Best Therapeutic Practices for First Responders

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What Can We Do to Help?

Knowing the signs and symptoms of PTSD can help save the life of you or someone you know. By knowing which options are available and likely to work, we can ensure that the individual is taken care of in an effective manner. PTSD is extremely treatable, and we need to protect our first responders at all costs. They are the heroes of society and we have the ability to make sure members of this group live long, healthy, productive lives.

If you or someone you know needs help, please reach out.

Suicide Hotline:
1-800-273-8255

First Responder Hotline:
1-206-459-3020

Best Therapeutic Practices for First Responders

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What is PTSD?

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is defined as a mental health condition that's triggered by a terrifying event — either experiencing it or witnessing it. Symptoms may include flashbacks, nightmares and severe anxiety, as well as uncontrollable thoughts about the event (Mayo Clinic). First Responders are especially susceptible to PTSD as the profession is surrounded by tragedy every day. Knowing which therapeutic interventions work and are available could be the difference of life or death for some people.

What Methods Work?

There are many different forms of therapy out there. Many different types claim to be the “fix-all” to symptoms of PTSD. However, of the main types of therapeutic interventions, the most heavily supported are:

- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (83.3%)**
  Challenges unhelpful thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes, improves emotional regulation, and targets solving current problems.

- **Medication (83.3%)**
  The use of medication helps when used with other methods in reducing symptoms of PTSD. Medications may include antidepressants, anti-anxiety medication, Benzodiazepines, Beta-Blockers, etc.

- **Cognitive Processing Theory (66.7%)**
  Essentially, CPT is talk therapy which helps restructure the way one thinks and reacts to those thoughts.

- **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (66.7%)**
  EMDR works by looking at back-and-forth movement or sound while calling to mind an upsetting memory until shifts occur in the way that one experiences that memory.

- **Life Skills Training (66.7%)**
  This type of therapeutic intervention teaches the individual how to deal with the somatic (physical) and psychosomatic (mental) symptoms associated with PTSD including:
  - Breath Retraining
  - Muscle Relaxation
  - Cognitive Restructuring

- **Psychoeducation (50%)**
  Teaches individuals about the somatic (physical) and psychosomatic (mental) experiences the body goes through when experiencing PTSD.

Other Methods:

- SMART Recovery Training (50%)
- Motivational Interviewing (33%)
- AA, NA, or related Substance Misuse Groups (33%)
- Yoga/ Exercise (33%)
- Pain Management (16.7%)
- Pastoral/Religious Care (33%)

Why is this Important?

- In 2019, 68% of firefighter deaths were related to suicide
- The rate of suicide in first responders is nearly 5x higher than that of the general population
- These individuals are risking their lives daily for the community... they are our heroes