Living with PTSD, A Former 911 Dispatcher Perspective

This presentation will cover one dispatcher's story of the trauma she experienced on the job that contributed to her PTSD diagnosis and how she rehabilitated herself to find joy in other career fields. She remains connected to this field through her husband who has more than 15 years of service and advocates for mental health awareness for all first responders.

Wendy Bundy
MSLS, MA, AHIP, CPRS

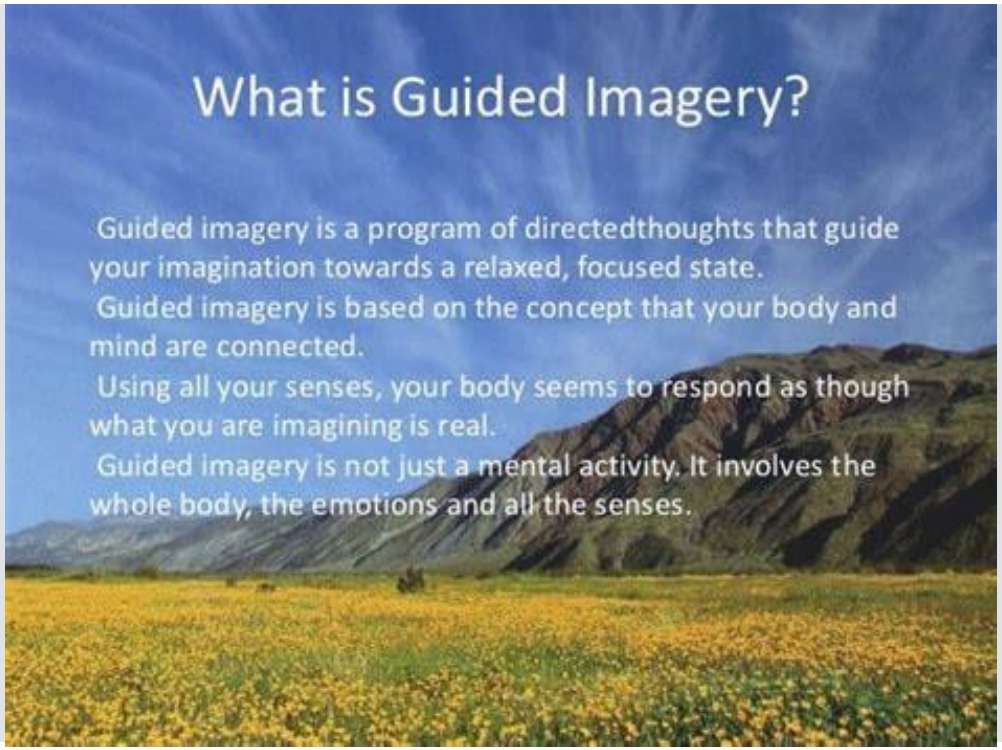
#MENTALHEALTHAWARENESS

North Carolina APCO
Telecommunicator Training Symposium
Tuesday, November 5th
1:00-2:00pm

TRIGGER WARNING

This presentation contains sensitive material/details related to trauma, public safety type calls (violence), death of a child, death of a co-worker, death of those within a support system, self-harm, suicidal ideation and eating disorders. Resources are provided at the end but remember to practice self-care throughout. Attend/Listen at your own discretion. If you need to leave/take a break at any point, please do so.

This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND



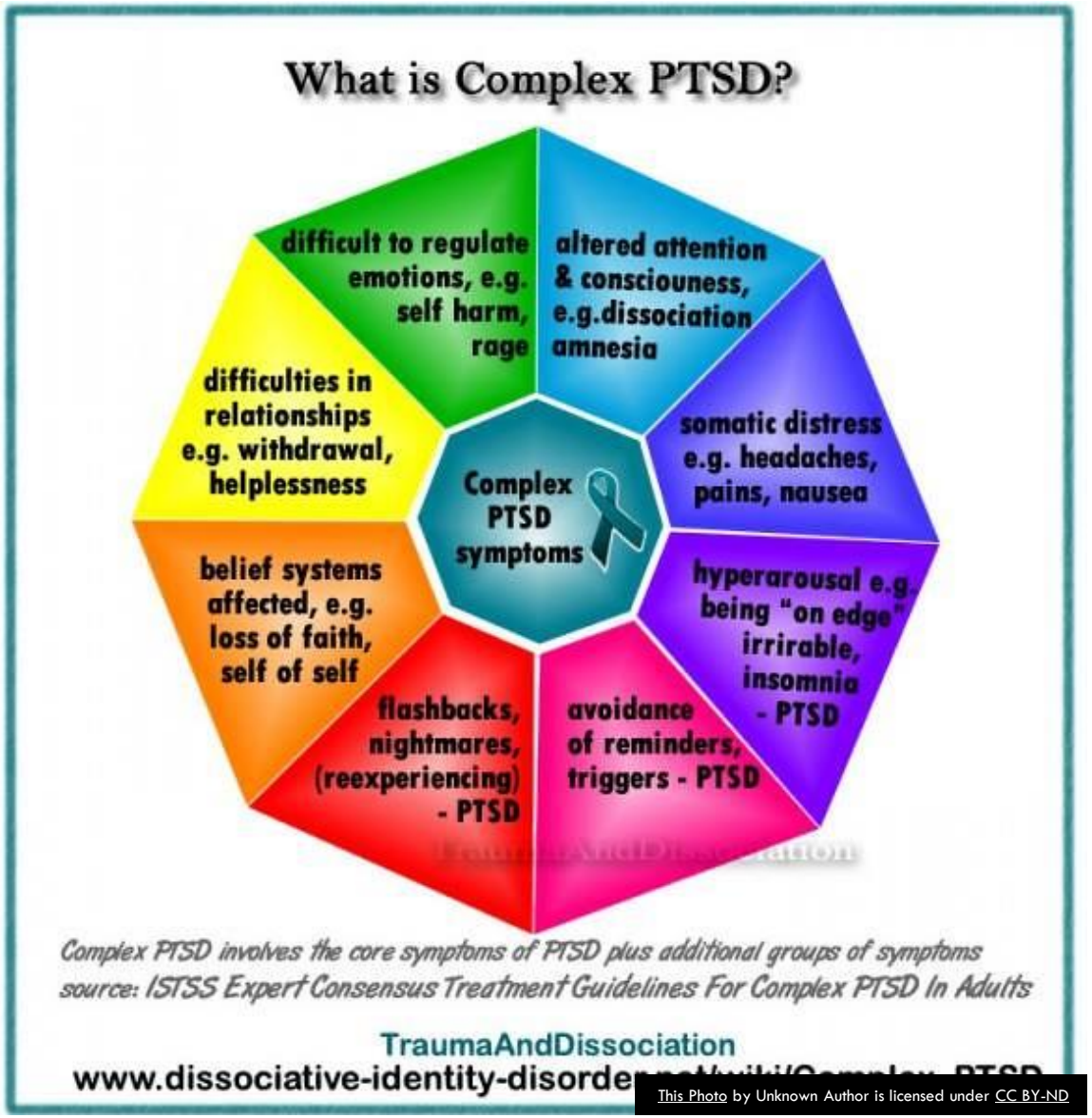
RELAXATION TECHNIQUE

WHAT HAPPENED?

THE DIAGNOSIS 2018

Complex PTSD

- I also have lots of anxiety, depression, seasonal changes in moods (esp. around anniversary dates), some OCD type behaviors, and what I like to call an undiagnosed eating disorder.



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-ND

THESIS RESEARCH

Emergency Medical Dispatchers: PTSD and Preventing It

Summary of Study

- A survey created through Survey Monkey was emailed to participants from their supervisor and used to gauge the risk of these EMDs having a stress related disorder and also their familiarity with and use of assistance programs. Seven people responded to the survey out of 14.
- The independent variables of capacity/ability to handle stress of the job and level of support systems were compared with qualitative analysis to determine which could be effective in these environments at reducing stress and PTSD, which is the dependent variable.
- The theoretical framework of this study focused on social cognitive theory and the social buffering hypothesis and how those play a role in regards to this topic.
- A major conclusion found is that even those with the strongest support systems and belief in them to handle the stress of the job still experience negative stress related effects.
- Recommendations for further research include a qualitative study in a larger center and with other dispatch populations (fire, police, etc.) to compare for similarities to EMDs.

Impactful Quotes from the Survey

"The majority of my coworkers are either well experienced to not get upset over calls or hide it well."

"I try to have a good perspective on things where others at least do not know that I am stressed."

"Feeling like we are left alone."

"Would like to see dispatchers included more often when debriefing is offered to fire/rescue/law enforcement. debriefing is often done for them when they have had a high stress call and the dispatchers are forgot about. Would also like it if dispatchers were not looked down on from administration if they have problems with depression/anxiety, which in a lot of cases was caused by this job in the first place. "

"Disturbing images or thoughts that can be difficult to forget once the work shift is over"

"Frightened, worried that I cannot do it anymore, alone"

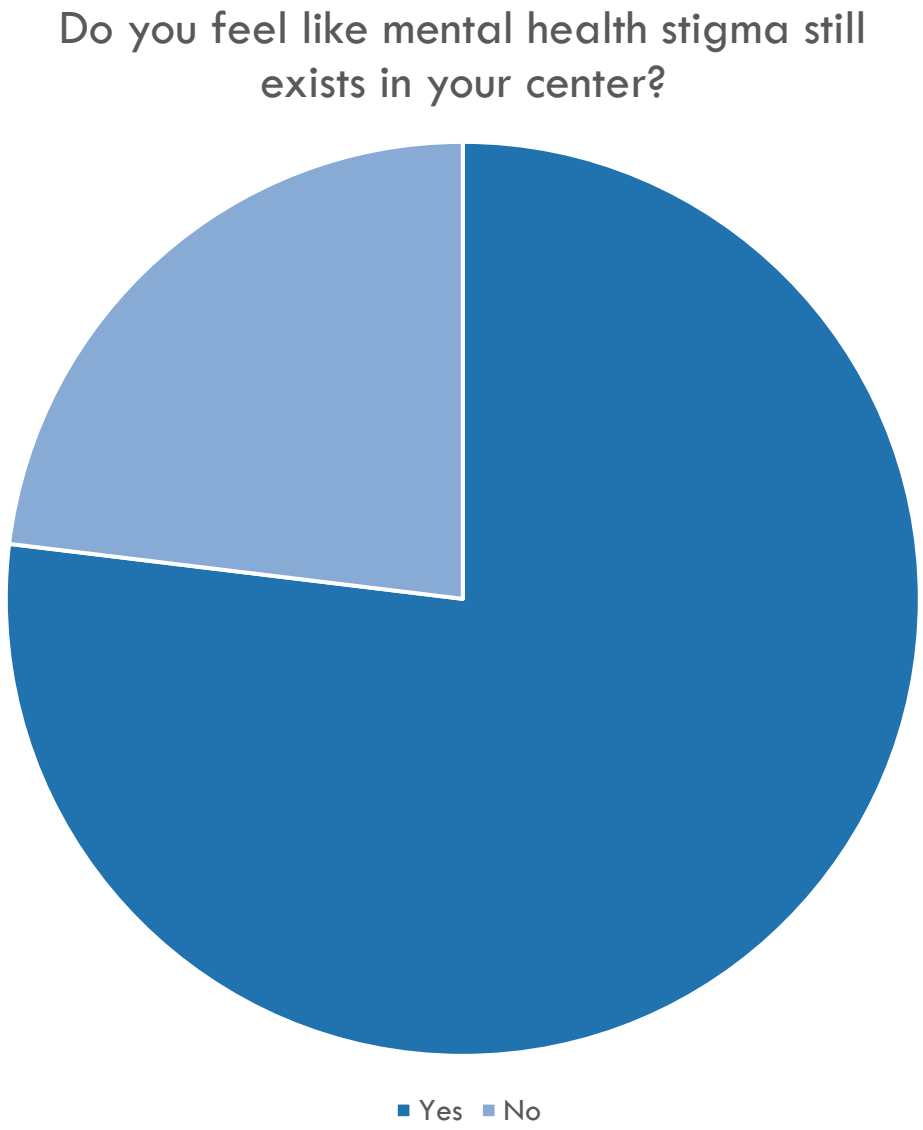
POLL RESULTS FROM DARE TO BE GREAT

41% answered yes to having PTSD or another mental health diagnosis.

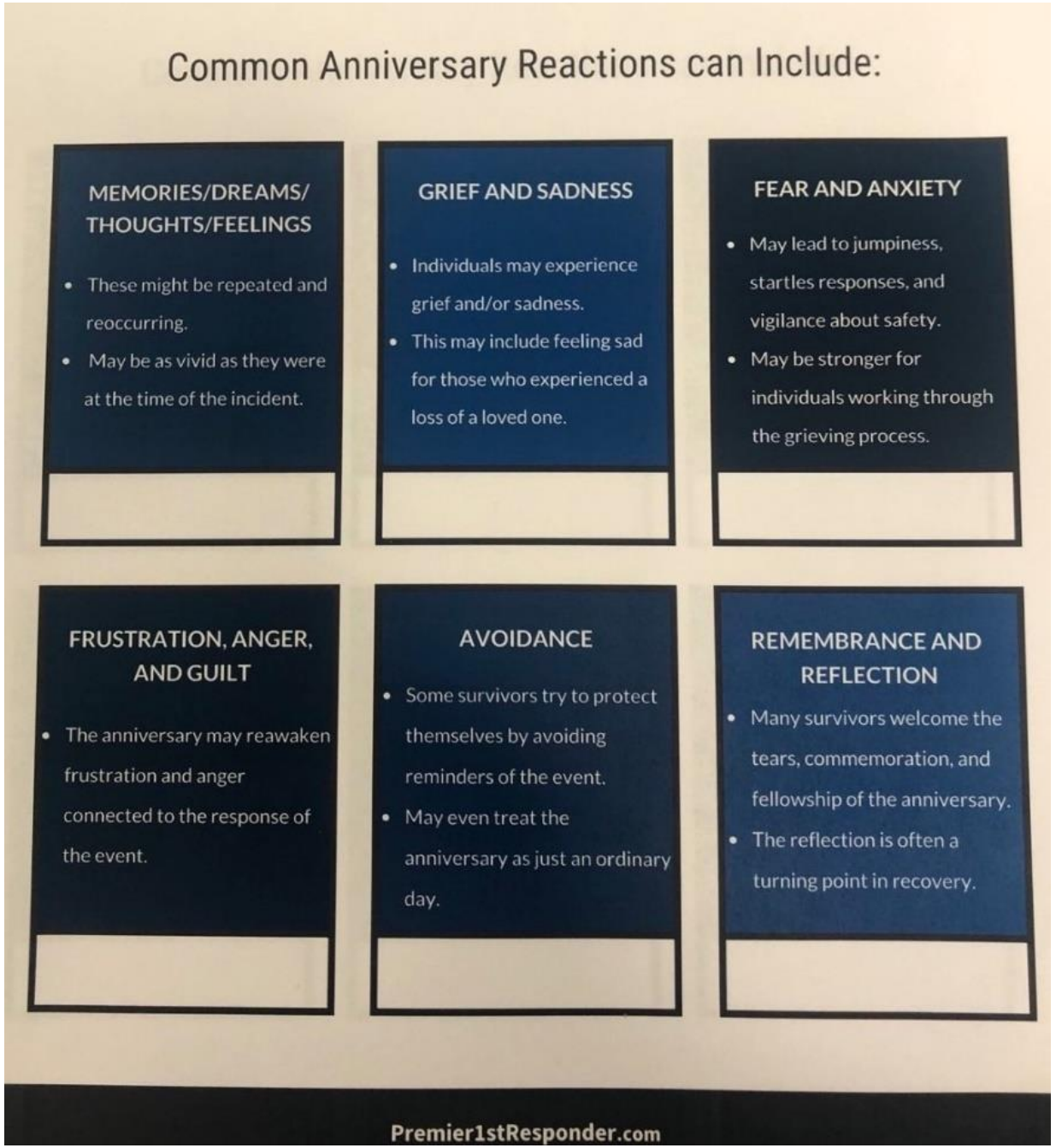
8.82% had disclosed their mental health diagnosis at work.

71% felt like they have support/resources for dealing with stress on and off the job.

84% felt like they have good coping skills for dealing with stress on the job.



ANNIVERSARY DATES



SUPPORT SYSTEM

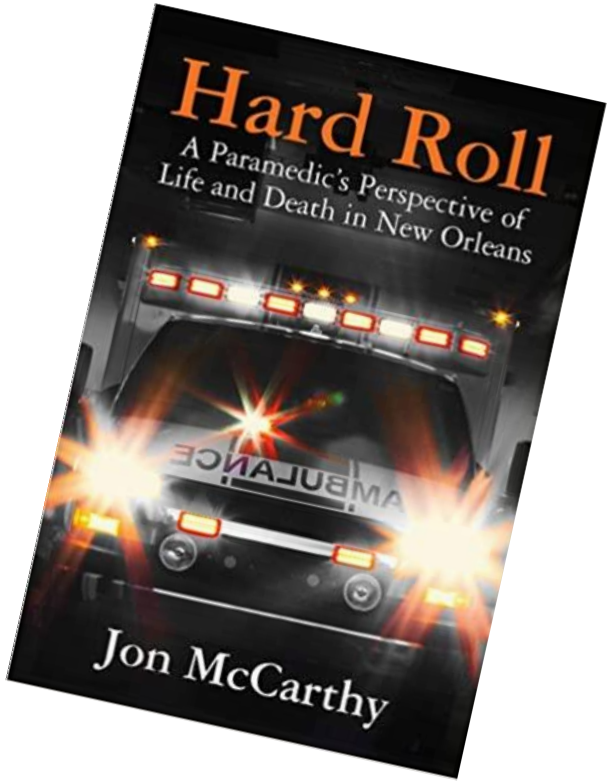
Professionals

- Primary Care Provider
- GI Specialist
- Psychiatrist
- Counselor
- Endocrinologist
- OBGYN
- Dietician
- ENT Specialist
- Health Coach

Natural

- Husband
- My babies: Dogs and birds
- Mom & Dad
- Chris's Aunt & Uncle
- Extended family
- Hair stylist
- Current & Past Co-workers
- Current & Past Education Professionals
- Peer Support Groups/Trainings
- NAMI Family

TRAVEL/EXPERIENCES/THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO



- ALA Conference New Orleans June 2018
  - Sally Field, Librarians from Sandy Hook, Author of Hard Roll
  - Writing for Cognotes while there as part of Student to Staff Program
- ACRL Conference Cleveland April 2019
  - Connecting with family members while there
  - Rock n Roll Hall of Fame
- APCO Baltimore August 2019
  - Attended Sessions like Imagine Listening and sharing story to be on the Within the Trenches podcast
  - Attended exercise sessions like Zumba

Advocacy/Volunteering/Giving Back

Dare to Be Great

By: Wendy L. Bundy, M.S.L.S., M.A., CPRS

Over the last year, I've told my story at three conferences. My story of what's it like to live with PTSD. Complex PTSD to be exact. The first one was at James Madison University's (JMU) Diversity Conference in March. It was a weird experience for me to do this in person since so much of life had been online for the past couple of years thanks to Covid. It was titled, "Living with PTSD, Working in Human Services," because I was working for the Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) at the time.

I focused on what daily life is life for me, coping skills I use, many of which are evidenced based like mindfulness and peer support. It was raw and real. I talked candidly about my experiences, including the trouble I'd had holding down a full-time job in the years when I was struggling the most. To my surprise, it resonated with many in the audience and several of us had a good conversation during the Q & A portion. There was the gentleman in the front row who had retired from law enforcement, who nodded along during my talk, and at the end shared his own experiences with similar feelings. There was a librarian in the back that connected with me because of my previous work experience in that environment and the unique stressors from the library field. There was a woman in the middle of the room who almost brought me to tears as she spoke, validating and praising me for being brave enough to share my story in this way.

>>Continue reading click here<<

- **Sharing stories for publications**
- **Pic I use with teal and PTSD necklace**
- **Wearing bracelets and other awareness jewelry**
- **VOCAL Advocacy Calls**
- **Attending trainings like NAMI SMARTS**
- **Attending Advocacy Day Events**
- **Sending letters/emails to politicians**
- **Speaking at conferences/events like this**

COPING SKILLS

Evidence Based: Mindfulness, Tapping, Yoga, Counseling (CBT), Seeking Safety, WRAP for Work Plan & Peer Support

Positive

- Creative Writing/Journaling/Reading
- Counseling
- Walks/Exercise/Yoga
  - Playing with pets
- Healthy eating
- Mindfulness
- Self-awareness
- Self-care/downtime/Sundays
- Puzzles/board games/card games/Wii
- Scheduling
- Setting boundaries
- Knowing my limits
- Adjusting expectations
- Music
- Learning/Higher Education
- Ancestry Research
- Pictures
- Scrapbooking/Crafts
- Awareness of Anniversary dates
- Avoiding certain people, places and things

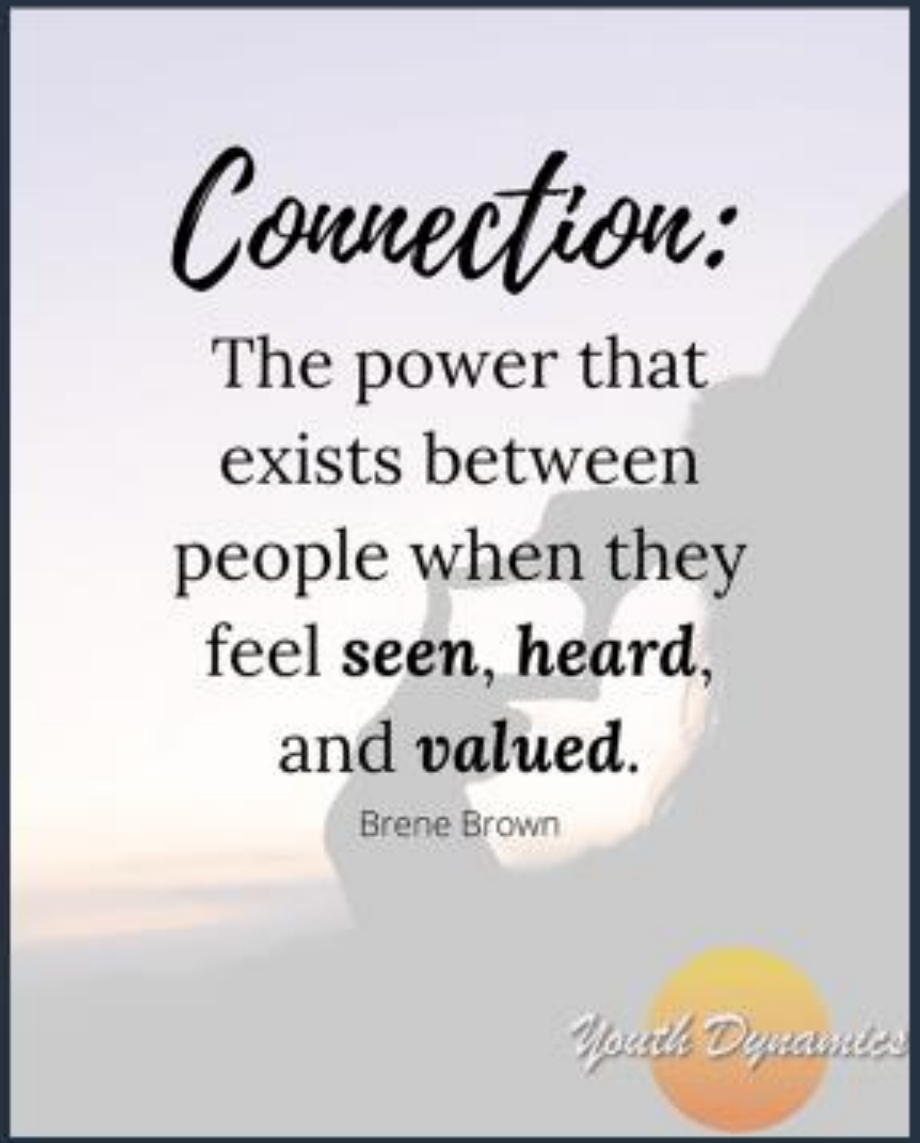
Negative

- Heat
- Too restrictive eating
- Too structured
- Isolation

Peer Support Training/Programs

NAMI Programs (Evidence Based): NAMI Basics, NAMI Ending the Silence, NAMI In Our Own Voice, NAMI Peer to Peer

Source: https://www.nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Research/Research-on-NAMI-Programs



DAILY TIPS

Daily Activities

- Morning/Nighttime routines
- Meal prep
- Taking brain breaks
- Coffee/Tea
- Morning chats with co-workers
- Sharing struggles with co-workers (within reason)

Other Tips/Thoughts

- Love Like Crazy
- Be Grateful esp. for the little things
- Take chances
- Say YES
- Putting myself in rooms/places that are uncomfortable and force me to grow
- Allowing myself GRACE
- Ask questions/ask for help

THE FUTURE

MENTAL HEALTH/SUICIDE RESOURCES

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**
  - **988**
  - Chat Option available at **suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat**
- **SAMHSA'S National Helpline (Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services)**
  - **1-800-662-HELP (4357)**
  - **TTY: 1-800-487-4889**
- **911 or local emergency room**
- **See more on next slide that utilize Peer Support (but note that not all the ones on the next slide are not the same as crisis hotlines/resources)**

RESOURCES THAT USE PEER SUPPORT

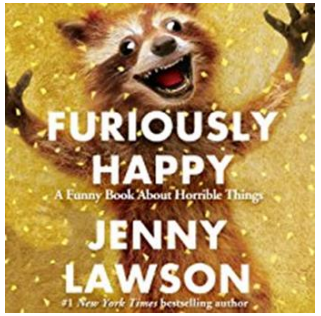
- **Safe Call Now** is a resource for public safety employees to speak confidentially with officers, former law enforcement officers, public safety professionals and/or mental healthcare providers who are familiar with your line of work.
  - MAKE A SAFE CALL NOW: **206-459-3020**

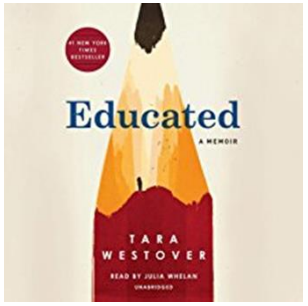
- **NAMI National Helpline** at 800-950-NAMI or chat with us. In a crisis, text "NAMI" to 741741.
  - Operates Monday-Friday 10am-10pm

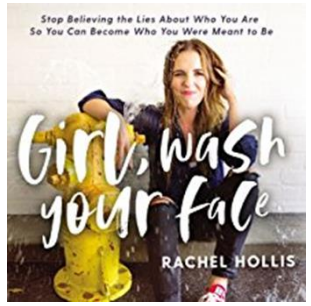
- **HERO- HOPE FOR EMERGENCY RESPONDERS ORGANIZATION**
- Peer support and resources are available immediately.
- You can contact our warm line to get help now.
  - **844.833.HERO (844.833.4376)**

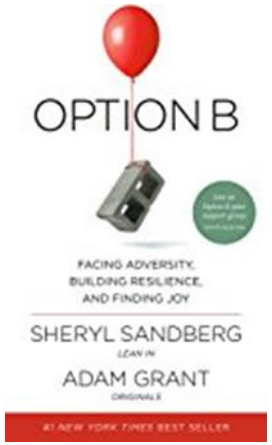
- NAMI Frontline Resources: https://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Frontline-Professionals/Public-Safety-Professionals
- NAMI Frontline Resources for Family members of Public Safety Professionals: https://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Frontline-Professionals/Public-Safety-Professionals/Family-Support

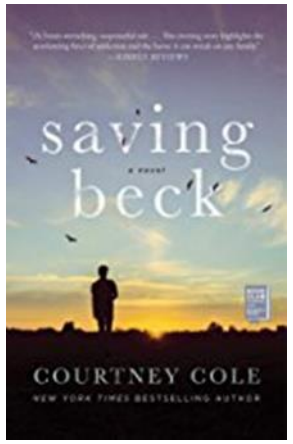
READING RECOMMENDATIONS

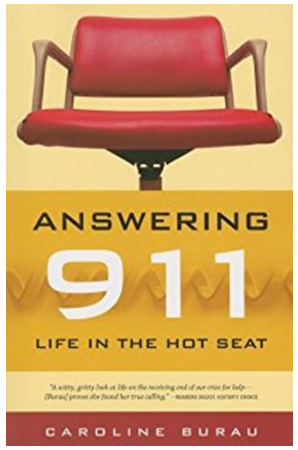


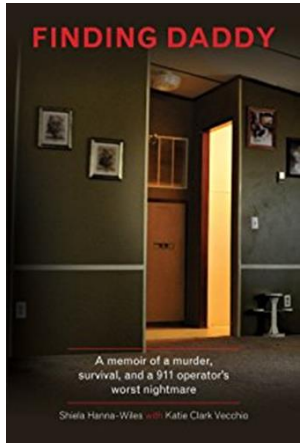


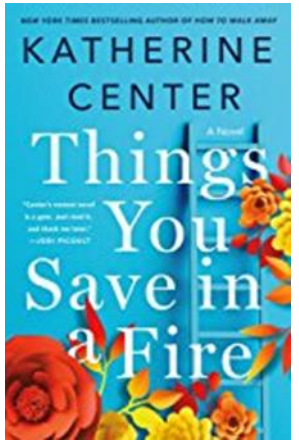


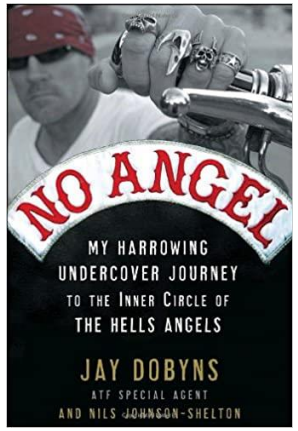


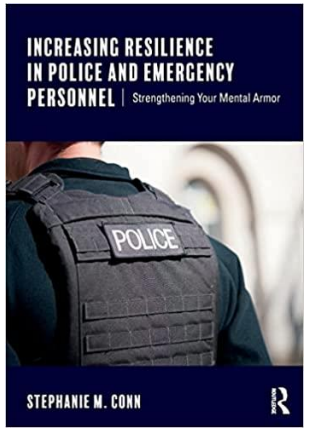


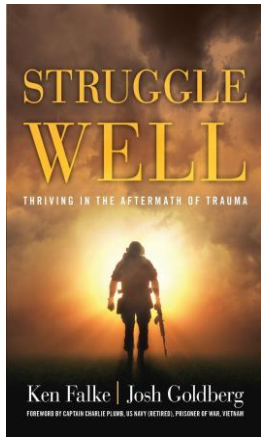


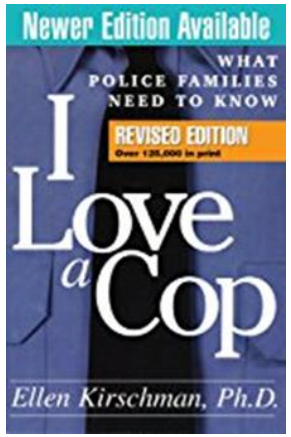


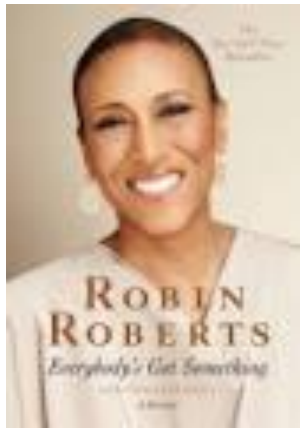


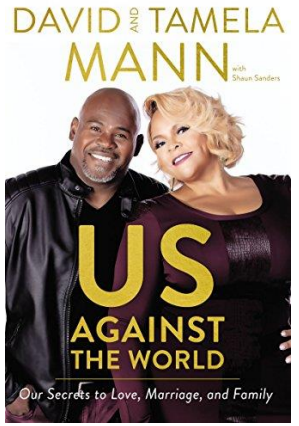












REFERENCES/LINKS

APCO Public Safety Telecommunicator Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Program Standard:

- https://www.apcointl.org/~documents/standard/11191-2021-critical-incident-stress-debriefing/?layout=default

Common Anniversary Reactions Picture/Info courtesy of Premier1stResponder.com (Instagram Post, April 1, 2022).

Crisis, Stress, and Human Resilience

Bundy, Wendy Lou. 2020. "Emergency Medical Dispatchers and PTSD." *Crisis, Stress, and Human Resilience: An International Journal* 1 (4): 192–214.

- https://www.crisisjournal.org/article/12208-emergency-medical-dispatchers-and-ptsd

Dare to be Great (2022). Responder Health Blog. https://responderhealth.com/blog/f/dare-to-be-great

NAMI Programs (Evidence Based): https://www.nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Research/Research-on-NAMI-Programs

UPCOMING EVENTS, AWARDS & RECORDINGS

Ep 482 features Wendy, former 911 dispatcher, and a Peer Support Recovery Specialist.

Let's Talk Dispatch
A PODCAST FOR 911 DISPATCHERS

Featured on April 5th Episode, Wellness with Wendy Bundy

WELLNESS
With Wendy
Let's Talk Dispatch Podcast

- *May 3, Guided Imagery & Tapping*
- *May 31, Meal Prepping*
- *June 28, Chair Yoga*

https://crowdcast.io/c/dtbg6

QUESTIONS/FEEDBACK

Wendy Bundy

Email: wlb2319@gmail.com

LinkedIn:

https://www.linkedin.com/in/wlb2319/