

THIS IS KEVIN

MODULE TWENTY

Kevin has been a CO for six years. The last two years have been particularly stressful. He was in two major prison brawls that left him injured, once with a knife. He's moved around within the prison system recently so he doesn't have a new peer group yet. He's in great physical shape from frequent exercise since he wants to be able to control situations physically.



Recent circumstances have been tough. Mandatory overtime has strained his marriage, and his wife has moved out. Because of his hours, he's not in contact with many of his friends outside of work. He's having trouble sleeping, and his only outlet is exercise. At work, he has a lot of eyes on him because an inmate committed suicide last month. There's a lot of inquiry and pressure on him and other COs to find out what happened.

For the past few months, his unit has often been on lockdown due to staff shortages. Inmates are angry at the lockdown and often verbally assault the officers. When the inmates are let out, there have been several fights due to lockdown stress. Kevin is tired and sore from trying to break up the fights and putting incarcerated people in restraints.

Further, an incarcerated person has accused Kevin of purposely breaking personal possessions (a radio) during a cell search.

SUPPORT SYSTEMS TO COMBAT STRESS

MODULE TWENTY

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)

EAPs are an important source of support for correctional officers. These programs can help support correctional officers in dealing with stressors related to work and home that may be impacting wellbeing and performance. Some EAPs are offered internal to the agency, and others are offered by external providers.



Peer Support Programs

If available, peer support programs are another important source of support (Brower, 2013). With these programs, correctional officers are trained to offer support to their peers (Brower, 2013). This often makes accessing support less stigmatizing and more desirable, as correctional officers may talk to someone who knows what their day-to-day experiences are like (Brower, 2013).

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) is another strategy of increasing interest to those in correctional settings. "Mindfulness is a sustained nonreactive attention to one's ongoing mental contents and processes (physical sensations, perceptions, affective states, thoughts, and imagery)" (Samuelson et al., 2007, p. 255). Engaging in mindfulness can increase individuals' "capacity for attentiveness and presence and generally promotes a more open, relaxed, flexible, and less reactive state of mind."

That is, being aware of stressors and reactions to these can help cope with such stressors in a calm way. Mindfulness techniques are being used with correctional officers, police, court personnel, and incarcerated adults and youth around the nation.

Other free resources can be found at the Prison Mindfulness Institute. Visit <http://www.prisonmindfulness.org/resources/prisoners/>

The Self-Care Exercises and Activities within the Self-Care Starter Kit

https://socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/self-care-starter-kit/self-care-assessments-exercises/exercises-and-activities.html#title_5