



The Importance of 9-1-1 “Peer Support”

DEVELOPED AND PRESENTED BY:

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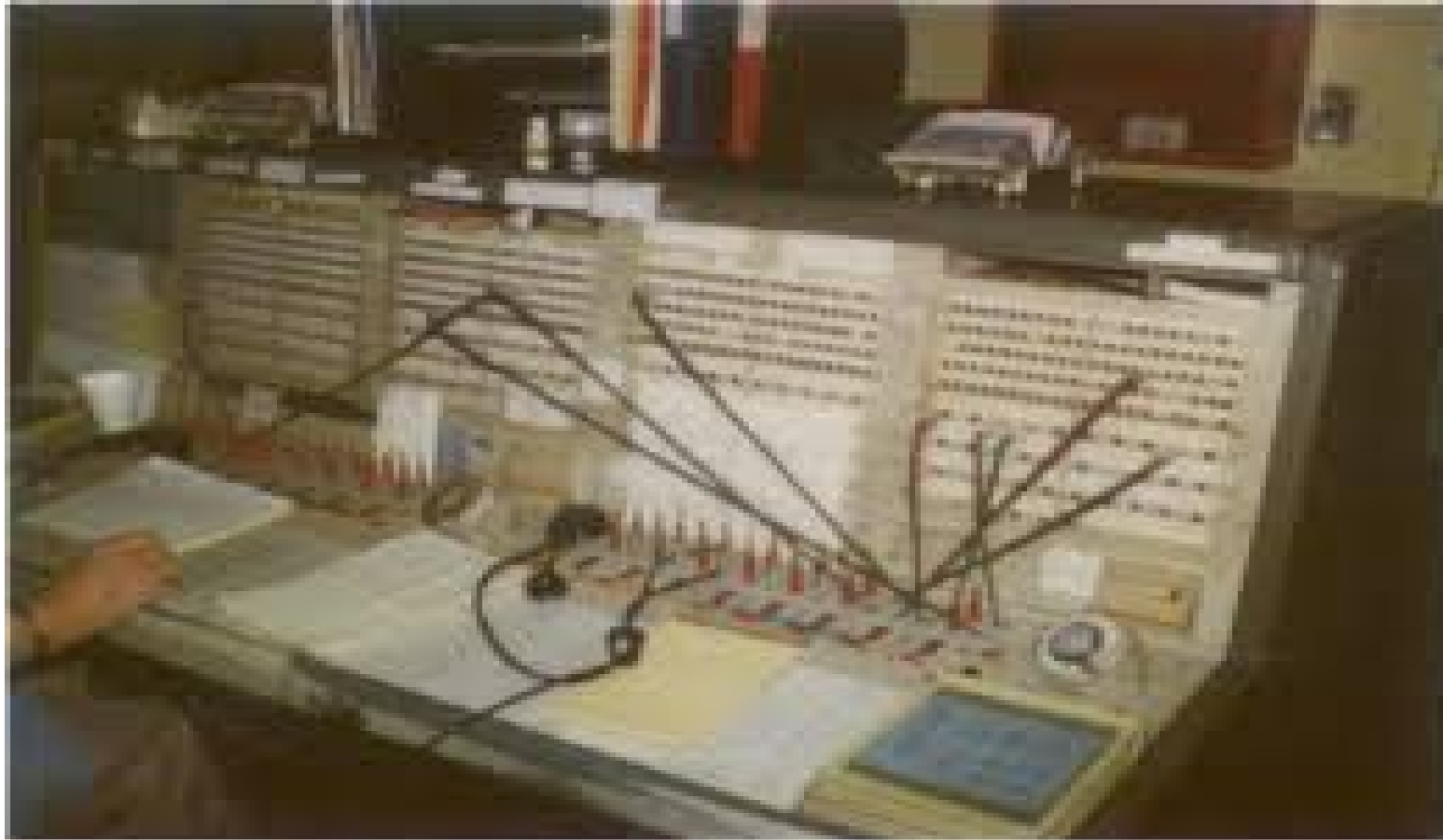
CLINICAL DIRECTOR, ALLEAPS

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- AS Paramedics/EMT
- BA Criminology
- Master's in Education
- PhD Counseling (Licensed Marriage/Family Therapist)
- Clinical Director, Alabama Law Enforcement Alliance for Peer Support (ALLEAPS)
- Critical Incident Coordinator, Houston County Sheriff's Office/Dothan Police Department
- Wrote and coordinated Alabama Statute 36-21-14



My First Console??!!



Help Wanted

911 Dispatcher: Applicants must be easily irritated by 911 callers, phone slamming and swearing an asset. Preference will be given to candidates able to complain about their workload while receiving calls. Must be able to survive on donuts for breakfast, greasy takeout food in the wee hours and gallons of coffee. Must be able to answer and log calls, and go to the bathroom at the same time. Be able to go home and leave work at work!

Salary: Not nearly enough to put up with all this.

Why?

- Stress is epidemic in a 911 center. Not the garden variety type, but...the stress associated with listening to someone else's worst day – every day – as a routine part of the job.
- This is the kind of stress that builds up over time (cumulative stress), and slowly erodes an individual's ability to feel empathy (compassion fatigue).

Why?

- It is the stress that drops in like a sledge hammer when you hear the voice of a frantic mother screaming into the phone that she has just found.....
- As the stress increases, we all tend to put up barriers in an effort to protect ourselves from the “cost of caring.”

Why?

- Dispatchers carry a heavy load....they must be ready to answer any call, to help unappreciative callers, or callers who abuse the system.
- It can be frustrating, irritating and can lead them to being stressed-out.

What stress is not!

The confusion created when your mind overrides your body's basic desire to choke the living mess out of some person who desperately needs it.

Stress: What is it?

Stress is _____



Stress

- Stress is the “wear and tear” we experience as we adjust to our continually changing environment.
- Stress has both physical and emotional effects and can create negative and positive emotions.

Stress

- As a positive (+) influence, stress can help compel you to action.
- As a negative (-) influence, it can lead to health problems such as headaches, upset stomach, rashes, insomnia, ulcers and hypertension.

Stress

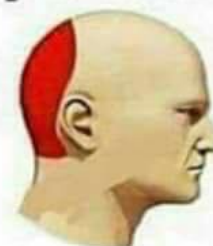
- Stress can also lead to depression and anxiety.

Types of Headaches

Migraine



Hypertension



Stress



Dispatch



Five 911 stressors

- There is always the chance that something will happen that you have no control over.
- And.. that in itself can keep you up at night and cause you to have personal and family conflict.

Five 911 stressors

1. The weight of responsibility that you carry, can be overwhelming.
 - Maintaining the illusion of a proud, but unshakable, can-do 911 dispatcher is hard work.
 - Believe it or not, you do it not for yourself, but for those who depend on you.
 - Your mind is never at rest.
 - Millions of things can go wrong at any second ... perform.

Five 911 stressors

2. You are not born with the knowledge required to be so “fearsome on the radio!”
 - You have the capacity for the job, but that’s not enough.
 - It will need to be cultivated and continuously challenged.
 - There is a word for what needs to be done to ensure competence: TRAINING!

Five 911 stressors

3. Fear of failure is one of the greatest burden you carry.
 - You have an inner level of pride that drives you, and allows you to exemplify a “can-do, doesn’t bother me” attitude.
 - Others look to you as a “rock” of confidence with no weaknesses.
 - But... at night when all is quiet, you question whether, or not you have what it takes.
 - The “what if” game never ends.

Five 911 stressors

4. You live with the understanding of the risk that you face.
 - The physical, and mental problems that you can develop as the result of the job that you perform.
 - Heart disease, cancer, stroke, depression, anxiety, etc.
 - You help others on their worst day, and it can impact you for the rest of your life.

Five 911 stressors

5. The sounds (images) that you hear (images) are worse than anyone could imagine.
 - Going to work knowing there is a good chance something will happen that will eat away at you.
 - Mentally preparing yourself to tackle death and *stupidity*, while it just becomes the norm.
 - All of this just slowly eats away at your compassion and your capacity to love freely, and without fear.

Maybe there are three types of dispatchers

1. MAYBE, the **toughest** are actually not that tough at all, maybe they are just the healthiest.
2. MAYBE, those who **joke** about “it” are those who suffer the most and disguise their hurt with swagger.
3. MAYBE, the rest of us just **cope**, and get through each day the best that we can.

Maybe...

- Even those who are fortunate enough to have the greatest job in the world know the price they pay, but for the benefit of those they love, they keep it to themselves.
- AND it is killing them slowly, but surely.
- **IT'S time to change the culture; it is not healthy!**

Survey said

- It is estimated that the average tenure for an emergency professional (dispatcher) to be just about two-years.
- While there might be many different reasons for this, I believe the greatest is _____.

Survey said

- Survey results showed that dispatchers experience high levels of “peritraumatic distress,” the strong emotions felt during a traumatic event.
- Participants reported experiencing fear, helplessness or horror in reaction to nearly one-third of the different types of potentially traumatic calls.

Heal thyself

- Alcohol/drug abuse
- Keeping it in (file cabinet)
- Domestic abuse
- Suicides
- Trying to “protect” the family from the job
- Results: jail, loss of career, kids in trouble + bad grades, burnout, disgruntled, angry, early retirement, early death, etc...

Why Peer support

- Peer support has emerged as the virtual “standard of care” in the emergency responder community.
- EAP verses Peer Support



Why Peer support

- Recipient group is specially trained/educated.
- Group possesses a unique culture.
- Group members perceive themselves as unique, little understood, misunderstood.
- Group extends minimal trust to those outside the group.
- Generally not necessary with groups from general populations of primary victims.

Why Peer support

- What's the deal with “peers?”
- “Ethos,” i.e. credibility, is one of the 3 core elements of interpersonal influence - *Aristotle*

(ethos, pathos, logos)

Peer support

TRAINED PEER SUPPORT PERSONNEL
HAVE AN “ETHOS” (CREDIBILITY) THAT
NO ACADEMIC TRAINING PROGRAM
CAN CREATE!

Who should provide Peer support?

911 Operators and Dispatchers

We can make split-second decisions on matters of life and safety
but it takes an hour to decide where to order lunch.



- Trained peer support personnel **and** Trained Mental health clinicians may perform peer support services.

911 DISPATCHER

A man is seen from the side, sitting at a desk in a control room. He is wearing a headset and looking at several computer monitors. The monitors display various information, including maps and data. The room has a professional, functional appearance with multiple workstations in the background.

Instagram@dispatcherjohn

**THE JOB THAT SHOWS YOU JUST WHAT LEVEL
OF CRAZY IS OUT THERE WALKING AROUND**

CAUTIONS:

Peer Support

- Need to work with professional mental health for guidance/support (trained).
- Need to view peer support/first aid as only one point on the overall continuum of care.
- Know when one is over one's head (underestimating severity).
- Countertransference (getting too close; over-identification; taking too much for granted).

Peer Support Members

- Understand the mindset of a dispatcher.
- Have been in many of the same incidents.
- Are trained to help in certain situations.
- Are trained to recognize specific issues.
- Offers confidential and privileged communication because of the Peer Support law that was passed in 2018 (one of the few if not the only state to include dispatchers).

What we cover

- What is trauma, a High Stress Event?
- How does the human body react to trauma/CI?
 - Physically?
 - Psychologically?
 - Emotionally?
- What is stress? What can we do about stress?
- Impact the job has on your family and personal life

More of what we cover

- How we communicate better?
- What are the symptoms of suicide?
- How do I care for myself after taking care of everyone else?
- What is a DEFUSING? How do we do it?
- What is a COACHING? How do we do it?

Peer Support Training

- ▶ Dispatcher Peer Support training overview:
 - ▶ The training is conducted on two consecutive days.
 - ▶ The training begins at 0800 and concludes both days at 1800.
 - ▶ Attendees should be an active dispatcher for an agency.
 - ▶ ALLEAPS provides all the training material, to include a thumb drive containing all the training material.
 - ▶ Completion of the twenty-hour training certifies the attendee per Alabama Statute 36-21-14.

Peer Support Training

▶ Training Cost:

- ▶ The sponsoring agency covers the cost of lodging for the instructors (two rooms, two nights).
- ▶ The sponsoring agency ensures adequate A/V equipment.
- ▶ The sponsoring agency provides snacks (water, coffee, etc.)
- ▶ The sponsoring agency provides adequate seating arrangements for twenty (20) attendees.
- ▶ The sponsoring agency provides for lunch on the last day of training (working lunch).

Peer Support Training

NO COST FOR THE TRAINING!!

Some comments

- “Man this training was intense! It is something dispatchers need. One to have peers to help each other. Two the tools to be the peer that can help other dispatchers. Lastly, the validation that dispatchers experience stress as much or more than our officers.”
- “This was very well designed for our needs in the communication center. We are so overlooked and we need to know how to take care of each other.”

Future Training

September 27-28, 2021

Wiregrass Public Safety Center, Dothan

Registration is open

Last training in 2021 for Dispatchers



4th Annual Peer Support Conference

Date: February 7 - 8, 2022

Time: 0830 - 1630

Location: Harvest Church
Dothan, Alabama

Special Guest: LT. (Ret.) Brian Murphy



www.alleaps.org

State-Wide Peer

Support Number

(833) 219-2461

Closing Thought

- Statistics show that when an individual involved in a high stress event is not properly taken care of (supportive care), there is a **70%** chance of death (suicide) when involved in a second critical incident.
- When an individual is properly taken care of following the first high stress event, there is only a **3%** chance they will lose their life when confronted by the second critical incident.



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QUESTIONS

