

# MISSOURI'S FIRST RESPONDERS

## "Even Heroes Need to Talk"\*

✦ First responders are generally quite resilient to traditional trauma.

✦ Experience and age are associated with healthy coping.

### Unique Stressors for the Emergency Responder community:

✦ Stress of anticipation

✦ Exposure to death, including mass casualties and child victims.

✦ Identification with victims (as self, family or friends)

✦ Discomfort of personal protective technologies and difficult working conditions

✦ Use of alcohol and other drugs as coping mechanisms.

✦ Suicide Risk

### Managing Stress:

✦ Talk to family, friends or fellow responders. Although we may prefer not to discuss our emotions, opening up will help us work through what we have experienced, and will help our fellow responders as well.

✦ Exercise reduces stress and makes us feel better.

✦ Relax: go fishing/hunting, read a book, spend time with your kids, take a walk - allow your body to recover.

✦ Eat and drink healthy: Nutritional foods and water replenish our bodies and minds after the increased adrenaline rush and expended energy involved in emergency responses. Avoid sugar, caffeine & alcohol.

✦ Sleep: Getting back to a normal routine and getting enough sleep are important.

✦ Seek help. When overwhelmed, talk with a trusted colleague or pastor. If you are having thoughts of harming yourself, you are abusing alcohol or drugs, or if thoughts or emotions about an incident are interfering with your work or home life, ask for professional help.

### Reluctant heroes:

Unsolicited media recognition may occur when a camera or news crew records first responders performing a rescue operation. Although first responders may feel they were "just doing their jobs", the attention may exacerbate stress and regrets that more could not be done. *If this happens to you or someone you supervise, do not be afraid to seek assistance.*

### Barriers to Help:

- Fitness for duty issues
- Culture of first responders – "Buck up and get on with your life"
- Lack of compensation for services or time off
- Masked as physical illness
- Stigma and concerns about confidentiality

*Early assistance can help prevent substance abuse, family problems (divorce), and depression.*

### Helping Strategies for your Company:

✦ Pair more experienced first responders with less experienced responders.

✦ Prepare families for the stress in emergency response fields and teach them coping and support skills.

✦ Promote family communication so first responders & their families are physically and emotionally prepared to address safety concerns & cope with strong emotional reactions to life & death situations.

---

\*Marketing slogan for Project Liberty, New York's Post 9/11 Crisis Counseling Project