

# Maintaining Positive Mental Health in Law Enforcement

Mental Health Support for Police Officers |  
Continuous Training | Peer Support

In the course of their duties, law enforcement officers are regularly faced with situations that can have a negative impact on their mental health. Proactively taking steps to build mental resilience, creating a culture that prioritizes wellness, and ensuring officers receive the extra support they need when they need it are all key steps any agency can take to support the long-term health of their officers.

May is recognized as Mental Health Awareness Month and is the perfect time to evaluate existing mental health support initiatives and implement something new to support your officers. Below, find three key areas of consideration for maintaining positive mental health amongst law enforcement officers.

## BUILDING RESILIENCE

In years past, there was a tendency to believe that a person who was affected by a traumatic event was “soft.” While it is true that everyone reacts differently to trauma, the reality is that resilience is not just a trait that you’re born with – it’s a skill that can be developed and strengthened through training and practice. By training mental resilience, officers can more effectively navigate the mental impacts of trauma, recover more quickly, avoid long-term effects on their mental health, and maintain performance in the aftermath of a traumatic event.

### Here’s how:

- Require officers regularly undergo training on mental health, stress management, emotional regulation, and other relevant topics
- Incorporate scenario-based training using realistic situations to help officers learn to effectively manage stress in high-pressure situations
- Offer learning opportunities to your officer’s families to help them be an additional pillar of support and mitigate the negative impacts the job can have on an officer’s personal life
- Provide training on the importance of overall wellness and physical health, as well as the physiological impacts of the job

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# PRIORITIZING WELLNESS

When it comes to wellness, there is no silver bullet. It is a culmination of many different actions and efforts that take the unique needs of each agency and officer into account. Most importantly, to truly support the overall wellness of your officers, leaders must make it a core component of agency culture and operations.

## Here's how:

- Lead by example and demonstrate the behaviors and actions you hope to inspire in your officers
- Encourage officers to speak openly about wellness to lessen any remaining stigma or shame attached to it, especially when it comes to mental health
- Prioritize all aspects of wellness by offering programs aimed at promoting physical health
- Make it easy for officers to get help when they need it by providing confidential access to culturally competent mental health professionals, employee assistance programs, and peer support programs
- Bolster morale by recognizing exceptional performance and officers who are championing wellness
- Seek input from your officers on wellness initiatives and incorporate their feedback

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# PROVIDING SUPPORT

While proactive wellness activities are essential, agencies must also be prepared to respond when an officer is in crisis. Realistically, there may still be situations when an officer does not feel comfortable reaching out for help. As a result, supervisors and agency leadership need the tools and training to recognize the signs of an officer in crisis, or one going down that path.

## Here's how to support effective responses:

- Incorporate mental health support into agency policies, such as crisis response protocols, critical incident debriefings, and scheduled follow ups after a traumatic incident
- Provide supervisors with training to help them recognize signs of excessive stress or burnout in their direct reports
- Offer officers a confidential way to reach out for help or share concerns about a peer
- Ensure 24/7 access to peer support and culturally competent mental health professionals for officers in crisis
- Make it abundantly clear that utilizing mental health support will not have a negative impact on an officer's career.

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