

ANNUAL CHECK-IN

HOW HAVE YOU CHANGED SINCE BEGINNING FIRST RESPONDER WORK?

Have these changes been positive? Or negative? Take inventory by considering the following.

How have your relationships changed?

Your family life?

Friendships?

Are you satisfied with your intimate relationship? What is something that you two used to do that brought you joy that you do not do now or do less often? Make a plan to reincorporate these activities into your life. Life will always be busy. There is always a limited amount of time. Instead of prioritizing your schedule, try scheduling your priorities.

What are your priorities in life? Do you still do things you enjoy? What hobbies and interests do you have? Which ones have you abandoned? As artificial and silly as it might sound, plan your recreation with the same amount of commitment that you would schedule work tasks and household chores.

Do you find that your outlook has changed? How so? Have you become cynical?

First responder work has been found to change the way you see the world and the people in it. Think about it. You only see a thin slice of the population on a regular basis. It would be easy to assume that all people are the same or similar to the people you see every day. Seeing is believing. It takes vigilance to remind yourself that you interact with a small segment of the population and that society, as a whole, is largely law-abiding and non-violent. Test your outlook by filling in the blanks to the following statements:

I am _____. People are _____. The world is _____.

Is there evidence of mistrust, cynicism, vulnerability, or some related concept? The challenge is to look for evidence to the contrary of imbalanced, cynical views based upon a thin slice of the population. If your outlook is that people are greedy, look for evidence that they are, in fact, generous. We tend to find what we are looking for so why not look for something positive?

How about your health? Do you often feel stressed? What are your signs of being stressed?

How well do you feel you are coping with stress and strains from the job and from your personal life? What do you do when you notice you are becoming overstressed? How do you alleviate stress?

If you don't know the answers to these questions, chances are you are at the mercy of stress, responding in a haphazard fashion. Research indicates that there are a number of factors that buffer stress. Some of these factors impact at the point where one is coping in the aftermath of stress. Examples include seeking support from family and friends, physical activities such as exercise and meditation, distraction activities such as hobbies, and seeking professional support. Some of the factors that impact how we manage stress take place BEFORE the stressor even occurs. This includes proactive measures such as taking care of ourselves, having a spiritual practice, building a resilient mindset, preparing ourselves for potential stressors by building our confidence to manage tasks with preparation, and living a balanced life. What can you do that will fortify your resilience to better endure and recover from trauma and stress?
