Stress Identification and Management

Stress Identification and Management provides telecommunicators with an understanding of stress, its causes, symptoms, and effects within the public safety communications environment. The course examines personal, environmental, operational, workplace, and critical incident stressors and explores the progression from normal stress to burnout. Learners examine practical strategies for managing stress through exercise, nutrition, relaxation, social support, and other stress-reduction techniques. The course also addresses critical incident stress, critical incident stress debriefing, trauma-related stress, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including signs, symptoms, prevention, intervention, and treatment approaches.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this course, learners will be able to:

1. Define stress, stressors, critical incident stress, burnout, and PTSD as presented in the course.
2. Recognize emotional, physical, cognitive, and behavioral symptoms associated with stress.
3. Identify personal, environmental, operational, and workplace factors that contribute to stress among telecommunicators.
4. Differentiate among the stages and types of stress and the stages and signs of burnout.
5. Apply practical stress-management techniques to reduce the negative effects of stress.
6. Describe critical incidents and the purpose and process of critical incident stress debriefing.
7. Recognize the signs and symptoms of PTSD and identify treatment and support approaches discussed in the course.

Module 1: Introduction

This module introduces Stress Identification and Management and establishes the unique role of telecommunicators as the first point of contact during police, fire, and medical emergencies. Learners examine how the responsibility of initiating the public safety response can create situational stress and receive an overview of the stress-related concepts addressed throughout the course.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Describe the telecommunicator's role in initiating the public safety response process.
2. Explain why telecommunicators may experience situational stress while handling emergency calls.
3. Identify the major stress-related topics addressed throughout the course.
4. Recognize the relationship between telecommunicator responsibilities and job-related stress.

Content/Activities

- Stress Identification & Management Course Overview
- The Real “First Responders”
- Video: Police Dispatchers Overview

Module 2: Stress and Stressors

This module defines stress and stressors and examines how the body responds to real or perceived danger. Learners explore emotional, physical, cognitive, and behavioral symptoms; the three stages and four types of stress; common personal and workplace stressors; and the immediate and long-term consequences of unresolved stress. The module also examines departmental and public expectations that may contribute to telecommunicator stress.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Define stress and stressors and explain the body's fight-or-flight response.
2. Differentiate among emotional, physical, cognitive, and behavioral symptoms of stress.
3. Distinguish among the three stages and four types of stress presented in the course.
4. Identify common personal, workplace, departmental, and public stressors affecting telecommunicators.
5. Explain the immediate and long-term effects of unresolved stress on health and well-being.

Content/Activities

- Stress, Symptoms, Stages, and Types
- Activity 1: Where Were You?
- Stressors and Their Immediate and Long-Term Effects
- Activity 2: What's Causing Your Stress?
- Video: Effects of Stress on the Body
- Activity 3: What Is Causing Your Stress at Work?
- Workplace, Departmental, and Public Stressors
- Brainteasers 1–5

Module 3: Causes of Stress

This module focuses on environmental and operational causes of stress within the communications workplace. Learners examine physical workspace conditions, equipment, sick building syndrome, organizational support, staffing and training issues, shift work, lack of control, and chronic exposure to tragedy and misery as potential contributors to occupational stress.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Identify environmental conditions within a communications center that may contribute to stress.
2. Describe potential causes and symptoms associated with sick building syndrome.
3. Identify operational factors that can increase stress among telecommunicators.
4. Explain how workplace conditions, organizational support, shift work, and chronic exposure to tragedy may affect telecommunicators.
5. Recognize environmental and operational stressors within their own work environment.

Content/Activities

- Environmental Causes of Stress
- Sick Building Syndrome
- Signs and Symptoms Associated with Sick Building Syndrome
- Video: Sick Building Syndrome
- Operational Causes of Stress
- Shift Work, Organizational Support, and Workplace Conditions
- Chronic Exposure to Tragedy and Other Operational Stressors
- Brainteasers 1–4

Module 4: Burnout

This module examines burnout as a syndrome of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion that can develop from ongoing stressors. Learners explore the four stages of burnout, signs of cumulative stress, the effects of burnout on job performance and interactions with callers, and key distinctions between stress and burnout.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Define burnout and describe its potential effects on telecommunicators.
2. Identify the characteristics of the four stages of burnout.
3. Recognize behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and occupational signs of cumulative stress and burnout.
4. Explain how burnout may interfere with a telecommunicator's ability to respond appropriately to callers.
5. Differentiate the characteristics and consequences of stress from those of burnout.

Content/Activities

- Understanding Burnout
- Video: Managing Stress and Burnout
- Burnout Stage 1: Exhaustion
- Burnout Stage 2: Shame and Doubt
- Burnout Stage 3: Cynicism
- Burnout Stage 4: Failure, Hopelessness, and Crisis
- Signs of Cumulative Stress and Stress vs. Burnout
- Video: 911 Dispatcher Says “Deal With It” and Brainteasers 1–4

Module 5: Stress Management

This module presents practical strategies telecommunicators can use to reduce and manage normal stress. Learners explore stress-management guidelines involving personal boundaries, social support, relaxation, nutrition, exercise, sleep, organization, and positive habits. The module also provides opportunities to practice deep breathing, visualization, and progressive relaxation techniques.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Identify practical strategies for reducing and managing normal stress.
2. Explain the roles of nutrition, exercise, sleep, social support, and positive habits in stress management.
3. Demonstrate the steps involved in a deep breathing exercise.
4. Describe and apply visualization and progressive relaxation techniques.
5. Identify personal habits and activities that can support effective long-term stress management.

Content/Activities

- Stress Reduction and Stress Management Guidelines
- Video: Stress Relief Tips
- Proper Diet and Nutrition
- Video: Nutrition, Exercise, and Wellness
- Video: Mental Fitness & Stress Relief Exercises
- Deep Breathing, Visualization, and Progressive Relaxation Exercises
- Ten Habits of Highly Effective Stress Managers and Additional Stress Relievers
- Brainteasers 1–4

Module 6: Critical Incident Stress

This module introduces critical incidents and critical incident stress within public safety communications. Learners examine incidents that may overwhelm an individual's capacity to cope, the physical, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive symptoms that can follow, and the role of critical incident stress debriefing. The module also explores the teaching phase of debriefing and principles associated with trauma-related stress and recovery.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Define a critical incident and identify examples telecommunicators may experience.
2. Recognize physical, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive symptoms of critical incident stress.
3. Describe the purpose and characteristics of critical incident stress debriefing.
4. Explain recommendations presented during the teaching phase for supporting recovery after a critical incident.
5. Summarize key principles of trauma-related stress, including individual differences in traumatic responses.

Content/Activities

- Dealing With Critical Incidents
- Critical Incidents Telecommunicators May Experience
- Critical Incident Stress and Its Symptoms
- Critical Incident Stress Debriefing
- Critical Incident Reflection: Facts, Thoughts, Reactions, and Symptoms
- The Teaching Phase
- Principles of Trauma-Related Stress and Video: Critical Incident Stress
- Brainteasers 1–4

Module 7: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

This module examines post-traumatic stress disorder and its relevance to telecommunicators who may experience traumatic events indirectly through emergency calls. Learners explore the development and symptoms of PTSD, including re-experiencing, avoidance, and increased anxiety and emotional arousal. The module also discusses research involving emergency call handlers and reviews prevention, intervention, professional assistance, and treatment approaches presented in the course.

Module Objectives

Upon completion of this module, learners will be able to:

1. Define PTSD and explain how direct or indirect exposure to traumatic events may contribute to its development.
2. Identify the three main clusters of PTSD symptoms described in the course.
3. Recognize signs that a normal response following a traumatic event may have become persistent or worsened.
4. Explain how PTSD symptoms may affect telecommunicator well-being, decision-making, relationships, and job performance.
5. Identify prevention, intervention, and treatment approaches for PTSD presented in the course.

Content/Activities

- Understanding PTSD and Who May Be Affected
- 9-1-1 Telecommunicators and PTSD
- Video: PTSD Symptoms and Signs
- Re-Experiencing, Avoidance, Anxiety, and Emotional Arousal
- PTSD and the Call Handler
- Prevention, Intervention, and Professional Assistance
- PTSD Treatment Approaches, Including Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, Family Therapy, Medication, and EMDR
- Brainteasers 1–4

Course Completion Criteria

To successfully complete this course and earn continuing education hours, learners must achieve a minimum score of 75%. The quiz must be completed within one hour.

- CE hours awarded: 2
- Certificate duration: 12 Months

Technical Requirements

- Desktop, laptop, or mobile device
- Speakers or headphones
- High-speed Internet access
- A current web browser