



Behavioral Health for the Fire Service Participant Manual

Introduction

Behavioral health is just as important as physical health for firefighters and emergency services personnel. Take this course to learn more about what behavioral health means to you, its cultural progress and future potential, along with some of the many concerns responders and their families are facing. The presentation also covers a variety of tools, resources, and programs to help those impacted by the job overcome existing or potential behavioral health issues.

The purpose of this workshop is to:

- Understand the concepts of behavioral health, mental health, and mental illness
- Understand the major behavioral health concerns for firefighters, EMS personnel, and their families
- Understand how behavioral health initiatives have developed and changed in the fire service and the future direction of behavioral health in the fire service

Participant Materials

- PowerPoint Slides

About the National Volunteer Fire Council

The National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) is the leading nonprofit membership association representing the interests of the volunteer fire, EMS, and rescue services. The NVFC serves as the voice of the volunteer in the national arena and provides invaluable tools, resources, programs, and advocacy for first responders across the nation.

The mission of the NVFC is to provide a unified voice for volunteer Fire/EMS organizations. This mission is accomplished by:

- Representing the interests of the volunteer fire, emergency medical, or rescue organizations at the U.S. Congress and federal agencies
- Promoting the interests of the state and local organizations at the national level
- Promoting and providing education and training for the volunteer fire, emergency medical, or rescue organizations
- Providing representation on national standards setting committees and projects

- Gathering information from and disseminating information to the volunteer fire, emergency medical, or rescue organizations

NVFC Resources

The foundation of the NVFC is its web site www.nvfc.org. This web site serves as a gateway to information for the fire and emergency services, as well as for potential volunteers. Resources such as guides, online training, data, and best practices can be found on a variety of topics.

Topics include, but are not limited to:

- EMS/Rescue
- Emergency Preparedness
- Grants and Funding
- Health and Safety
- Legislation
- Line of Duty Deaths
- Reputation Management
- Recruitment and Retention

The NVFC is the only organization dedicated to serving the interests of the volunteer fire, rescue, and emergency medical services.

NVFC Programs

The NVFC administers a wide array of programs to assist fire departments, firefighters, EMS personnel, and emergency responders. These programs address issues ranging from health and safety, recruitment and retention, fire department capacity, fire prevention, and more.

Programs include:

Fire Corps (www.nvfc.org/programs/firecorps/)

Fire Corps is a program under the federal Citizen Corps initiative that connects resource-constrained fire/EMS departments with community members to assist in non-emergency roles. This allows first responders to focus on training and operational duties while at the same time increasing the department's capacity and services. Fire Corps members can assist with administration, fundraising, public fire prevention and life safety education, home safety checks and smoke alarm installation programs, apparatus maintenance, and much more.

Heart-Healthy Firefighter Program (www.nvfc.org/programs/heart-healthy-firefighter-program/)

Heart attack is the leading cause of on-duty firefighter fatalities, accounting for around half of all firefighter deaths each year. The NVFC launched the Heart-Healthy Firefighter Program in 2003 to combat this alarming trend through education, awareness, and resources. The Heart-Healthy Firefighter Program promotes fitness, nutrition, and health awareness for all members of the fire and emergency services, both volunteer and career.

Make Me A Firefighter (www.makemeafirefighter.org)

Finding and recruiting potential volunteers is a multi-step process that requires dedication, follow-up, and follow-through. To resource-constrained departments, developing and implementing a full-scale recruitment campaign may seem daunting. Fortunately, the Make Me A Firefighter campaign is here to help. The campaign is designed to simplify and streamline local recruitment efforts by providing departments with a one-stop-shop to advertise their volunteer opportunities, download ready-to-use recruitment materials, plan events, and keep track of potential recruits.

National Junior Firefighter Program (www.nvfc.org/programs/national-junior-firefighter-program/)

Getting youth involved in the fire and emergency services fosters the next generation of first responders and creates a network of community supporters of the emergency services. The NVFC National Junior Firefighter Program serves as an umbrella for junior firefighter programs nationwide to promote youth participation within the fire and emergency services community. The program is a powerful recruitment tool for departments and provides youth with valuable life skills such as teamwork, leadership, responsibility, and commitment.

Serve Strong (www.nvfc.org/servestrong/)

Firefighters are tough, but so are the challenges we face. Our service to our community can take a toll on our health, and oftentimes we forget that health and safety are key to being the best firefighter or EMT we can be. Serve Strong provides firefighters and EMTs with proven wellness programs and resources to help you prevent cancer, reduce heart attack risk, cope with behavioral health issues, and engage in safe practices on and off the fireground.

Share the Load (www.nvfc.org/programs/share-the-load-program/)

Taking care of your mental health is as important as managing your physical health. The NVFC's Share the Load™ program provides access to critical resources and information to help first responders and their families manage and overcome personal and work-related problems. This includes the Directory of Behavioral Health Professionals as a resource to find local assistance for behavioral health issues, as well as the Fire/EMS Helpline, which offers free 24-hour assistance with addiction issues.

Wildland Fire Assessment Program (www.nvfc.org/programs/wildland-fire-assessment-resources)


The two-year Wildland Fire Assessment Program (WFAP) is a joint effort by the U.S. Forest Service and the NVFC to provide firefighters with training on how to properly conduct assessments for homes located in wildland fire areas. This is the first program targeted to volunteers that specifically prepares a firefighter for how to conduct an assessment and what to look for during an assessment, as well as provides departments with the printed materials they may need.

Module 2

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH IN THE FIRE SERVICE

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the concepts of behavioral health, mental health, and mental illness
2. Understand the major behavioral health concerns for firefighters, EMS personnel, and their families
3. Understand how behavioral health initiatives have developed and changed in the fire service and the future direction of behavioral health in the fire service



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Module 3

What is Behavioral Health?



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BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

is a term used to refer to fields related to the study, assessment, diagnosis, treatment, and

PREVENTION

Of mental illness and substance abuse.



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Think About:

- Mental Illness
- Coronary Disease
- Diabetes

What comes to mind?



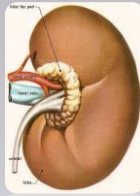
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Mental Illness



Coronary Disease



Diabetes



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- Mental illness, coronary disease, and diabetes:
- All affect an organ in the body
- All can be hereditary
- All can be exacerbated by stress
- All may be helped by diet and exercise
- All may be treated with medication

You can't cure or prevent any of them by "mind over matter"



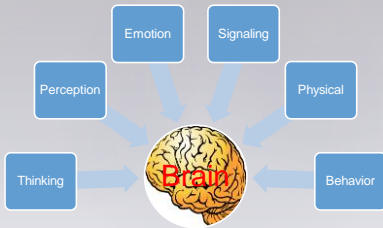
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The one major difference is that mental health problems are often short term and reversible.



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When mental health issues prevent the brain from **working properly**, one or more of its **6 functions** will be disrupted.



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Module 4

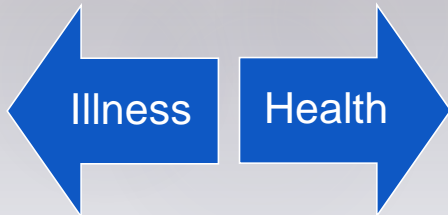
Mental health is as important as physical health.

- Good mental health contributes greatly to an overall feeling of well-being
- Untreated mental health disorders in adults can lead to diminished functioning, substance abuse, poor quality of life, and increased mortality
- Research shows untreated mental illness can slow healing from physical illnesses



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Continuum of Behavioral Health



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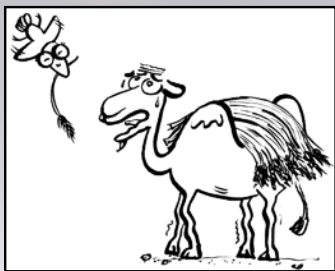
Factors that Increase Risk

- Being previously in treatment for another disorder
- Starting out as a firefighter at a young age
- Being unmarried
- Holding a supervisory rank in the fire service
- Proximity to death during a traumatic event
- Experiencing a series of events back-to-back



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It's the little things...



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Physical Injuries



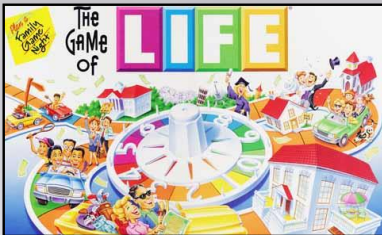
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Competing Priorities



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Significant Life Events



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Shift Changes/Sleep Disturbances



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Loss and Grief



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Depression



- Persistent feelings of sadness or anxiety
- Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities that lasts for more than two weeks
- Changes in appetite that result in weight loss or gain unrelated to dieting
- Insomnia or oversleeping
- Loss of energy or increased fatigue
- Restlessness or irritability
- Feelings of worthlessness or persistent guilt
- Difficulty thinking, concentrating, remembering or making decisions
- Ongoing body aches and pains,
- problems with digestion that are not caused by physical disease
- Increased drinking, cigarette smoking, or using prescription or illicit drugs
- **Thoughts of death or suicide or attempted suicide**



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Anxiety



- Painful, intrusive memories; recurring nightmares
- Fatigue, headaches, muscle tension, muscle aches, irritability, or difficulty swallowing
- Persistent obsessive thoughts
- Intense feelings of panic and fear
- Sweating, trembling, nausea, and difficulty talking
- Excessive, irrational or ongoing anxiety or fear
- Feelings of dread



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Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

- Hopelessness about the future
- Memory problems
- Trouble concentrating
- Difficulty maintaining close relationships
- Irritability or anger
- Overwhelming guilt or shame
- Self-destructive behavior, such as drinking too much
- Trouble sleeping
- Being easily startled or frightened
- Hearing or seeing things that aren't there
- Flashbacks, or reliving the traumatic event for minutes or even days at a time
- Upsetting dreams about the traumatic event
- Trying to avoid thinking or talking about the traumatic event
- Feeling emotionally numb
- Avoiding activities you once enjoyed



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Responder Fatigue Syndrome

Cognitive	Emotional	Behavioral	Spiritual	Personal Relationships	Physical Somatic	Work Performance
Lowered concentration Decreased self-esteem Apathy Rigidity Disorientation Perfectionism Minimization Preoccupation with trauma Thoughts of self-harm or harm to others	Powerlessness Anxiety Guilt Anger/rage Survivor guilt Shutdown Numbness Fear Helplessness Sadness Depression Emotional roller coaster Depleted Overly sensitive	Impatient Irritable Withdrawn Moody Regression Sleep disturbance Nightmares Appetite changes Hypervigilant Elevated startle response Accident proneness Losing things	Questioning the meaning of life Loss of purpose Lack of self-satisfaction Pervasive hopelessness Anger at God Questioning of prior religious beliefs Loss of faith in a higher power Greater skepticism about religion	Withdrawal Decreased interest in intimacy or sex Mistrust Isolation from others Over-protection as a parent Projection of anger or blame Intolerance Loneliness Increased interpersonal conflicts	Shock Sweating Rapid heartbeat Hiccoughing Aches and pains Dizziness Increased number and intensity of medical maladies Other somatic complaints Impaired immune system	Low morale Low motivation Avoiding tasks Obsession about details Apathy Negativity Lack of appreciation Detachment Poor work Staff conflicts Absenteeism Exhaustion Irritability Withdrawal from colleagues



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Alcohol Abuse

- Have you ever felt you should **C**ut down on your drinking?
- Have people **A**nnoyed you by criticizing your drinking?
- Have you ever felt bad or **G**uilty about your drinking?
- Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning (as an "Eye opener") to steady your nerves or get rid of a hangover?



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Legal and Illegal Drugs



- Oxycontin
- Percocet
- Dexedrine
- Ritalin
- Concerta
- Valium
- Xanax

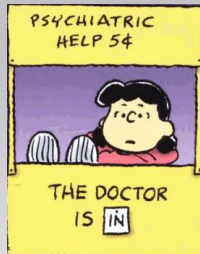


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Module 5

In the beginning...

- Firefighting ranks among the most stressful and demanding occupations (Gist & Woodall, 1995)
- Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) became a movement in the industry, prevent negative outcomes (Mitchell, 1983)
- Control critical incident stress with effective use of ICS
- NFPA 1500 includes CISM
- Accepted need for behavioral health assistance



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Where is it going?

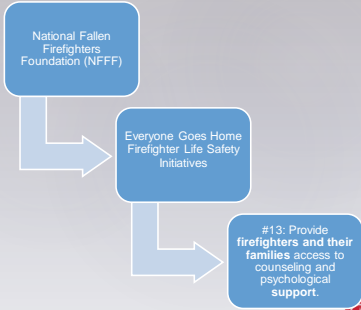
- Psychological Assistance Programs
- Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)
- Evolution away from CISM
- Institution of Peer Support Team models
- Stress First Aid (SFA) adopted from the military models
- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)



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Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives



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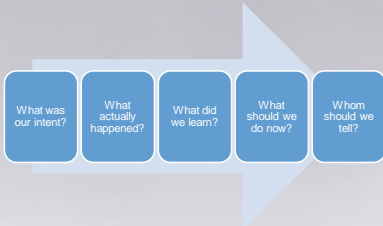
7 Strategies of Initiative #13

1. Debrief using operational strategies rather than clinical
2. Individualize interventions using screening tools to help first responder determine if/what help is needed
3. Recognize that not everyone is effected by an event and intervention is variable
4. Offer Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)
5. Train peer support programs to promote wellness and recognize early signs of stress
6. Utilize resources to offer first responders, their families at home, and the organization immediate access to self-help
7. Provide training to Behavioral Health professionals and other supporting first responders



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AFTER ACTION REVIEW



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TRAUMA SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

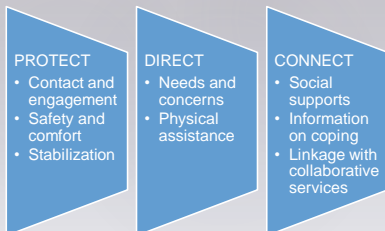
- Bodily reactions (fast heartbeat, stomach churning, sweatiness, dizziness) when reminded of the event
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Irritability or outbursts of anger
- Difficulty concentrating
- Heightened awareness of potential dangers to yourself and others
- Being jumpy or being startled at something unexpected
- Upsetting thoughts or memories about the event that have come into your mind against your will
- Upsetting dreams about the event
- Acting or feeling as though the event were happening again
- Feeling upset by reminders of the event

If you experience 6 or more in a 2-week period, seek help!



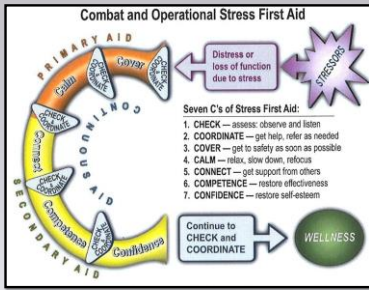
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PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID



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STRESS FIRST AID



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Bring it Home



- Daily self-assessment
- Consider the people working next to you at your organizations and their needs
- Become familiar with Life Safety Initiatives
- CISM has its place; PFA and SFA are there daily
- Leaders don't need bugles
- Only time you need to keep an 'open mic'



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Finding a Model that Works



- One size does not fit all
- Individual, department, regional differences
- Assessment tools available
- Community resources
- Don't force a program or concept that doesn't fit



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Finding a Model that Works



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Module 6

Wrap Up



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