

## 20: MANAGING WORKPLACE STRESS

<b>Time:</b>	45 min.
<b>Format:</b>	Pre-work, activity, discussion
<b>Materials:</b>	PowerPoint, Handout: "Support Systems to Combat Stress," Handout: "This is Kevin," flip chart and markers.  Optional: Handout: "Workplace Stress Survey."  Optional: materials such as brochures that give information about any relevant workplace or agency Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) or other local sources for mental health care for correctional staff.
<b>Competencies:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify sources of workplace stress and burnout.</li><li>• Describe resources and strategies for addressing workplace stress.</li></ul>

### Description

This module focuses on the stress of being a corrections professional, especially a correctional officer. After identifying specific sources of stress, participants will engage in an activity to better understand how stress can lead to burnout. Finally, the module will end with a discussion of ways to get support to remain emotionally and mentally healthy at work.

THIS MODULE HAS PRE-WORK. If pre-work is not feasible, you may have the participants take the workplace stress survey as part of the training day.

## Before Training

### Pre-work for Participants

Ask participants to take the Workplace Stress Survey online and bring the results in to the training day. The survey can be found at <https://www.stress.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Workplace-Stress-Survey.pdf>

### For Trainer

Make enough copies of the handouts “Support Systems to Combat Stress” and “This is Kevin” for every participant to have one.

If you've decided that taking the “Workplace Stress Survey” before the training day is unfeasible for participants, print and bring in enough copies of it for every participant.

If you have relevant materials for participants about EPA programs or other local support for correctional staff, assemble and bring enough for all participants.

## During Training

### Workplace Stress is Powerful



### Set Up

Say:

It's important to acknowledge that all workplaces have stress and that being a CO has its own particular set of stressors.

## Activity: Add It Up

Say:

So what are some common sources of stress in the life of a CO? Let's invent a corrections officer and see what might cause him or her stress.



Go to flipchart or board and say:

Let's give the CO a name – what shall we call him/her? (Note: select the gender appropriate to the training group depending on the community their facilities houses.) Write the name they decide on at the top of the board.

Then have them call out stressful things about life as a CO that the CO they've created might have experienced and write them down on a flip chart or white board, as is available to you. Give them time to think and to decide what they want to say. You may find that they'll start with things that are easy to admit but will slowly make more suggestions as they grow more comfortable and continue to think carefully.

Facilitate discussion with the following:

- That's a lot of stressful events. Can these lead to burnout?
- What does burnout look like on the job? How does a burned out CO behave (NOTE: Make list of what they relate.)
- What kind of consequences can stress bring to a CO, on and off the job?



Transition by saying:

Let's look at the life of one CO.



## Correctional Officer Well-being

### Activity: Kevin the Correctional Officer

1. Explain that this activity will have them assess the well-being of a correctional officer, in the same way they assessed the well-being of an incarcerated person in earlier modules.
2. Give a copy of the handout “This is Kevin” to every participant.
3. Read the following scenario:



Kevin has been a CO for six years. The last two years have been particularly stressful. He was in two major prison riots that left him injured, once with a knife. He's moved around within the correctional 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.



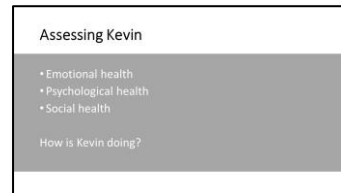
Recent circumstances have been tough. Mandatory overtime has strained his marriage, and his wife has moved out. Because of his hours, he's not in contact with many of his friends outside of work. He's having trouble sleeping and his only outlet is exercise. At work, he has a lot of eyes on him because an inmate committed suicide last month. There's lots 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. Those who are incarcerated and their families are angry at the lockdowns and often verbally assault the officers. When lockdowns are over, there have sometimes been fights due to lockdown stress. Kevin is tired and sore from trying to break up the fights and putting

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

4. Give the following instructions:

- a. Let's discuss Kevin's well-being.
- b. What do you think about the state of Kevin's emotional health? (Hint: Lots of personal and work-related stress. Also mention that people handle stress differently, so this will vary widely).
- c. What about the state of his social health? (Hint: He's separated from his wife and doesn't have a peer group at work or time to see friends outside of work).
- d. If Kevin were your co-worker, what advice would you give him?



## How Can We Feel Better?

### Discussion

Say:

Based on Kevin's experience and what you know from your own life, what are some things we can do to feel better? (NOTE: keep a list, again.)

Facilitate a discussion based on the following questions:

- How can you improve the following?
  - Emotional health
  - Social health
  - Physical health

Give the handout "Support Systems to Combat Stress" and review it with them.



Say:

If you don't know if your workplace offers an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or if you don't know how to access it, make sure to consult your employee manual or ask when you return to work.



**Facilitator Note:** If all (or most) participants are covered under the same EAP or similar program, hand out the materials you've brought in and explain how to access these services and the benefits.

Say:

Take a moment to think and write down at least one thing you know you can do to keep yourself healthy. It might be for your emotional, social or physical health.

Give them a few minutes to think and write and then say:

After you leave today, make a plan to try out one of the ideas you've had to help relieve your stress so you can enjoy your life and have success on the job.

## How Are You?

### Discussion: The Workplace Stress Survey

**If you're giving the "Workplace Stress Survey" in class,** pass it out now. Tell them that this survey is for their own benefit. It is confidential and will not be collected. Allow them five minutes to complete the survey.

**If they've taken the survey outside of the training day,** ask them to bring out their copies for their own reference. Again, emphasize that this is for their own use and it will not be collected.

**A Note on Confidentiality:** participants have the right to keep their scores to themselves. Be sensitive to the fact that these scores are highly personal and participants may not be proud of what they scored. In light of their right to confidentiality, the questions are general and do not

require anyone to disclose their score. The survey is a tool for participants to use for self-awareness so they can make choices about their own well-being so be sure to keep that in mind.

Say:

Let's think about our own workplace stress surveys. Let's take a few minutes of self-reflection and think about our individual scores.

Facilitate self-reflection with the following questions:

- Were you surprised by the results of your survey? Or did it seem about right to you?
- Are you aware of any programs your workplace or agency has in place to support you?

## What Are You Living For?

### Discussion

Introduce the discussion by saying:

People need purpose and meaning in their lives in order to keep living. What kinds of things can give us meaning and keep us going when life gets hard?

Facilitate discussion with the following:

- What makes life good and worth living to you?
- How are hopes for the future and personal goals important to well-being?



## Concluding

Say:

Your own health—physical, social and emotional—is a crucial part of your job. While a lot of focus goes to interacting with people who are incarcerated, you should all keep your own health in mind. Support each other. Talk to your co-workers if you need support or talk to a friend who seems to be struggling on the job. The work you do is important. Care for yourself!





## SOURCES

### Module 20

Appelbaum, K., Hickey, J., and Packer, I. (2001). The role of correctional officers in multidisciplinary mental health care in prison. *Psychiatric Services*, 52(10), 1343-1347.

Beagley, D. (n.d.). Correctional fatigue and self-care [PowerPoint Slides]. Center for Applied Behavioral Health Policy.

Brower, J. (2013). Correctional officer wellness and safety literature review. National Institute of Corrections, 1-26. Retrieved from: <http://nicic.gov/library/028104>

Center for Mindfulness in Corrections. (n.d.). Mindfulness. Retrieved from: <http://mindfulcorrections.org/mindfulness/>

Finn, P. (2000). Addressing correctional officer stress: Programs and strategies. *Issues and Practices in Criminal Justice*.

Pittaro, M. (2015a, January 5). Suicide among corrections officers: It's time for an open discussion. In Public Safety. Retrieved from: <http://inpublicsafety.com/2015/01/suicide-among-corrections-officers-its-time-for-an-open-discussion/>

Pittaro, M. (2015b, January 29). Stress management strategies for correctional officers. In Public Safety. Retrieved from: <http://inpublicsafety.com/2015/01/stress-management-strategies-for-correctional-officers/>

Prison Mindfulness Institute and Transforming Justice: The Center for Mindfulness and Criminal Justice (2016). The mindful justice initiative. Retrieved from: <http://mindfulcorrections.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/MJI-report-Sept-2016.pdf>

## Correctional Mental Health

Samuelson, M., Carmody, J., Kabat-Zinn, J., and Bratt, M.A. (2007). Mindfulness-based stress reduction in Massachusetts correctional facilities. *The Prison Journal*, 87(2), 254-268