

# THE “MAKE IT SAFE” POLICE OFFICER INITIATIVE

## CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN POLICE PSYCHOLOGY



Make it Safe

Police  
Officer  
Initiative

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Three “Seconds” of Policing  
Primary and Secondary Danger of Policing  
“Make it Safe” Police Officer Initiative

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# The Three “Seconds” of Policing

# The Three “Seconds” of Policing **Secondary Injury, Secondary Trauma, Secondary Danger**

## (1) Secondary Injury

The way an officer is treated following a critical incident such as a shooting is not benign. *Secondary injury* is the harm that can be caused to police officers when they are poorly treated following involvement in a critical incident. One way to virtually insure second injury following a police critical incident is to treat the involved officers as suspects without cause to do so.

# Police Secondary Injury

While some police secondary injury-causing behaviors are obvious and easily understood, keep in mind that the smallest and seemingly innocuous insensitive statements, comments, or even thoughtless non-verbal glances or gestures may cause or contribute to an officer's second injury.



# To reduce the probability of secondary injury

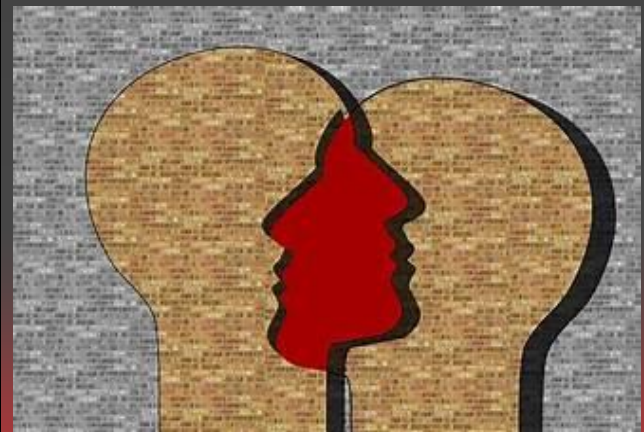
Peers, investigators, supervisors, and command personnel must remain aware that involved officers...

1. may have just survived a fight for their lives
2. may have had to use lethal force to protect self or another
3. may be variously impacted by various aspects of the incident
4. may be experiencing psychological denial and shock
5. may be experiencing reactions not easily observed or understood by others
6. may have been physically or psychologically injured
7. need not be treated as suspects without cause to do so

# The Three “Seconds” of Policing

## (2) Secondary Trauma

*Secondary trauma* — also known as vicarious trauma — refers to the indirect traumatization that can occur when a person is exposed to others who have been directly traumatized. Police officers are at risk for secondary trauma by the very nature of policing. Secondary trauma is also a real concern for spouses and family members of police officers that have been involved in a critical incident, as well as previously non-traumatized officers and others participating in departmental critical incident group debriefings.



# Some ways to avoid or manage police officer secondary trauma...

- Maintain a life outside of policing
- Develop hobbies that interest you
- Engage healthy practices – diet and exercise
- Develop a healthy personal boundary
- Self-monitor – remain mindful of your stress levels
- Talk to trusted persons about stressful experiences
- Utilize body and mind relaxation techniques
- Recognize your limits – take a break when you need some time to recover from stressful work incidents – “get away” for a while
- Manage your workload – share duties and responsibilities when possible. This helps to limit being overwhelmed by exposure to traumatized others.

# The Three “Seconds” of Policing

## (3) Secondary Danger

The *secondary danger* of policing is the idea that equates “asking for psychological help” with “personal and professional weakness.” *Secondary danger* can be thought of as an attitude which includes the idea that police officers must “show no weakness.”



Is there a primary danger of policing? Yes.



# Police Primary and Secondary Danger

POLICE SERVICES



**The unavoidable stressors of  
policing comprise the**



***primary danger* of policing**

# Police primary danger

The primary danger of policing is comprised of:

- (1) physical primary danger and
- (2) psychological primary danger.

## **Police Physical Primary Danger**

The physical primary danger of policing is comprised of the inherent risks of the job, such as working in motor vehicle traffic, working in bad weather, confronting armed and violent persons, being a target of disgruntled persons, etc. You need only to read a newspaper or watch a news broadcast to understand the physical primary danger of policing. These cases represent circumstances in which an officer can be physically harmed.

# Police Psychological Primary Danger

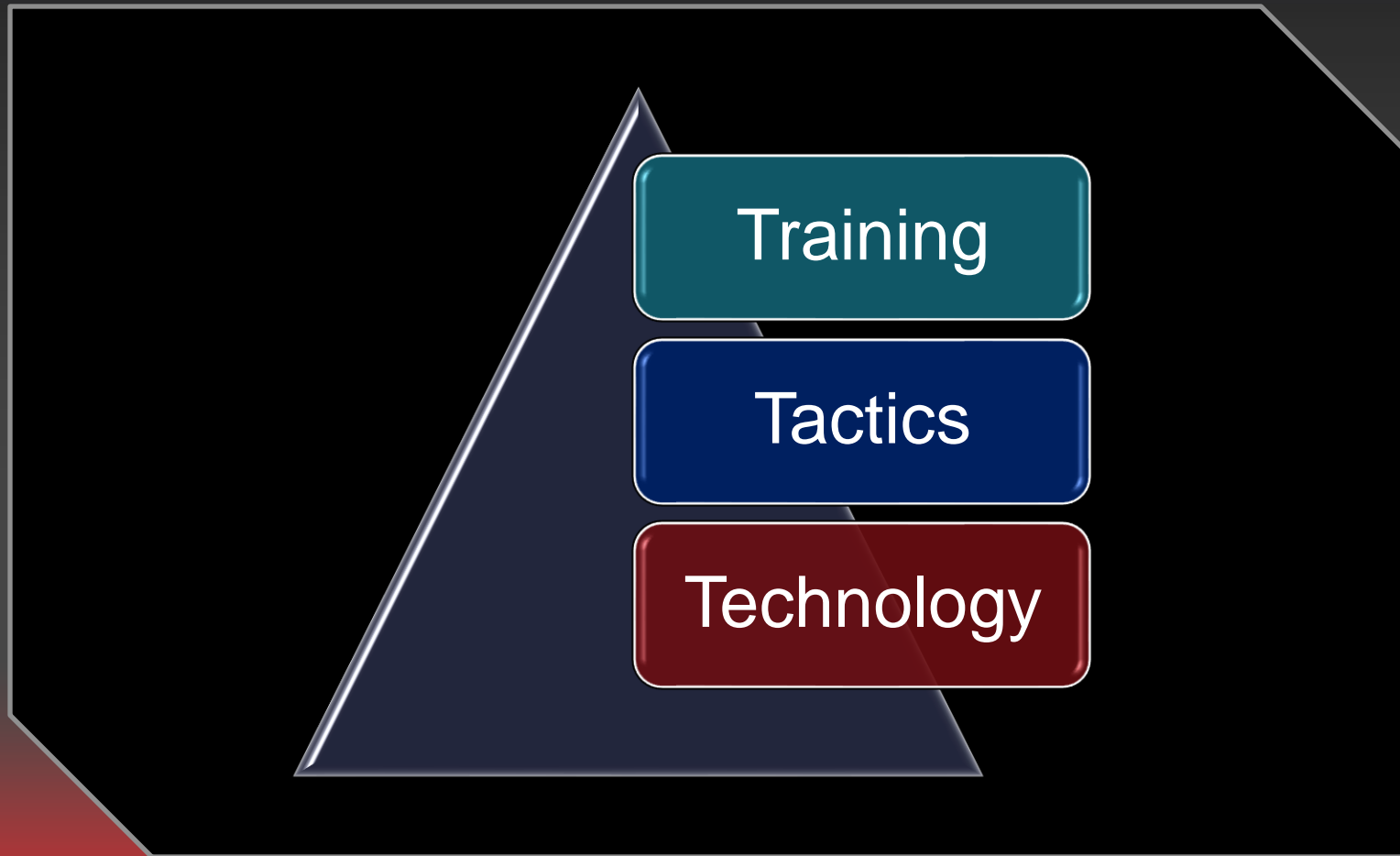
The psychological primary danger of policing is related to, but distinguishable from the physical primary danger of policing. The psychological primary danger of policing is represented in the increased probability that due to the nature of policing, officers will be exposed to critical incidents, work-related cumulative stress, and human tragedy, thereby increasing the probability of stress related psychological difficulties.

# Police Physical and Psychological Primary Danger



Another way of saying this is that the physical primary danger of policing constitutes a work environment that generates the psychological primary danger of policing.

# Addressing police physical and psychological primary danger involves the “3 T’s”



The 3 "T's"



**POLICE**

**Training  
In Progress**

Police primary dangers are addressed by basic, advanced, & ongoing training, effective tactics, and improved technology



Training, Tactics, and Technology for addressing the primary physical and psychological dangers of policing.



Are there specific programs designed to address the secondary danger of policing?



# Programs designed to address the secondary danger of policing are notably lacking.

This allows the secondary danger of policing to continue unchecked.

What is needed is a profession-wide acknowledgement of secondary danger and the development of programs to effectively address it.

Law enforcement agencies must come to better understand secondary danger, its origin, and ways to reduce it.



# Police Secondary Danger



The secondary danger of policing is an insidious artifact of the police culture and is often strengthened and reinforced by police officers themselves.

The idea that equates *“asking for psychological help”* with *“personal and professional weakness”* is:

- (1) strengthened by officers’ fear of department or peer ridicule or reprisal for seeking psychological help, and
- (2) reinforced by actual department or peer ridicule or reprisal for seeking psychological help...

# Secondary Danger

...the idea that equates “asking for psychological help” with “personal and professional weakness” can also be reinforced by *friends, family members, personal self-talk, and officers’ internalized ideas about what a cop should be!*

Combined, these factors encourage some officers to conclude that good cops must “show no weakness,” including the “mental weakness” sometimes associated with seeking psychological intervention and support.



*How dangerous is secondary danger?*



So dangerous that some officers will  
suicide before asking for help.

The  
*Make it Safe Police Officer Initiative*  
is aimed at reducing the secondary danger  
of policing and thereby reduce the number  
of police officer suicides.



Make it Safe

**Police**

**Officer**

**Initiative**

## The **Make it Safe Police Officer Initiative** seeks to...

1. make it personally and professionally acceptable for police officers to engage peer and professional psychological support services without fear of agency or peer ridicule or reprisal.
2. reduce officers fears about asking for psychological support when confronting potentially overwhelming job or other life difficulties.
3. change organizational climates that discourage officers from seeking psychological help by reducing explicit and implicit organizational messages that imply asking for psychological help is indicative of personal and professional weakness.
4. alter the profession-wide police culture that generally views asking for psychological help as a personal or professional weakness.
5. improve the career-long psychological wellness of officers by encouraging police departments to adopt long-term and comprehensive officer-support strategies such as the Comprehensive Model for Police Advanced Strategic Support (COMPASS).

# The 12 Elements of the Make it Safe Police Officer Initiative

Make it Safe

**Police**

**Officer**

**Initiative**

# The Make it Safe Police Officer Initiative encourages:

(1) every officer to "self-monitor" and to take personal responsibility for their mental wellness.

The logo features the text "MENTAL WELLNESS MATTERS" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. The words "MENTAL" and "WELLNESS" are stacked on the top line, and "MATTERS" is on the bottom line. A horizontal blue line is positioned below the word "MATTERS". The text is contained within a white rectangular border. To the right of the text is a stylized blue silhouette of a human head in profile, facing right. Inside the head is a red heart. The background of the head area is filled with a pattern of blue hexagons of varying sizes.

**MENTAL  
WELLNESS  
MATTERS**



# Make it Safe Police Officer Initiative

(2) every officer to seek psychological support when confronting potentially overwhelming difficulties (officers do not have to "go it alone").

**Tough cops  
ask for help**



# Make it Safe Police Officer Initiative

(3) every officer to diminish the sometimes deadly effects of secondary danger by reaching out to other officers known to be facing difficult circumstances.



**REACH OUT**

you may save a life

# Make it Safe Police Officer Initiative

(4) veteran and ranking officers to use their status to help reduce secondary danger . Veteran and ranking officers can reduce secondary danger by openly discussing it, appropriately sharing selected personal experiences, avoiding the use of pejorative terms to describe officers seeking or engaging psychological support, and talking about the acceptability of seeking psychological support when confronting stressful circumstances.

# Make it Safe Police Officer Initiative

(5) law enforcement administrators to better educate themselves about the nature of secondary danger and to take the lead in secondary danger reduction.



# Make it Safe Police Officer Initiative

(6) law enforcement administrators to issue a departmental memo encouraging officers to engage psychological support services when confronting potentially overwhelming stress (the memo should include information about confidentiality and available support resources).

# Make it Safe Police Officer Initiative

(7) basic training in stress management, stress inoculation, critical incidents, posttraumatic stress, police family dynamics, substance use and addiction, and the warning signs of depression and suicide.



**STRESS**

# Make it Safe Police Officer Initiative

(8) the development of programs that engage pre-emptive, early-warning, and periodic department-wide officer support interventions (for example, proactive annual check in, “early warning” policies designed to support officers displaying signs of stress, and regularly scheduled stress inoculation and critical incident stressor management training).

# Make it Safe Police Officer Initiative

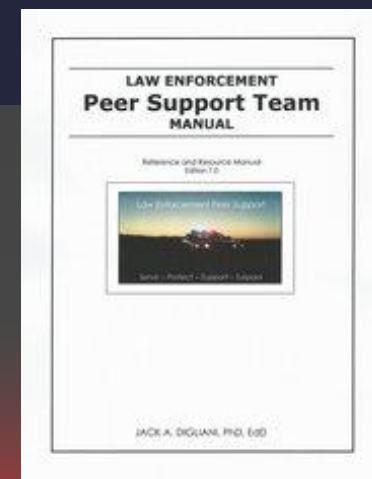
(9) agencies to initiate incident-specific protocols to support officers and their families when officers are involved in critical incidents.





# Make it Safe Police Officer Initiative

(10) agencies to create appropriately structured, properly trained, and clinically supervised peer support teams.



Serve-Protect-Support-Surpass

# Make it Safe Police Officer Initiative

(11) agencies to provide easy and confidential access to counseling and specialized police psychological support services.

Counseling  
**CONFIDENTIAL**

# Make it Safe Police Officer Initiative

(12) officers at all levels of the organization to enhance the agency climate so that others are encouraged to ask for help when experiencing psychological or emotional difficulties instead of keeping and acting out a deadly secret.



# Make it Safe Police Officer Initiative

Members of police agency peer support teams can help reduce police secondary danger by sharing **Make it Safe Police Officer Initiative** information with administrators, presenting Initiative information at shift briefings, and discussing the Initiative in appropriate individual and group settings.



Additional ways to reduce secondary danger ?

# CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN POLICE PSYCHOLOGY

A police vehicle is shown from a low angle at night, with its blue and red emergency lights flashing. The scene is dark, with the lights creating a dramatic, high-contrast atmosphere. The vehicle's headlights are on, and the overall image has a grainy, high-contrast aesthetic.

Make it Safe

**Police  
Officer  
Initiative**

For suggestions about the implementation of the Make it Safe Police Officer Initiative, to read more about COMPASS, to download the Law Enforcement Peer Support Team Manual, or to contact Jack A. Digliani visit [www.jackdigliani.com](http://www.jackdigliani.com)