

How to Recover from Traumatic Stress

1. Accept your emotions as normal and part of the recovery/survival process.
2. Talk about the event and your feelings.
3. Accept that you may have experienced fear and confronted your vulnerability.
4. Use your fear or anxiousness as a cue to utilize your officer safety skills.
5. Realize that your survival instinct was an asset at the time of the incident and that it remains intact to assist you again if needed.
6. Accept that you cannot always control events, but you can control your response.
7. If you are troubled by a perceived lack of control, focus on the fact that you had *some* control during the event. You used your strength to respond in a certain way.
8. Do not second-guess your actions. Evaluate your actions based on your perceptions at the time of the event, not afterwards.
9. Understand that your actions were based on the need to make a critical decision for action. The decision likely had to be made within seconds.
10. Accept that your behavior was appropriate to your perceptions and feelings at the time of the incident. Accept that no one is perfect. You may like/dislike some actions.
11. Focus on the things you did that you feel good about. Positive outcomes are often produced by less than perfect actions.
12. Do not take personally the response of the system. Keep the needs of the various systems (DA's office, administrative investigation, the press, etc) in perspective.

Remember, police critical incidents happen because you are a police officer and there are circumstances beyond your control, not because of who you are as a person.

Positive Recovery - keep in mind that you are naturally resilient.

1. You will accept what happened. You will accept any experience of fear and any feelings of vulnerability as part of being human. Vulnerability is not helplessness.
2. You will accept that no one can control everything. You will focus on your behaviors and the appropriate application of authority. You will keep a positive perspective.
3. You will learn and grow from the experience. You will be able to assess all future circumstances on their own merits. You will become stronger and smarter.
4. You will include survivorship into your life perspective. You may re-evaluate life's goals, priorities, and meaning. You will gain wisdom that can come from survivorship.
5. You will be aware of changes in yourself that may contribute to problems at home, work, and other environments. You will work to overcome these problems.
6. You will increase the intimacy of your actions and communications to those you love. You will remain open to the feedback of those who love you.

Getting Help

No one can work through the aftermath of a critical incident for you, but you do not have to go it alone. Keep an open mind. Allow your family, friends, and peers to help. Seek professional assistance if you get stuck, if you do not "feel like yourself" or if your friends or family notice dysfunctional emotional responses or behavior. Do not ignore those who care about you. Stay connected to your loved ones.

This page adapts and includes information from the Colorado Law Enforcement Academy Handbook and *Reflections of a Police Psychologist* (Digliani, J.A., 2010).