



Course Title

PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE in LAW ENFORCEMENT

COURSE OVERVIEW

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND LESSON PURPOSE:

The law enforcement profession is one that includes many challenges. Officers are frequently faced with intense, rapidly unfolding, dramatic situations in their daily work and these circumstances can have a significant impact on psychological functioning. Whether the impact of one critical incident or a culmination of years of cumulative stressors, the job of being a police officer can take its toll on the overall psychological and emotional stability of even the most resilient of individuals.

In this sixteen-hour course, we will explore the short and long-term impact of the police profession on individual functioning. This issue will examine the psychological and physical toll on the human being, with a detailed analysis on how the short and long-term stressors of police work can impact both the mind and body. This will address the officer's experiences related to critical incidents, but also consider the more subtle, yet equally insidious impacts of cumulative stressors on officer psychological well-being and performance. We will explore the complicated dynamics that exist between physical and psychological functioning, with detailed analysis of how the two can be negatively impacted by the stresses inherently found within police work.

In addition to the impact of these issues on officer functioning, the course will also delve deeply into training and police practices that can serve to build the psychological immune system, from the academy through retirement. This focus will be based upon the intimate relationship between mind and body, with suggestions for both physical and psychological interventions and techniques that have been scientifically supported to aid in officer health and wellness.

LEARNING AND TRAINING OBJECTIVES:

Students will learn a wide variety of information (both theoretical and practical) during this course including:

- The physiological responses to critical incidents and cumulative stressors.
- The psychological responses to critical incidents and cumulative stressors.
- The unique relationship between human physiology and psychology.
- Training to build the psychological immune system from the academy throughout the career.
- Best career practices to combat the negative impacts of critical incidents and cumulative stressors.

- The Critical Incident: What do officers need?
- Best practices for long-term support following a critical incident
- Strategies for increasing officer motivation and willingness to seek professional help and support
- Consideration of officer wellness checks: risks and rewards
- Mental health labels: moving away from labeling and toward helping

COURSE OUTLINE

I. INTRODUCTION 2 hours

A. The Police Officer Personality

1. Personality characteristics of a police officer
2. Competencies empirically linked to police officer performance

B. What is Wellness and Emotional Resilience?

Learning Objectives

- Operationally define wellness and emotional resilience
- To introduce participants to the unique psychological characteristics of the police officer.
- To explain the benefits and costs of these unique characteristics.
- To investigate defensiveness and stoicism as a barrier to police psychological health.

II. Police Stressors: The Impact of Critical Incidents and Cumulative Stressors on Human Physiology and Psychology 6 hours

A. The Critical Incident: Physiological and Psychological Reactions

1. The impact of “life and death” events on brain functioning.
2. The sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system
3. Common officer reactions to traumatic events.

B. Cumulative Stressors: Physiological and Psychological Reactions

1. Stress hormones and their impact on functioning
2. HPA Axis Dysfunction in long-term stress responses.
3. Stress and medical illnesses
4. Long term stress and its impact on officer perspective and perception.
5. Chronic stress and habituation.

Learning Objectives

- Improve understanding of both short and long-term stressors on officer physical health
- Increase awareness of both short and long-term stressors on officer psychology.
- Understand the “mind-body” interactions in response to both short and long-term police stressors.

III. Inoculation: Building the Psychological Immune System

8 hours

A. Psychoeducation: “Now you know and knowing is half the battle”

1. Wellness training in the police recruit
2. The hazards of police work on the human.
3. Importance of self-care.
4. Long-term maintenance of psychological and physical health
5. Wellness as a tool for psychological resilience
6. Making psychological resilience training a critical part of officer training

B. Physical Movement

1. Exercise and the brain
2. Neurotransmitters, mood, and movement
3. The relationship between physical movement and emotional health

C. Nutrition

1. Food and its relationship to emotion and psychological health.
2. Mindful eating as a strategy for wellness

D. Emotional/Psychological Resilience

1. Psychological skills training
2. Mental toughness and adaptability
3. Arousal regulation
4. Imagery and mental preparation
5. Goal setting
6. Mental plans
7. Emotional awareness and mindfulness

E. Spirituality

1. Faith and emotional resilience
2. Care of the Soul

E. Psychological Health Wellness Screening for Officers

Learning Objectives

- Help participants understand the importance of wellness and self-care as a critical element of psychological resilience.
- Understand psychological resilience as “money in the bank” for responding to critical incidents and cumulative stress
- Increase awareness of specific skills in the enhancement of psychological resilience
- Address research findings on faith in a power greater than oneself on emotional resilience
- Address the concept of regular psychological health screenings in law enforcement

IV. The Critical Incident: What do officers need?

5 hours

A. Research on Officer Responses to Traumatic Incidents

1. Normal reactions to traumatic incidents

2. Prevalence of PTSD in officer traumatic incidents

B. Psychological First Aid versus “Treatment”

1. The differences between an educational approach versus a treatment approach
2. Specific components of psychological first aid intervention
3. Value of peer support groups

C. PTSD and Psychological Treatment

D. Family Support

E. Long Term Support

Learning Objectives

- Participants will understand the difference between normal and abnormal responses to critical incidents
- Identify the symptoms of PTSD and their impact on functioning
- Review most effective treatments for PTSD.
- Participants will learn the importance of peer support groups and its impact on officer wellness
- Explore the impacts of a critical incident on family members, including spouses, and best practices for intervention/support
- Learn about the best practices for long-term support following a critical incident

Total Time: 21 hours