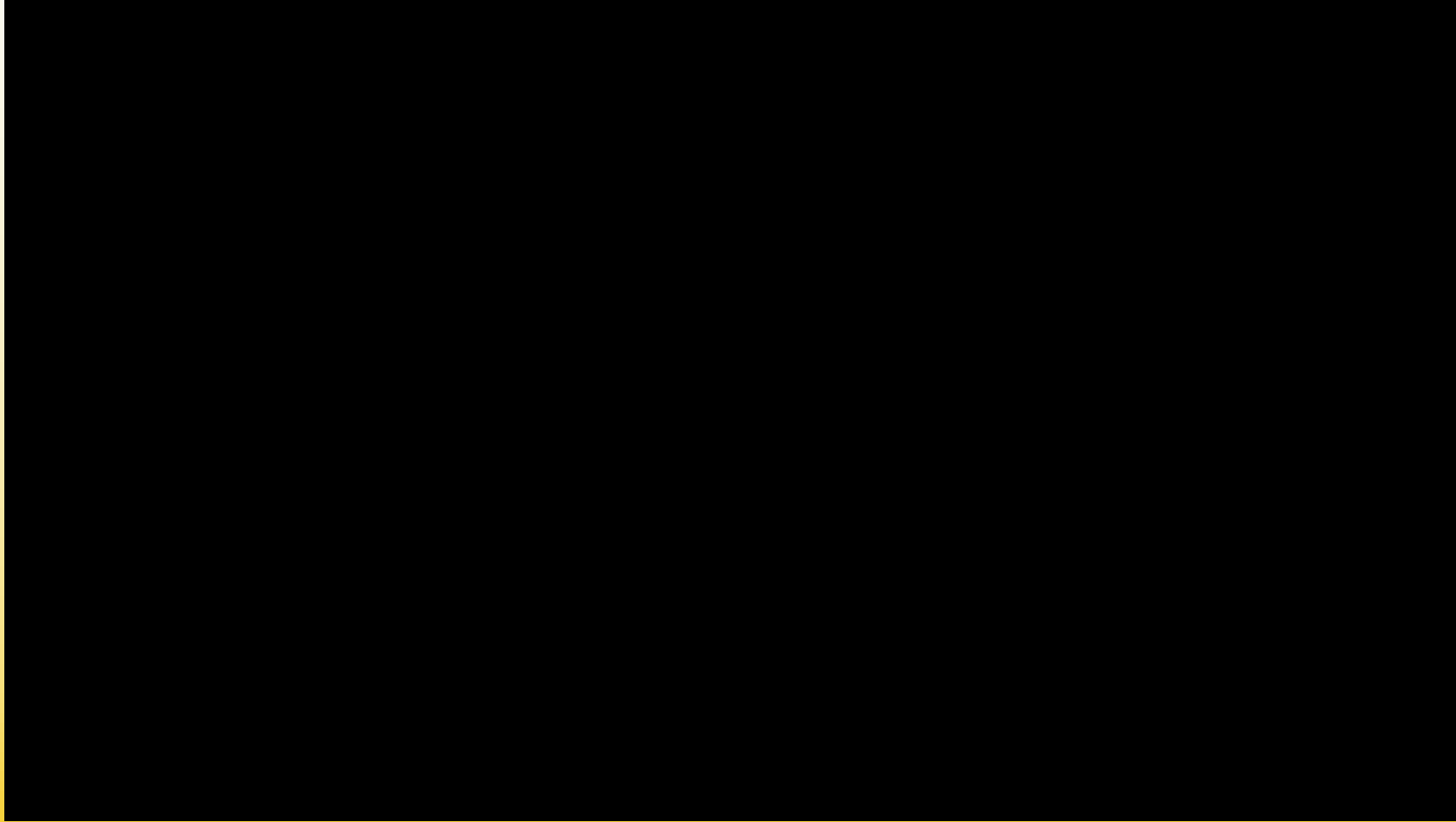
Inform

Chain of command
Family
Peers

Refer

Recommend
resources
Consultation
Direct hand-off

Coordinate: Referral is Helpful



Coordinate: Reasons for Referral



Poses a threat to self or others



Uncertainty about the strength of the working alliance



Uncertainty regarding stress level, dangerousness or level of impairment

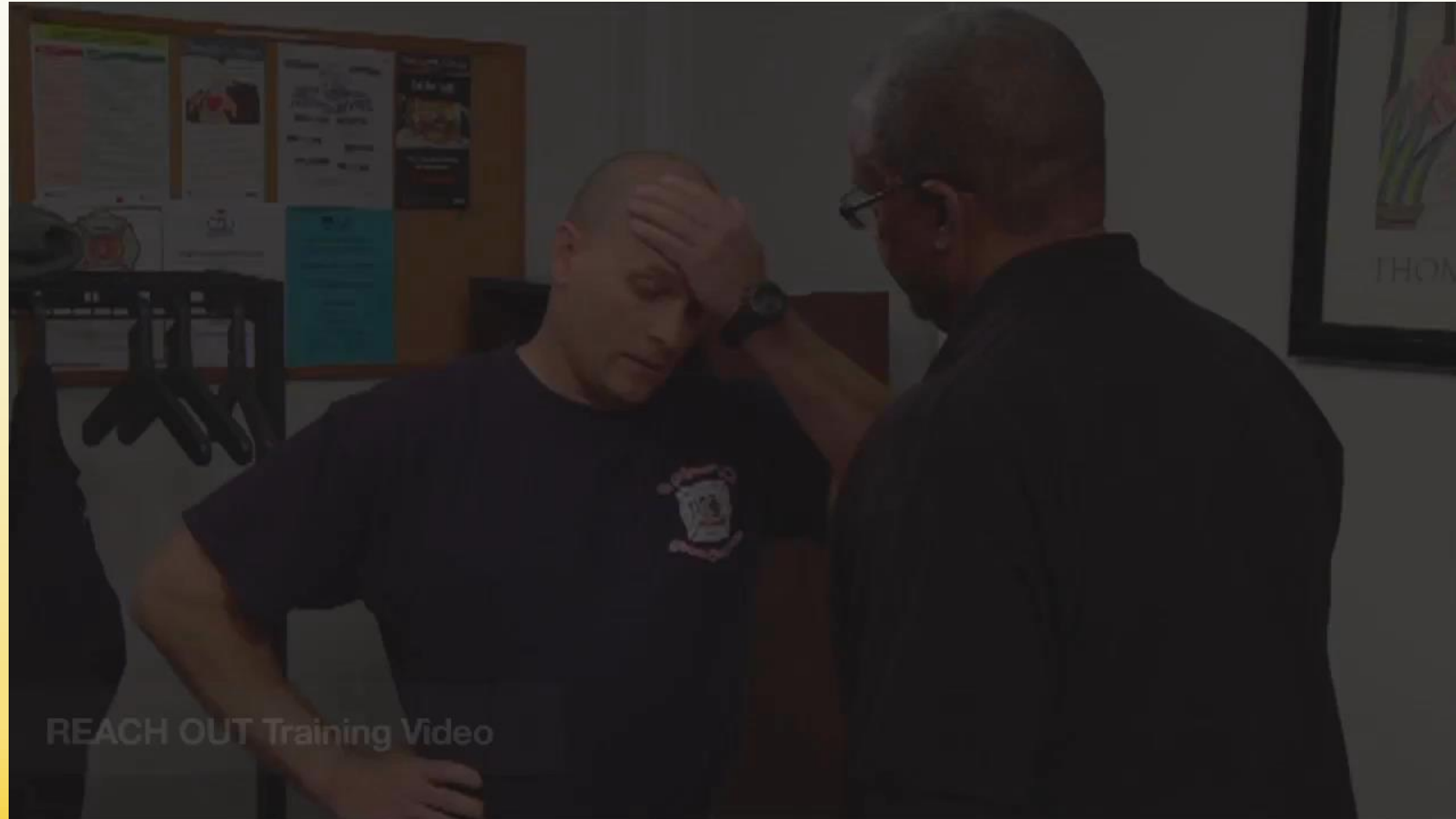


Worsening over time or failure to improve

Coordinate: Fire Example



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What are some of the barriers or challenges to connecting with resources?

What are some of the characteristics of a trusted resource?

Identify at least two trusted resources you would refer a friend with a stress injury to



Group Discussion



Cover Actions

Stand By	Make Safe	Make Others Safe	Encourage Perception of Safety
Ready to assist Watch and listen Hold attention	Authoritative presence Warn Protect Assist	Protect Warn	Caring presence Reduced chaos Reduced danger Listen and communicate



Examples of Need for Cover

A firefighter in a life-threat situation is not thinking clearly or making good decisions because of stress

A firefighter has frozen or panicked in a life-threat situation

A firefighter feels guilty because his family has concerns about his safety following a line-of-duty death of a co-worker

An EMT has threatened others

A medic has expressed serious thoughts of suicide



Cover Strategies: Self



Find those people, places, or actions that feels safe to you and call on them when you need to feel more safe



When you feel unsafe, distract yourself by focusing on something near you or your own breath or thought (i.e., counting)



Realize that no one is perfect and everyone is going to have strengths and vulnerabilities – be aware of your own



Cover Strategies: Others

Slowly implement SFA actions into any organization so it is normal well in advance of anything happening

Depending on what a person is doing and how they are responding, adjust communication with that person to be more abrupt or directive if it's necessary to keep them safe

Let others know that no one is perfect, and let those around you know your strengths as well as your own vulnerabilities

After line of duty deaths, assign a trusted family liaison who is also given support for the work they do

Cover Example



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Bringing Out the Dead, 1999, Paramount



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What are some ways that you have seen that cover might be needed in your work?

What are some ways that you find cover for yourself?

What are some ways that you have offered or been offered cover?



Group Discussion



Cover: Group Discussion

- A respected member of your crew has had a hard couple of years. He had an injury, financial problems, and lost a close friend to a MVA. Recently, he separated from his spouse and had to move out of the family home.
- He has been drinking a lot and often appears to be under the influence of alcohol when not at work.
- He is distracted and expresses a sense of hopelessness that things will improve.
- Today, he arrives to work late.
- When you begin to talk with him about your observations he says, “what difference does it make? Nothing really matters anyway. It doesn’t matter if I’m here or not.”

Cover: Group Discussion

- What kind of stress injury may be present?
- What SFA action(s) would you use?
- What is your plan for approaching the situation?
- What other information would you want to know?
- Outline the exact words/sentences you would use.



Calm Actions

Quiet

Stop physical exertion
Reduce hyper-alertness
Slow down heart rate
Relax

Compose

Draw attention outwards
Distract
Re-focus

Foster Rest

Recuperate
Sleep
Time out

Soothe

Listen empathically
Reduce emotional intensity

Examples of Need for Calm

A firefighter is pacing and wringing her hands while on duty in the firehouse. She just heard that her son, an Army Sergeant deployed in Afghanistan, has been seriously injured.

An EMT responding to a multiple vehicle crash is talking too fast and not reacting appropriately to commands or questions.

An EMT punches his locker and is yelling and kicking things. He has just returned from a call responding to a baby in a coma after being shaken by a parent.

Calm Example



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Ladder 49, 2004, Touchstone

Calm Strategies: Self



Regular physical activity



Spend time with family and close friends



Take a short break



Build in rewarding activities to get energized during down cycles



Try to see things from a higher vantage point

Breathing Technique



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Kelly McGonigal – Power Breath Mind Hack 2016



Calm Strategies I: Others

Emphasize the importance of personalized self-calming strategies

Ask for help to empower and distract the other person

Get the person to look at you. Be very specific about what you want them to do

Use light humor

Make every effort not to call attention to someone's stress

Acknowledge future stressors and possible need for support in a matter of fact way

If the person can't focus or make good decisions, calmly use their name and say exactly what is needed



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What are some examples of how calm might be needed in your work?

What are some ways that you find calm for yourself?

What are some ways that you have offered or been offered calming actions?



Group Discussion



Connect Actions

Be With

- Maintain Presence
- Keep Eye contact
- Listen
- Empathize
- Accept

Promote Connection

- Find Trusted Others
- Foster contact with others
- Encourage Contact with others

Reduce Isolation

- Improve understanding
- Correct misconceptions
- Restore trust
- Invite and include

Rationale for Connect



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Kelly McGonigal, TED Talk 2013

Connect: Types of Support



- **Instrumental support:** material aid (such as assistance with daily tasks)
- **Informational support:** relevant information (such as advice or guidance)
- **Emotional support:** empathy, caring, reassurance and giving opportunities for venting
- **Inclusion:** Make efforts to pull the person in

Examples of Need for Connect

A young firefighter freezes during his first major working fire. Although only disabled for a few seconds, he feels ashamed and withdraws from all contact with crew members.

A warehouse roof collapses during a fire, killing four firefighters. Some department members feel that better coordination could have prevented at least a few of the deaths. Firefighters not involved in the fire avoid speaking or interacting with those who were involved. Unit cohesion drops.

Connect Strategies: Self



Surround yourself with people who are genuine, authentic, honest



Make friends with people you can be yourself with and talk with about what bothers you



Discipline yourself to have conversations people who know you well enough to know when something is bothering you



Reprioritize your schedule to spend more time with those who mean the most to you

Connect Strategies: Others



Hold the crew accountable for treating each other with respect



If someone has retreated because of an incident, find ways to indirectly include them in collaborative projects, to get them back into doing something meaningful



With introverts, get them re-connected after they recharge, whatever that looks like for them



If someone is resistant to getting support, and they trust you, don't be afraid to be more authoritative in getting them the help they need



In the middle of intensive stress, keep people moving or get them engaged in activities that facilitate talking while you do things



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What are some examples of how connect might be needed in your work?

What are some ways that you have been able to connect with others that have been helpful for you?

What are some ways that you have offered or been offered connect actions?



Group Discussion



Competence Actions Foster

Occupational Skills

Brief operational pause
Mentor back to duty
Retrain
Reassign

Well-Being Skills

Problem-solving skills
Health and fitness
Managing trauma and loss reminders

Social Skills

Develop peer relationships
Develop personal relationships
Seek mentoring

Competence: When is it Needed?

1. When lack of experience or training contributes to difficulty meeting job demands
 - Operational challenges are new to a crew member
 - An individual is unprepared to handle specific emotional aspects of the job
 - There is a lack of sufficient training in certain aspects of the job
2. When stress reactions cause loss of previous skills or abilities
 - Mental focus or clarity, cognitive functioning
 - Emotional or behavioral, physiological self-control
 - Enthusiasm and motivation
 - Social aptitude
3. When stress reactions cause new challenges to coping
 - Trauma or loss reminders, intrusive memories
 - Difficulty relaxing, slowing down or getting to sleep
 - Difficulty maintaining an emotional “even keel”
 - Dread and desire to avoid re-exposure

Examples of Need for Competence

A firefighter who narrowly escaped a ceiling collapse experiences persistent mental confusion and slowed, unclear thinking.

An EMS professional who developed wear-and-tear stress injury loses the ability to stay calm when dealing with co-workers.

A chief who loses a firefighter becomes hesitant about sending subordinates into hazardous situations, increasing the danger to the entire department.



Competence Procedures

STOP

- Rest, time to recover
- Identify challenges to recovery
- Don't do things that aren't working

BACK UP

- Retrain/refresh skills
- Mentor/problem solve
- Learn new skills

MOVE FORWARD

- Practice skills
- Gradually increase responsibilities
- Trouble shoot obstacles
- Celebrate success

Competence Strategies: Self



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



Be more disciplined in taking whatever healthy steps support you in dealing with stress



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



Competence Strategies I: Others

Start with absolute basics and provide stepped escalation of responsibility in a calculated manner

If someone is overthinking, give them simple ways to occupy their thoughts, like counting random numbers or steps

If someone is struggling, find someone who they can relate to and communicate with, and assign that person to them

Figure out how the person is going to best learn something, and have them teach the same strategy to others



Competence Strategies II: Others

Give the person responsibility little by little, so that they are more and more in control

Remind them that everyone is human and all reactions acceptable in the right context

Help them figure out what they might do differently in the future

If sense of duty and commitment lead to overworking, make sure they're getting rest

Before recommending time off, make sure taking time off is feasible



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What are some examples of how competence might be needed in your work?

What are some ways that you have been able to increase sense of competence in yourself?

What are some ways that you have offered or been offered competence-enhancing actions?



Group Discussion



Confidence Actions Rebuild

Trust

Trust in:
Peers
Equipment
Leaders
Mission

Hope

Forgiveness of self
Forgiveness of others
Imagining the future

Self-Worth

Belief in self
Accurate self-concept
Self-respect

Meaning

Making sense
Purpose
Faith



Double-Edged Sword of Firefighter Ideals

Strength	Guiding Ideal	Vulnerability
Placing the welfare of others above one's own welfare	Selflessness	Not seeking help for health problems because personal health is not a priority
Commitment to accomplishing missions and protecting others	Loyalty	Survivor guilt and complicated bereavement after loss of friends
Toughness and ability to endure hardships without complaint	Stoicism	Not acknowledging significant symptoms, and suffering after returning home
Following an internal moral compass to choose "right" over "wrong"	Moral Code	Feeling frustrated and betrayed when others fail to follow a moral code
Becoming the best and most effective professional possible	Excellence	Feeling ashamed of (denial or minimization) imperfections

Double Edged Sword Example

“There is a moral code. You value selflessness, you’re not taking care of yourself, you’re being focused on your family, on everybody else but you. You focus on the crew first. And you attempt to not look at or allow yourself to feel. You use it as a distraction. Ego, culture, fear. Those things get in the way all the time. We say that if you do everything right you won’t get hurt. It’s sort of implied. When something goes wrong, we look back to see what went wrong. The dangers of the job, whether you do everything right or not, need to be discussed ahead of time.”

Double-Edged Sword of Firefighter Ideals



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Examples of Need for Confidence

A firefighter whose failure to take proper precautions contributes to the death of fellow firefighter feels extremely guilty and becomes self-destructive

A paramedic who developed wear-and-tear stress reaction loses respect for his leaders and becomes angry and irritable

A firefighter with significant life threat stress suffers lowered functioning; loses his spiritual faith and his professional capabilities; and becomes depressed

You see a change in non verbal cues indicating that a crewmember has low self-confidence, not squared away like he normally would be, no eye contact, or a change in healthy routines, such as skipping PT



Confidence Strategies: Self



Use small triumphs to build confidence



If you have self-doubt, read more self-help books or tactical reports



Don't push yourself to "process" a situation in any particular time frame, but if something triggers you, give yourself time and space to integrate it



Use the wisdom gained from hard experiences to reconfirm your values, make changes in your life, appreciate what you value, or help others



If you have tried to mentor someone and cannot get them up to speed, realize that not all personalities fit this job, and sometimes you have to walk away



Confidence Strategies I: Others


Normalize guilt and let them know they are not alone in experiencing stress reactions

Give inexperienced staff tasks that they can be successful at, solicit their opinions, or find some way they can contribute

If someone shows severe stress, talk with them, give them relevant reading materials, and connect them to people who have dealt with similar things

If someone continues to get triggered, mentor them to consider their options, including leaving the department

Confidence Strategies II: Others



Consider involving other disciplines or mentors/peers who can implement Confidence either more effectively or in a complementary way to you

Improve communication, mentoring and information about mission and acknowledgement of person's value

Make efforts to confront stigma about stress reactions

Foster and support doing things that will alleviate and mitigate harmful effects of stress

Help to re-establish belief in colleagues who have stress reactions



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What are some examples of how confidence might be needed in your work?

What are some ways that you have been able to increase sense of confidence in yourself?

What are some ways that you have offered or been offered confidence-enhancing actions?



Group Discussion

Stress First Aid Group Format



SFA Group Format: Introductions



INTRODUCE YOURSELF. STATE THAT YOU WILL BE USING A STRESS FIRST AID FORMAT FOR THE DISCUSSION



IDENTIFY THE INCIDENT, AND GROUND RULES (FOCUS ON PEER SUPPORT)



SAY SOMETHING LIKE, “I AM NOW GOING TO ASK ABOUT SOME ESSENTIAL NEEDS THAT CAN BE IMPACTED BY SIGNIFICANT EVENTS.”



Essential Need	Question
Cover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="861 615 2232 668">■ How has the incident affected your sense of safety?
Calm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="861 846 2288 976">■ What changes have occurred regarding sleep, feelings of being on edge, or ability to keep calm?



Essential Need	Question
Connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="764 554 2211 758">■ Has there been an impact on how you talk with each other, work morale, or connecting with family and friends?<li data-bbox="764 858 2168 986">■ Is there someone you feel comfortable talking with about this?<li data-bbox="764 1086 2168 1215">■ Has anyone you know done or said something that really helped?



Essential Need	Question
Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="741 558 2232 762">■ Any concerns about being able to handle what's going on in your life, deal with your stress reactions, or do your work?<li data-bbox="741 862 2244 1066">■ What are some things that you have done to cope that have been helpful in the past, or have been helpful since this incident?



Essential Need	Question
Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="657 729 2283 936">■ Any change in your confidence in your ability to do your job in the same way as before the incident, in equipment, or in leadership?<li data-bbox="657 1033 2232 1165">■ Does this event/incident hold special meaning or connect with other experiences in any way?

Group Format Wrap Up



Say: “We have talked about the ways that this experience has affected your sense of Safety, Calming, Connectedness, Competence, and Confidence. Is there anything else that that you wish to share?”



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



Say: “Moving forward, is there any other support I could help you obtain at this time, from me, EAP, or anyone else?”



Wear and Tear Group Review

**After
extended
periods
heightened
stress, ask:**

Over the past (time frame):

- What have been your greatest challenges, hassles, or frustrations?
- What have been your greatest rewards or successes?
- What does it mean to be a (name role) in this unit?



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Questions or Comments