Welcome to the NVFC’s Train Strong Webinar Series.

Today’s webinar is “Holidays and First Responders: How to Deal with Increased Stress.”
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 resources, programs, education, and advocacy for first responders across the nation.

NOT A MEMBER? Visit [nvfc.org/join-nvfc](http://nvfc.org/join-nvfc) today and you will be eligible for a wide range of benefits including insurance, training, special member promotions, and more!
Our Presenter: Ali Rothrock

Ali Rothrock, CEO & Lead Instructor
1 in 5 people have mental illness.

5 in 5 people have mental health.

Mental health matters for everyone.

@gmf.designS
First responders are at a unique risk for mental health challenges due to:

- Chronic exposure to trauma
- Lack of tailored resources
  - Sleep disruption
- Time away from social support
- Stigma on first responders
The fire service can put a tax on our mental health, but the community and sense of purpose we gain can be a major positive influence in our lives.
Not all first responder’s will struggle with their mental health…

But our risk goes up when compared to the civilian population
Increased stress around the holidays due to:

- Financial stress
- Grief
- Stressful family dynamics
- Upturned schedule
- Difficult calls can feel more tragic
We know what to bring with us to the scene of a call.

But what do we do with what we take home?
“We do not rise to level of our expectations, we fall to the level of our training.”

Navy Seal
Do you:

• Know how to recognize signs of mental health struggle?
  • Know how to talk about them?
  • Share your reactions to tough calls?
  • Understand basic mental health concepts?
What is Trauma?

“Trauma is when we have encountered an out of control, frightening experience that has disconnected us from perceived world order, sense of resourcefulness, safety and coping.”

Tara Branch, 2011
The Stress Continuum
The Stress Continuum

Post Traumatic Stress → Acute Stress → PTSD

Up to 24 hours → 72 hours → 31+ days
Types of Stress

Post Traumatic Stress → Acute Stress → PTSD

Post Traumatic Stress Symptoms

These are very common.

- Repeating / reliving the incident
- Dreaming of the incident
- Difficulty eating / sleeping / keeping routine
- Uncharacteristic anxiety / mood swings

- Usually after a few sleep cycles we get back to baseline.
Types of Stress

Post Traumatic Stress $\rightarrow$ **Acute Stress** $\rightarrow$ PTSD

**Acute Stress**
*(the first 30 days)*

- *Can be* the predecessor of PTSD
- PTS symptoms do not lessen over time
Types of Stress

Post Traumatic Stress → Acute Stress → PTSD

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
(31 days+ post event)
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

PTSD is a disorder that develops in some people who have experienced a shocking, scary, traumatic or dangerous event.

It is a natural defense mechanism and response to significant or prolonged trauma.

It’s never too late to address it.
Cumulative Stress

This can comprise a combination of factors that build up over time, gradually eroding our resilience and productivity.

Prolonged exposure without adequate rest or relaxation can eventually have devastating results.
Burnout

Work stress that can happen to anyone in any field when one becomes overwhelmed with their work load
Compassion Fatigue

“All out of empathy”
Vicarious Trauma

When you identify with the pain of people who have endured terrible things, you bring their grief, fear, anger, and despair into your own awareness and experience.

It’s about your emotional proximity, not necessarily your physical proximity to a trauma.
Negative Coping Skills
Understanding Negative Coping Skills
Seasonal Affective Disorder

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is a type of depression that's related to changes in seasons — SAD begins and ends at about the same times every year.

Light therapy and talk therapy can really help.
Grief and the Holidays

• Set realistic expectations for yourself
• Surround yourself with supportive people
  • Don’t isolate yourself
  • All feelings are okay
• Take care of yourself in healthy ways
  • New traditions are okay
• “Extra favorite everything” Dr. Anne Bisek
Suicide

In 2017 more firefighters died by suicide than in the line of duty

103 verified suicides to 93 LODD’s
What is the #1 Cause of Suicide?

untreated depression
(not weakness, not a character flaw)
Depression is...

- A treatable medical illness
- Diagnosed by experiencing a cluster of symptoms (five or more) over a minimum of two weeks
- Many people experience symptoms of depression for 7-8 months before getting help or telling someone
- The majority of people never receive treatment
9 out of 10 people who die by suicide had a diagnosable mental disorder.

Yet, only 3 out of 10 of people who die by suicide received mental health service in the year before they died.

Treatment is available. Early detection and treatment are the keys.
There is Always Hope
There is Always Hope
Firefighters & Mental Health

Barriers and stigmas exist which make us think that either help is not there or that we are unable to access it.

Struggling with your mental health is not a choice, it is not a character flaw, not a weakness and not your fault.
What do you say if someone opens up about a struggle they’re having?

“That makes sense.”
“I’m really sorry to hear that you’re struggling”
“Thank you for trusting me enough to tell me this.”

Think about what you’d like to hear and say that.
Positive Coping

1. Escape – literally and mentally
2. Rest – what makes you feel safe?
3. Play – exercise & hobbies (other than physical)
Stanford University School of Medicine published a 10-year study which found a relationship between suicide in adults and poor sleep quality, regardless of depression.

Of 420 participants, 20 individuals with sleep deprivation committed suicide, showing that a sleep deprived person is 1.4 times more likely to commit suicide.

From ‘First Responder Sleep Recovery’
4 Categories of Support Systems

1. Physical
2. Mental / Emotional
3. Spiritual
4. Professional
Best prevention for significant mental health challenges:

- Strong social support
- Strong positive coping skills
How to incorporate your family into your positive coping skills:

- Communicate to your spouse / partner / family
- It’s okay to need some time alone (different than isolating)
- Try to keep whatever routine was working for you but make time for others
How to deal with holiday stress:

• Take unnecessary stress off your plate
  • Work proactively toward goals
• Acknowledge that it’s okay to slow down
  • Set a budget and stick to it
• Maintain a schedule as best you can
Each time we overcome adversity we raise our baseline of functioning and increase our ability to be resilient.

Adversity

Resilience

Adversity met with resilience

Adversity met with resilience

Adversity met with resilience

Adversity met with resilience

Adversity
We Always Have a Choice

**Post Traumatic Stress**

- **Growth** (positive coping, support systems)
  - Stay connected to your sources of joy!

- **Disorder** (negative coping, isolation)

**ON THE JOB AND OFF**

NVFC
We Always Have a Choice
Resources

ON THE JOB AND OFF

Fire/EMS Helpline
1-888-731-FIRE

SHARE THE LOAD
www.nvfc.org/help

NATIONAL
SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE™
1-800-273-TALK
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org
Questions?

Ali W Rothrock

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Q&A Session
Post-webinar thoughts or questions?

VOLUNTEERVOICES.NVFC.ORG

Or contact Caroline Stachowiak at: caroline@nvfc.org
THANK YOU!

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