



Creating space for law enforcement during the pandemic and protests

The rise of pandemic related mental health distress calls, personal and organizational stress, and recent protests have contributed to a perfect storm that is profoundly impacting our officers nationwide. Below we call attention to these stressors and provide suggestions for coping.

Mental Health distress calls are on the rise. Long Island has witnessed a dramatic rise in fatal drug overdoses since last year. Preliminary data shows a 40% increase in Suffolk County and a 50% increase in Nassau County (O’Keeffe, 2020). Officials believe the pandemic is to blame, which has led to self-medication of stress, isolation, despair, and anxiety. People reach out to drugs and alcohol to cope with the unknown, job loss, and increased familial stress. Additionally, dealers have cut their supplies with fentanyl, which is lethal at minute doses, due to their disrupted supply chain.

COVID-19 Personal and Organizational Stress. Even before the pandemic, first responders faced higher levels of stress, which resulted in depression, PTSD, and burnout (Beary, 2017). A 20% increase in sick or quarantined time, the shortage of medical supplies for law enforcement, and a lack of PPE for first responders cause significant stress for officers, administrations, and management. “Resilience should be a core focus for law enforcement leaders and colleagues seeking to prevent mental health crises among law enforcement and proactively addressing existing issues or those that surface” (Beary, 2018).

Racial Tension. Eric Garner (d. July 17, 2014, Staten Island, N.Y.), Michale Brown (d. Aug. 9, 2014, Ferguson, Mo.), Laquan McDonald (d. Oct. 20, 2014, Chicago, Ill.), Freddie Gray (d. April 19, 2015, Baltimore, Md.), Breonna Taylor (d. March 13, 2020, Louisville, Ky.), and George Floyd (d. May 25, 2020, Minneapolis, Minn.) are just a sampling of black Americans killed by U.S. police in the last six years which have fueled controversy and demonstrations across our nation (CBC News, 2020). [The Connecticut State Police released a sincere response](#) on the death of George Floyd expressing disgust for the incident and a commitment to public trust: “To our community, please know that we are more than a uniform, we are ordinary people, and we stand with you. We anticipate and welcome difficult conversations that will result in progressive changes. Our commitment to public safety remains the same.”

Creating space. De-escalation training teaches officers to slow down, create space to defuse potentially dangerous situations. When an officer answers a call to someone in a disturbed or heightened emotional state, de-escalation training teaches active listening skills, using “I” statements, mirroring/reflecting, and paraphrasing to connect with and calm the person down (Olivia, Morgan & Compton, 2010). Ferguson prompted a requirement for de-escalation training at the state level for Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Jersey (Clarey, 2020). As of December 2017, however, New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont, and New Hampshire still had no requirement. Although it is a requirement for our state, the percentage of classes offered on an accessible training resource, PoliceTraining.net maxes out at about 1.3% of all classes offered. Out of 293 courses offered in June 2020, only four focused on de-escalation training (3 webinars, one in-person) with costs of up to \$390 per officer. Although webinars make them readily available, it can cost close to \$4000 for single agency access. Time, budget, and the perceived need can contribute to barriers to training. Incorporating meditation (just 5-10 minutes a day) can create space and increased self-awareness, which may put space between your reaction and a potential confrontation.

Resilience and adaptability are key. New routines, while initially stressful, offer new areas for insight and growth. Resilience is choosing what’s right as we move forward in tough times. Routinely check in with peers to promote officers’ inherent resilient nature. Greco (2020) compiled a list: [10 tips for emergency responders, healthcare providers for managing stress during the COVID-19 crisis](#). It includes quick and useful tips such as accepting your limitations, meditation, exercise, sleep, hydration, news-fasts, and confiding in someone you trust. Silver Hill’s Covid-19 Resiliency Campaign (CRC) works with agencies and support networks throughout the community that can offer direct services to frontline workers in need of support. Based at Silver Hill Hospital, the CRC offers education and training to law enforcement agencies, assisted living facilities and hospitals. We do this by way of providing Town Hall Forums on COVID-19, wellbeing, coping strategies and tips on resiliency during the pandemic. Our goal is to support the officers in maintaining physical and mental well-being in these unprecedented times.

<https://silverhillhospital.org/covid19resilience/>



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