Resilience in EMS: What it is and How to Get it

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EMS is a stressful occupation.
Burnout

92% of a mostly volunteer EMS sample were emotionally burned out.

(Essex, 2008)
PTSD

$\approx 20\% \ (4\%-40\%)$ of EMS providers have probable PTSD.

(Hegg-Deloye, 2013; Rybojad, 2016)
Depression

6% of EMS providers were depressed.

(Bentley, 2013)
Suicidality

Rates of contemplating (37%) or attempting (6.6%) suicide are $\approx 10X$ higher than the general population.

(Newland et al., 2015)
We can mitigate some of the risk

Sleep, managing shifts, etc.
But we can’t eliminate it.

So what do we do?
Build **resilience**: The ability to bounce back from stress and adversity
And even better...

Handling stress and adversity so well you don’t have to bounce back.
What I’m going to Cover Today

I. Describe a helpful structure for understanding resilience and coping
II. Provide you with a framework for handling difficult circumstances
III. Provide you with a strategy for building resilience over time
I. A framework for resilience and coping
Appraisal Theory
If you understand the theory, you can build strategies for resilience.
The Appraisal Process

Event or Situation

Primary Appraisal: Threat?
- Yes
- No

Secondary Appraisal: Handle It?
- No
  - Bad stress
- Yes
  - Good stress
  - No stress

Coping
It’s not the event, it’s your **evaluation** of the event.

Different evaluation, different response
But how?
Learn the mindsets and beliefs of resilient people.
II. Hardiness
Bell Telephone
The 3 Cs of Hardiness

- Commitment
- Control
- Challenge
Commitment

vs. Withdrawal and Avoidance
It’s important to stay **involved** and active.
Control

vs. Helplessness
Find a sense of **control** wherever you can and **do** whatever you can.
Challenge vs. Threat
You can handle it and learn and grow from the experience.
The Appraisal Process

Event or Situation

Primary Appraisal: Threat?
- Yes
- No

Yes → Secondary Appraisal: Handle It?
- No → Bad stress
- Yes →
  - No → No stress
  - Yes → Good stress
Commitment -> Engagement
Control -> Active Coping
Challenge -> “I got this. Bring it on.”
But what do I do?
Adopt the beliefs and the behaviors will follow.
As I move on…

How can you adopt these beliefs and how would they show in your life?
III. Building resilience over time.
Hardiness helps, but you also need a strategy for managing over the long haul.
“Life isn’t a sprint, it’s a marathon.”
“Life isn’t a sprint, it’s a marathon.”
“Life isn’t a marathon, it’s a series of sprints.”
Marathon

Stress -> Stress -> Stress -> Stress -> Stress -> Stress
Sprints

Stress→ Recovery→ Stress→ Recovery→ Stress→ Recovery
You have to balance and alternate periods of stress and periods of recovery.

Little stress, little recovery

Big stress, big recovery
“Work hard, play hard.”
“I’ll sleep when I’m dead.”
But what works?
Just about anything.

Let your body and emotions be the guide.
What I Covered Today

I. Described a helpful structure for understanding resilience and coping: *Attributional theory*

II. Provided you with a framework for handling difficult circumstances: *Hardiness*

III. Provided you with a strategy for building resilience over time: *Life as a Series of Sprints*
EMS will burn you out if you let it.
Adopting hardiness beliefs and treating life as a series of sprints isn’t difficult.

But they aren’t natural either.
It will take some practice (and probably some scheduling).

So practice. And schedule.
Be here for the long haul.
Thank you.

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