
LAW ENFORCEMENT
Marriage and Relationship
Guidebook

Information for Law Enforcement Officers and Spouses

City - County - State - Federal



JACK A. DIGLIANI, PhD, EdD

LAW ENFORCEMENT **Marriage and Relationship Guidebook**

Also by Jack A. Digliani:

Stress Inoculation: The Police
Reflections of a Police Psychologist (now in 2nd edition)
Contemporary Issues in Police Psychology
Law Enforcement Peer Support Team Manual
Law Enforcement Critical Incident Handbook
Firefighter Peer Support Team Manual
EMS Peer Support Team Manual

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Law Enforcement Marriage and Relationship Guidebook

The *Law Enforcement Marriage and Relationship Guidebook* is designed to be used in conjunction with the *Law Enforcement Critical Incident Handbook*. Like the Handbook, the Guidebook includes information useful to law enforcement officers and their spouses.

The use of the term “spouse” is intended to include all persons involved in domestic partner relationships, whether or not traditionally married, including same-sex couples.

For convenience of writing and ease of reading, information and examples are specified in the male gender. In reality, the information presented, patterns identified, and issues discussed are applicable regardless of gender.

The Guidebook includes some information from the *Law Enforcement Critical Incident Handbook* and *Reflections of a Police Psychologist*. This information is included so that the Guidebook may be read independently of either of these documents.

A two-sided print of the Guidebook is recommended.

Download a free copy of the *Law Enforcement Critical Incident Handbook* and the *Law Enforcement Peer Support Team Manual* at www.jackdigliani.com

To order *Reflections of a Police Psychologist* and *Contemporary Issues in Police Psychology* visit Amazon.com

Law Enforcement Marriage and Relationship Guidebook

Contents

Introduction _____	1
<i><u>Police Marriage and Family</u></i>	
Marriage/Marriage Roman Style _____	2
Families _____	2
Family Culture _____	3
Family Rules, Myths, Alliances, Rituals, and Relationships _____	3
Pre-marital Mentality _____	4
Three Relationship Counseling Positions _____	5
Functional Relationships - Foundation Building Blocks _____	5
Special Status _____	6
Intimacy Enhancing - Intimacy Distancing _____	7
More on Communication _____	7
Message-to-Content _____	8
The <i>Northeast</i> Communication Style _____	9
Police Marriages and Relationship Counseling _____	10
Work Stress and the Police Family _____	11
Internal and External Interface _____	11
Internal and External Interface Management _____	12
Engagement - Disengagement _____	12
Love Is Not Enough _____	13
Couples Counseling _____	14
The Popeye Philosophy and PYLM _____	15
My Job - Your Job _____	15
Psychological Defenses and Police Marriages _____	16
Dysfunctional Relationship Patterns _____	17
Protect Less - Communicate More _____	18
Complaint versus Criticism _____	19
Extramarital Affairs _____	19
Affairs and Sex Addiction _____	20
Housekeeping and the Sloppy Factor _____	21
Intentional and Unintentional Harm _____	22
Silent Treatment _____	22
Change _____	23
Healthy Marriages and Gottman's Marriage Tips _____	23
Police Officer-Husband Modes of Transaction _____	25
Marriage and Couples Exercise _____	26
<i><u>Police Critical Incidents and the Officer Spouse</u></i>	
Critical Incident Information _____	27
Officer and Spouses: Critical Incident Information _____	28
Police Spouse Anxiety and Critical Incidents _____	29
Recovering from Traumatic Stress _____	30
Trauma: Chronological History and Psychological History _____	31
Tips for Recovering From Disasters and Other Traumatic Events _____	32
20 Suggestions and Considerations for Spouses _____	35
Some Things to Remember _____	37
<i><u>Information</u></i>	
About the Author _____	38

Introduction

In addition to the stressors confronted by every family, police families confront a myriad of specific occupational stressors. The family of police officers must cope with varying work schedules, working on holidays, and concerns about the officer's safety, just to name a few. Fortunately, many police families manage these stressors fairly well.

In many ways, police spouses live the "police life" along with their officers. As the wife of a retired police officer once explained to me, "I didn't have to be a cop to be on the job. For better or worse, the job came home to me every day!" This is especially true in cases where an officer is suffering from the results of cumulative job stress or is coping with the aftermath of a critical incident.

If there are children in the family they may also be affected by the police work of one or both of their parents. For example, in one particularly concerning case, a police officer was compelled to defend himself by shooting a male suspect. The suspect died. As it turned out, the suspect's son was a school classmate of the officer's son. It is difficult to imagine how this circumstance affected these two 10 year-old boys.

The kind of work that police officers do increases the probability of exposure to critical incidents. This is because of the role that the police play in modern society. Police officers know and accept this unavoidable stressor of policing.

Every police officer knows other officers that are either divorced or experiencing marital difficulties. Every police officer also knows other officers that are happily married and find their relationship a source of strength and support. Clearly, being a police officer does not automatically condemn a marriage to failure. In spite of some unique job demands, experience has taught us that there are many highly functioning and satisfying police-couple relationships.

Police officers and their spouses can enhance the probability of relationship success by working to appropriately manage stressors and maintaining positive interpersonal transactions. The *Law Enforcement Marriage and Relationship Guidebook* is a resource designed to help police couples in this effort...JAD

Police Marriage and Family

The secret of a happy marriage remains a secret - Henny Youngman

Whether or not you are inclined to agree with comedy legend Henny Youngman (1906-1998), most married people would agree that marriage is work. Marriage is work in the sense that when people choose to marry (or otherwise live together) they have to make accommodations and compromises for one another. However, good marriages are not *hard* work. They are not hard work because they are founded upon solid principles of positive interpersonal transaction. Good marriages are loving, functional, supportive, and rewarding.

Marriage

There are many types of marriage. Social anthropologists have identified various marriage arrangements in various cultures throughout the world. These include polygamy-polygyny (one husband-more than one wife), polygamy-polyandry (one wife-more than one husband), group marriage (more than one husband-more than one wife), and monogamy (one husband-one wife). In America, monogamy is the civil and legal standard for marriage (Schultz and Lavenda, 2006). However, as in other parts of the world, alternative forms of marriage are known to exist within the United States. Polygamy-polygyny appears to be the most common. Although many aspects of the following discussion apply to all relationships, it is presented in terms of the monogamous marriage.

Marriage Roman Style

In the Julian marriage laws of 18 BCE, No.120, *Men Must Marry*, roman emperor Augustus Caesar (63 BCE-14 AD) declared, "If we could survive without a wife, citizens of Rome, all of us would do without that nuisance; but since nature has so decreed that we cannot manage comfortably with them, nor live in any way without them, we must plan for our lasting preservation rather than for our temporary pleasure" (Lefkowitz and Fant, n.d., para.,1). The first part of this sounds a bit like the modern expression "can't live with them, can't live without them" used by some men when discussing women. Can it be that not much has changed in over two thousand years? The second part was an attempt on the part of Augustus Caesar to increase the number of children born to citizens of Rome.

Hopefully, in the twenty-first century, men do not continue to think of marriage and having a wife in the same manner as the emperor!

Families

Married couples have at least three families: the *immediate family*, the *family of origin*, and the *extended family*. The immediate family is comprised of the husband, wife, and any children. The family of origin is the family from which one came, for example, a person's mother, father, and siblings. The extended family is comprised of all other relatives such as aunts, uncles, cousins, in-laws, and so forth.

Reconciling family of origin values and practices with that of a new spouse, who is also bringing family of origin values and practices to the marriage, is a primary task of married couples. Without some degree of reconciliation, differences in family of origin values and practices can negatively impact or destroy the immediate family relationship. Problems can arise when one person's family of origin values or loyalties conflict with those of the

spouse. These conflicts often surface in marriage therapy. In the defense of their respective positions, spouses say things like, “I can’t help it. It’s how I was raised” or “I can’t disappoint my mother.” Much of the work of marriage counseling in these instances involves helping the couple to see that they can now decide for themselves how they will transact with one another. This may also mean learning new ways to transact with their family of origin - quite the challenge. But, it is self-defeating to have negative or dysfunctional values and behaviors of childhood express themselves in adult marriages.

In today’s world of divorce and remarriage, blended families, half brothers and sisters, and step-relatives, it is easy to see how complex families can become. There is no doubt that managing various family demands can be difficult. Finding a balance and remaining sensitive to those you care about can be a challenge. When thinking about the difficulties inherent in family demands, and observing the struggles of persons involved in complex family systems, I have often been struck by a single thought: *family issues are tough!*

Family Culture

Families are culturally diverse. They are multi-generational, evolve a system homeostasis, and have various structures, combinations, alliances, coalitions, rules, and myths. The homeostasis of a family system is reflected in how the family functions (the “steady-state” of the family system). It relates to the behavior of family members, their interactions, family values, and so forth. Some families have a high-functioning homeostasis; others are quite dysfunctional. All families default to a homeostasis, regardless of the level of family functionality. The homeostatic level of functionality can be altered by inputting energy into the family system. Such energy is represented by efforts to change unwanted or dysfunctional interactional patterns. If successful, family systems move from a default homeostatic position to a homeostatic system by design - but altering a family system is not easy. Theoretically, there are system forces that operate to maintain the family homeostasis, regardless of whether it is functional or dysfunctional (Lebow, 2005).

Family Rules, Myths, Alliances, Rituals, and Relationships

Rules are common in families. One of the most important rules is, “Who makes the rules?” The answer to this question defines the power broker(s) in families. Rules can be explicit (you must be home before midnight) or implicit (do not discuss sex). Myths too are common. They are comprised of family beliefs that are exaggerated or mostly false. They get passed from one generation to another. Some of the more common family myths have to do with how the family conceptualizes itself, such as “We are special and better than others” and “We don’t have problems.” Rules and myths function to define and govern a family unit.

Alliances and coalitions describe the relationships of some family members. For instance, a father and daughter might be allied together against the wife-mother. Such an alliance would “triangulate” the family, where the father and daughter represent a coalition. This would permit joint action against the wife-mother. In this dysfunctional scenario, the daughter has been elevated to the level of a spouse, and the wife has been relegated to the position of a child. The position of the daughter is empowered by the father. This would make even appropriate mother-to-daughter guidance, influence, and discipline nearly impossible. In such cases, the parent-child structure of the family has been damaged.

Rituals are family events that serve to communicate or reinforce family ties. Having a family dinner every evening serves as a bonding ritual for most families. Rituals can look a lot like rules, depending on how non-participation in the ritual is managed by the family. Rules, myths, alliances, and rituals are observed in all family systems. They may be functional or dysfunctional.

An interesting perspective on family rules, the parent-child relationship, and the structure of family was provided by actor Ricardo Montalban (1920-2009). In a column of syndicated writer Ann Landers circa 1975, he penned this letter to his son:

Dear Son: As long as you live in this house you will follow the rules. When you have your own house, you can make your own rules. In this house we do not have a democracy. I did not campaign to be your father. You did not vote for me. We are father and son by the grace of God, and I accept that privilege and awesome responsibility. In accepting it, I have an obligation to perform the role of a father. I am not your pal. Our ages are too different. We can be many things, but we are not pals. I am your father. This is 100 times more than what a pal is. I am also your friend, but we are on entirely different levels. You will do, in this house, as I say, and you cannot question me because whatever I ask you to do is motivated by love. This will be hard for you to understand until you have a son of your own. Until then, trust me. Your father.

Pre-marital Mentality

Ever wonder why things seem to go so well at the beginning of a relationship? This period can last from months to years. It is sometimes called the honeymoon period, and it seems to be characterized by the best behavior of each person in the couple. Then, as time passes, something seems to change. There are greater demands for perfection, less flexibility, and less tolerance for differences. This results in more disagreement and discord. The couple slowly drifts emotionally from one another. They do not seem to have fun anymore. In some cases, they begin to live as roommates, or describe their marriage as emotionally flat. In more serious cases, the couple becomes *emotionally divorced*, a condition wherein there is little or no emotional connection. Sometimes such couples will stay together to co-parent, or because of finances or religious beliefs. Some emotionally divorced couples have set a date for actual divorce. It usually coincides with their youngest child's eighteenth birthday.

Being emotionally divorced is a difficult way to spend years of your life. These couples may live fairly separate lives, may be constantly at odds with one another, or experience some variation of both. If none of this describes your relationship, congratulations. You are doing well. If it is descriptive of your relationship, and your marriage is not beyond saving, it is time to do something about it. It is time to reinvest in your relationship and rekindle your emotional connection. If you had a good marriage and somehow lost it, you should work together to recover it. Do this by looking back to the time when the relationship was good. How is the marriage different now? How is your behavior different now? This historical survey is the first step toward relationship enrichment.

What can you do to reestablish the positive? Try opening up dormant lines of communication, schedule a date night, show an interest in your spouse's activities, and do more things together. Seek professional help if necessary. Most importantly, as in all life-by-design strategies, *reclaim your marriage*.

Some persons approach marriage with the *safety valve* mentality. The safety valve mentality is "If I don't like marriage or if it doesn't work out, I can always get divorced." Is

this a good thought for married couples or for those considering marriage? It implies a degree of uncertainty and a lack of commitment. It is very different from the *marriage commitment* mentality “There is no issue that we cannot resolve.” If a couple has this thought prior to marriage, and maintains the thought throughout their relationship, the probability of staying happily married is greatly enhanced.

Three Relationship Counseling Positions

When a couple initiates counseling, they usually start in one of three positions: (1) we are committed to staying together, help us to make our relationship better, (2) we have decided to separate, help us to separate in the best way possible, or (3) we are unsure if we want to stay together, help us figure this out. The position of the couple often determines the course of therapy.

It is possible for a couple to be in a mixed position. The most likely mixed position is a combination of position one and three. One person reports being committed to the relationship, while the other is unsure about continuing. In this mixed position, it is usually the emotional connection which has eroded for the person who is unsure. They say things such as, “I love him, but I’m not in love with him,” “I haven’t felt anything in this relationship for a long time. What’s the point of staying,” and “I’m just here to give it one more chance.”

In counseling, some couples are able to find what they once had; a loving, functional relationship. This is because everything necessary to improve the marriage still resides within the couple. Other marriages have moved too far down the dysfunctional marriage track. Their marriage is a train wreck waiting to happen. Dysfunction has gained too much momentum and cannot be stopped. In such cases, at least one of the couple will conclude that there is no option but to separate.

Functional Relationships

Functional relationships are characterized by a balance between relationship rights and relationship responsibilities. The importance of this balance cannot be overstated. It can best be achieved by maintaining a solid relationship foundation. The stronger the foundation, the more balanced and functional the relationship. This is true not only of marriages but of all relationships. The *Foundation Building Blocks of Functional Relationships* describes the primary components of functional relationships.

Foundation Building Blocks of Functional Relationships

1. *Emotional connection.* All relationships are characterized by feelings or the emotional connections that exist between or among relationship members. Feelings frequently alter or influence perceptions and behaviors. Love is a common emotional connection. The emotional connection established between persons can alter, or be altered by, any or all of the other blocks.
2. *Trust.* Trust is a fundamental building block of all functional relationships. Trust is related to many other components of functional relationships including fidelity, dependability, and honesty.
3. *Honesty.* Functional relationships are characterized by a high degree of caring honesty. There is a place for not hurting others feelings and not addressing every issue. However, consistent misrepresentation or avoidance to avoid short-term

conflict often results in the establishment of negative outcomes such as long-term resentment and invalidation.

4. *Assumption of honesty.* With trust, we can assume honesty in others. A relationship in which honesty cannot be assumed is plagued with suspicion. Such relationships are characterized by trying to mind-read the “real” meaning of various interactions.
 5. *Respect.* Respect is demonstrated in all areas of functional relationships—verbal communication, nonverbal behaviors, openness for discussion, conflict resolution, and so on. Without respect, relationships cannot remain functional and problem resolution communication is not possible.
 6. *Tolerance.* The acceptance of personal differences and individual *preferences* are vital to keeping relationships working well. A degree of mutual tolerance makes forgiveness possible and relationships more pleasant. It also reduces points of conflict.
 7. *Responsiveness.* Your responsiveness to others helps to validate their importance to you. It reflects your commitment and demonstrates relationship meaningfulness. Responsiveness is especially important in families and in hierarchical work relationships.
 8. *Flexibility.* Personal rigidity frequently strains relationships and limits potential functional boundaries. Highly functional relationships are characterized by reasonable flexibility so that when stressed, they bend without breaking. Many things are not as serious as they first seem. Develop and maintain a sense of humor as part of flexibility.
 9. *Communication.* Make it safe for communication. Speak and listen in a calm manner. Allow others to express thoughts and feelings without interruption. Stay mindful of the difference between *hearing* and *listening*. Safe and functional communication is characterized by listening.
 10. *Commitment.* Long term functional relationships are characterized by commitment and a willingness to work on problems. This is accomplished by acceptance of personal responsibility, attempts to see things from other perspectives, conflict resolution, and the ability to move beyond perceived transgressions.
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In troubled marriages the fundamental blocks of the relationship foundation have been damaged. Because the blocks are the foundation upon which the marriage is built, the damage in the foundation is reflected in the relationship. The couple will experience a degree of marital discord commensurate to the foundation damage. Most persons in troubled marriages do not seek help until marital dysfunction reaches some crisis. By this time, the foundation may have sustained too much damage for the relationship to be successfully repaired.

Special Status

All of us have *special status* people. Spouses, significant others partners, and so on are special status people. They are the only persons in the entire universe that hold this unique status in our lives. It is ok to do some things differently for those with special status...for instance, yielding in an argument. Doing this for special status persons increases the likelihood that they will return the favor. For special status persons and others, model the behavior that you wish in return. A useful way to remember this is, *you often get what you give*.

Intimacy Enhancing—Intimacy Distancing

Intimacy is not sex. Sex is not intimacy. Intimacy is an emotion. Sex is a behavior. People can be intimate without sex. People can have sex without intimacy. Intimacy involves a feeling of closeness and connection. The closer a person feels to another person, the more intimate the relationship. High functioning relationships are characterized by a high degree of intimacy. In high functioning marriages, this makes sex with intimacy possible—a very good situation indeed.

Many behaviors are intimacy enhancing. Intimacy enhancing behaviors are those that encourage feelings of interpersonal connectedness. Intimacy enhancing behaviors are limited only by the imagination. A kiss on the cheek, a thoughtful gift, a well-timed wink, and establishing a date night are all examples of intimacy enhancing behaviors.

Special occasions such as birthdays, anniversaries, Valentine's Day, and so on are ideal times for enhancing intimacy. Thoughtful gifts, activities, and cards on special occasions are often much appreciated and work to enhance intimacy. Forgetting or minimizing special occasions will often distance intimacy (in spite of your spouse's statements to the contrary). So remain mindful of special dates. Also, do not underestimate the intimacy enhancing power of the occasional card or gift for no reason other than spousal appreciation. These seemingly simple things keep relationships fresh, interesting, and rewarding.

Many behaviors are intimacy distancing. These behaviors are emotional wedges which force people apart. Yelling, consistently criticizing, inconsideration, invalidation, threats, minimizing, and physical violence are examples of intimacy distancing behaviors. Intimacy distancing behaviors are common in dysfunctional relationships. Relationships can be improved by avoiding intimacy distancing behaviors and increasing the frequency of intimacy enhancing behaviors.

More on Communication

Communication is vital to functional relationships. There are many thoughts about human communication. There are theories about verbal communication, nonverbal communication, mass communication, persuasion, the list goes on and on. Some theories are simple, others quite complex. A simple, easy to remember, and useful way to think about verbal communication is the triad *content-message-delivery*. Within the triad, *content* refers to the actual words chosen to send a message. The *message* is the meaning of what is communicated. The *delivery* refers to how the content is spoken. Delivery includes nonverbal behavior when the verbal communication is in-person. Nonverbal behavior in these circumstances helps to define the message of the content. For example, pointing a finger at someone while saying, "I'm talking to you" can intensify the message.

The content of verbal communication can impart various messages. This is because words, phrases, and sentences have inherently differential meanings.

A person can use the same content to send different messages. This is accomplished by altering the delivery. For instance, "You're bad!" said in a serious and stern voice would indicate disapproval. However, in the present day, if said in an animated, enthusiastic tone, the same sentence might mean "You're great!"

A person can also use different content to send the same message. For example, when speaking to someone who has recently completed a difficult task, "I think you've done a great job" sends a similar message (approval) as "I'm impressed with your work and how well this turned out."

It is clear that delivery can alter the message of content. Most police officers are well familiar with this feature of communication. Many citizen complaints are founded in the grievance, “It’s not what he said (content), it’s how he said it” (delivery).

A fundamental component of delivery is *intensity*. Intensity can be thought of as ranging from a low of 1 to a high of 10. For most couples, verbal communication in excess of intensity level 5 brings the conversation out of “problem solving territory.” In conversations with an intensity higher than 5, the focus usually changes from the issue being discussed to the issue of power. Once people start yelling at one another, the core of the exchange becomes an argument over who is dominant. When the argument changes to a fight for dominance, spouses are arguing for their place in the relationship. So, a complaint about not replacing the toothpaste cap after brushing becomes, “Who are you to tell me what to do!” The ironic thing is that once a conversation evolves into a power fight, the issue that initiated the discussion seldom gets addressed. It becomes lost in the greater argument.

To keep discussions in problem solving territory, couples must monitor their verbal intensity. This involves remaining mindful of one’s emotional state, vocal emphasis, and vocal volume. It is not possible to demonstrate verbal intensity on the pages of a book, but varying communication intensities can also be expressed in writing. Written intensity involves text selection (content), semantics (meaning and message), letter case, fonts, underlining, and punctuation (delivery). For example, which sentence reads with greater intensity? “Leave me alone” or “LEAVE ME ALONE!” What about “Leave *me* alone” and “Leave me alone?” Most of us can literally “hear” the differences in these sentences. It is the same for verbal communication. Volume and emphasis can determine the message of identical content. Combine this with nonverbal behaviors and environmental context, and the framework for communication is complete.

Overall, communication improves when content aligns with the intended message and the intensity of the delivery is respectful and appropriate.

Message-to-Content

A dysfunctional content-message-delivery communication pattern which can cause considerable distress for couples is the “message-to-content” transaction. This negative behavioral pattern involves using benign or even complimentary content, but delivering it in a way that sends an insulting or attacking message. Then, if the sender is confronted on the attacking nature of the message, the sender defends it by referring to the content. An example will help to illustrate this pattern: A husband walks into the couple’s messy kitchen, looks around, and sarcastically says to his wife, “I see that you’ve been working on keeping the house clean.” The wife, responding to the criticizing message, responds, “Stop picking on me! I’m doing the best I can. It wouldn’t hurt you to help out more!” The husband, now reacting to his wife’s challenge, takes on the innocent, good guy role. He responds, “What’s wrong with you? All I said was that I saw that you’ve been working on the house. I was giving you a compliment! You must be crazy!” The message-to-content pattern of communication, when used habitually, is very destructive. It is an intimacy-distancing behavior which damages several blocks of the couple’s relationship foundation.

What if in the example above, the husband was actually trying to give his wife a compliment? After all, isn’t it possible that his good intention might have been misinterpreted? Of course this is possible. However, if it were true in this case, the husband would not have been sarcastic in his delivery. The delivery of the content would have been different.

In communication, the possibility of being misunderstood is ever present. This is because communication is transactional. The message you receive will influence your response. It

may not be the message intended by the sender. This is why feedback is so important. Communication is imperfect. Feedback is sometimes necessary to improve communication accuracy. To avoid miscommunication you should remember the communication imperative: *a person will respond to the message received and not necessarily the message you intended to send*. This is also true for you. You will respond to the message you receive and not necessarily the message intended by the sender. If you are unclear about the message you received or it is upsetting or seemingly unjustified, you can ask the sender to clarify the meaning.

To improve communication, think about speaking in suggestions, proposals, and preferences. For instance, which would you rather hear; “We’re staying in tonight because I’m tired.” or “I’m a bit tired tonight. What do you think about staying in?” The first sentence uses content that can be perceived as domineering and controlling. If the listener is sensitive to these issues, this sentence will trigger an argument or result in quiet resentment. The latter sentence is more likely to be received non-defensively. Its content validates the listener as a factor in decision making. From this point the couple can negotiate the evening’s activities.

A word about negotiation. If during negotiation you agree to something, you forfeit your right to complain about it later. The time to argue and complain is during the negotiation, not afterward. Once you agree to something, stand by your agreement. Do not punish others by agreeing to do something, such as going out for dinner when you wanted to stay home, and during dinner do little more than act badly. This is not good faith negotiation. It is part of a dysfunctional behavior pattern and should be avoided. Good-faith negotiation improves poor relationships and helps to sustain good ones.

If all this seems too complicated remember that good communication requires more energy than poor communication, at least at first. Once functional communication patterns are established it takes little energy to maintain them.

The *Northeast* Communication Style

Remain aware of the Northeast communication style (named by my wife due to my previous communication propensities). The Northeast communication style is characteristic of dysfunctional verbal communication and should be avoided. It is comprised of five communication style components which are best described as dominating the conversation, simultaneous talking, talking over, formulating the response, and the pause jump.

Dominating the conversation is nearly continuous talking without regard for others. Although the speaker achieves personal expression, no one else is provided this opportunity. Dominating the conversation monopolizes the transaction and normally fatigues listeners. In *simultaneous talking*, if everyone is talking simultaneously, who is listening? Everyone is so concerned about making their point that there is no consideration for the views of others. Is this communication? Not really. It is more like a struggle to establish interaction dominance. *Talking over* is a milder form of simultaneous talking. It is the occasional cutting off the communication of another by simply interjecting your response over their communication. It does not matter if they are mid-sentence, just making a point, and so on. Talking over can be a feature of superior rank or dominance in a relationship. It invalidates the speaker and shuts down a mutual exchange. *Formulating the response* is a communication pitfall. It is characterized by not listening. In the place of listening, the person is formulating how to respond to make a point, regardless of the speaker’s information. While formulating the response, vital pieces of the speaker’s communication may be missed. This is because most of us cannot fully attend to another’s communication while actively thinking about making our point. The internal process of formulating the

response is often reflected in nonverbal facial expressions. Observation of these expressions sometimes prompts the speaker to ask, “Are you listening to me?” The last of the NE communication style components is the *pause jump*. The pause jump occurs when a NE communicator perceives even the slightest pause in the communication of others as an opportunity to jump in. This often provokes the response, “I wasn’t finished!” or worse, “You never let me finish talking.” To avoid the pause jump, NE communicators must realize that different communication styles are composed of different length pauses within communication transactions. The NE style maintains very brief pauses. When all parties are NE communicators, this is not much of a concern. It can be annoying, but at least everyone is on the same hectic page. When NE communicators are speaking with non-NE communicators, it can become a problem. The problems are often similar to those seen in talking over. For NE communicators, moderating the elements of the NE communication style will likely improve the functionality of existing communication transactions.

Police Marriages and Relationship Counseling

Many police marriages are highly functional. In these relationships, the couple works together in ways that enhance one another. Regardless of whether the officer is the husband, wife, or both are officers, straight or gay, married or living together, many officers report a high degree of satisfaction in their relationships. This is reflected in police officer divorce rates. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports that on average, from 40 to 50 percent of first marriages end in divorce. Although some police marriages end in divorce, there is growing evidence that the divorce rate for police officers is similar to or maybe *less* than that for the general population. This is counter to the long held belief that police officers experience a higher than average divorce rate. In one study which compared the divorce rates of those in various occupations, several occupations had divorce rates higher than police officers. These included dancers, bartenders, massage workers, and telemarketers. Police officers, optometrists, clergy, and podiatrists, were characterized by lower than average divorce rates. The factor that emerged as the most significant influence on the probability of divorce was the state of residence (McCoy and Aamodt, 2009). Audrey Honig, chief psychologist for the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department, reported that the higher than average divorce rates historically reported for police officers is a modern myth that has its roots in the research and tales of the 1980s (2007).

Police marriages have much in common with other marriages. When police marriages become troubled, they are troubled by the same issues present in many marriages. The usual suspects in troubled marriages are the lack of emotional connection, money, spending of money, child discipline, sex, anger, use of alcohol, perceptions of mistreatment, life philosophy differences, and family issues. Occasionally, occupational stressors will surface as the primary problem area in police marriages. These stressors might involve spousal frustration with the officer’s work schedule, frustration with the police agency, the officer’s behavior at home (acting like a cop with family members—most family members do not like being treated as suspects), a perception that the officer is prioritizing the job before the family, and having firearms in the house. Rarely, the spouse of the officer is upset by the risks inherent in policing. This is because most police spouses manage this fear by trusting in police training, tactics, and technology. However, for some spouses the fear that the officer will be injured or killed on the job becomes unbearable. Several former police officers have ended their careers due to such fears of their spouses.

Work Stress and the Police Family

Work can be stressful. Police officers (and others) should avoid returning home from work without any fuel in their *stressor management gas tank* (SMGT). The idea of SMGT helps us gauge the amount of coping energy available for continued stressor confrontation. With some practice, anyone can become adept at SMGT level awareness. The hypothetical example of Officer D will help clarify SMGT.

Officer D has had a difficult workday. During his shift, he made three arrests, investigated six crime reports, investigated a vehicle accident, and wrote four traffic tickets. During one of the arrests, he was slightly injured. During another, the suspect spewed out insult after insult. Two of the recipients of traffic tickets told him he should be out catching real criminals. One questioned why he was picking on the honest citizens who pay his salary. To top things off, his sergeant mentioned that a citizen had filed a complaint in reference to one of his traffic stops the week before. As the day wore on, Officer D was becoming more frustrated and angry. He needed greater amounts of self-restraint to remain professional. By the end of his shift, Officer D had pretty much reached his limit with people. His coping energy, the energy needed to deal with others, was nearly depleted. This meant that his SMGT was precariously low. Officer D was hanging on by a thread. We will return to Officer D shortly.

The desire for, or tolerance of, external stimulation is relative. Some persons enjoy a great deal of environmental stimulation. Others find minimal outside stimulation desirable (a factor to be reckoned with in marriages where individual stimulation preferences are widely different). For most persons, there is an optimal range of stimulation. If they fall much below the optimum, they become bored and restless. If they are much above the optimum, they become overstimulated, irritable, and overstressed. In the latter circumstances, their limits for coping with stimulation (demands) have been exceeded.

Now back to Officer D. Officer D has been overstimulated. He has experienced too many demands during his workday. In his effort to manage the excess stimulation, he has depleted his coping resources. There is little fuel remaining in his SMGT. He is a raw nerve, a powder keg ready to explode at the least of provocations. And now he is going home.

For Officer D, once home, it would not take much to ignite family conflict. In fact, something as simple as his child asking him to play catch might do it. Imagine this. Officer D's child, happy to see her dad, asks him to play catch. Normally, this would not be a problem for Officer D. However, in his current, SMGT depleted condition, where his toleration for additional demands is nearly zero, he yells at her, "I don't have time for you right now!" The child walks away disappointed and confused. At eight years old she cannot understand what she did to make daddy angry. Officer D's wife, having watched the exchange, yells at him, "What's wrong with you! Why are you treating her that way?" Officer D responds, "You don't know anything! Get off my back!" He stomps to the refrigerator, grabs a beer, and walks outside. This is not good, and worse, the evening has just begun.

Fortunately for Officer D, future similar scenarios are avoidable. In order to prevent another similar occurrence, Officer D needs to renegotiate his *internal* and *external* interface.

Internal and External Interface

The internal interface represents the relationship that persons have with themselves. It is related to the notions of self-concept, self-esteem, personal values, and self-control. The

internal interface is made possible by the complexities of human consciousness. By renegotiating his internal interface, Officer D can learn to practice techniques and use strategies that help to prevent or manage stimulus overload. This will help maintain SMGT levels. In the event that these internal interface strategies occasionally prove insufficient, he can renegotiate his external interface. The external interface is best described by how a person relates to everything outside of self, including other people. By renegotiating his external interface, he would have replenished his SMGT prior to arriving home.

As a police officer, if you have had a stressful workday, your SMGT may be depleted. You can learn to recognize low levels of coping energy by increasing your self-awareness. If you feel that you cannot handle much more without blowing up, you have little left in your SMGT. What should you do? You should engage internal and external interface management strategies. You should do this to keep from arriving home in a stressed out frame of mind.

Internal and External Interface Management

When you feel stressed out after a workday, with little fuel in your SMGT, do not go home. (1) Stop. Hang around the station for a few minutes. Practice relaxation breathing and other stress management strategies. Talk to friends. Talk about something other than police work. Calm yourself. (2) Think about your family. Think about the fact that you will need to continue to cope with stressors when you get home. If you have children, keep in mind that they may be waiting for you. Consider that when you get home, your spouse may need a break from the kids. This means that you may need to go from police officer to parent as soon as you arrive. (3) Think about all that is good in your life. By accessing these thoughts, you add some fuel to your SMGT. (4) On your way home, listen to some favorite music. Continue your relaxation breathing. Think about a recent pleasant family outing. (5) Stay out of the bars. Coming home stressed and intoxicated is never a good way to improve family transactions. (6) Upon arrival home, *check yourself*. Checking yourself involves calming yourself and preparing for family transactions. Tap into your replenished SMGT. (7) Refuse to allow the stressors of your workday to follow you home. Really, would you want the suspect that you arrested today to affect you in ways that cause you marital or family problems? You might as well bring the suspect home! We do not bring suspects home physically, and we cannot afford to bring them home psychologically. Keep the bad guys out of your head, out of your home, and out of your family. The same holds true for all work stressors. (8) At home, if needed, ask your family for a few minutes alone. Always follow up this request with something like, “I’ll be back shortly. Then we can catch up on things.” During your down time, recharge, then reengage. (9) Try to think outside yourself. You are an important figure in your family’s life. It is important for your family to have you available. It is not a bad thing to have your family excited to see you. (10) If you are a parent, *remember that your family behavior today is creating your children’s future childhood memories*. What kind of memories would you like your children to have? Certainly, coming home from work and terrorizing the family is not one of them. The worst of who we are should never be acted out against those whom we care for most.

Engagement—Disengagement

Related to *optimal levels of environmental stimulation* are the concepts of *engagement* and *disengagement*. These are useful ideas when trying to understand stimulation-based difficulties. Simply stated, when persons are overstimulated, they seek disengagement from others. When understimulated, they seek to engage others. On any given day, officers that have been overstimulated at work may return home to a spouse that has been

understimulated (or vice versa). This creates a substrate for conflict. For example, after a stressful day, an officer might seek solitude at home. Meanwhile the spouse, being bored most of the day, might seek social contact and interaction once the officer arrives home. The worst cases of such a circumstance might end in heated exchanges such as “Talk to me!” (an attempt to engage) and “Get out of my face!” (an attempt to disengage). Of course, most engagement/disengagement conflicts are not this severe; however, couples should be on guard for the difficulties that can arise out of engagement/disengagement conflicts. Because anyone can become over or understimulated, these situations can arise even in cases where the spouses are nearly identical in their preference for environmental stimulation.

Love Is Not Enough

One of the myths of marriage is that love will keep the couple together. Love can keep a marriage together, but there are no guarantees.

Love can keep a marriage together even when the marriage becomes dangerous. Every officer is familiar with the response of some battered wives when asked, “Why do you stay with this guy?” She often replies, “Because I love him.” This is usually followed up with something like “He’s not always bad. He just loses his temper.” In seriously dysfunctional relationships, officers sometimes hear “It’s my fault that he hits me.”

In cases like this, there is always the question of whether the woman is truly speaking of love. It could be that she is unknowingly describing suppressed fear or emotional dependency. Regardless, couples like this are in need of immediate intervention. Left untreated, this kind of marriage represents a significant threat to the wife. Too many times such relationships end in serious injury or death.

Some couples split despite confessing their love for one another. When “loving” couples divorce, it is usually because of a violation of the marriage agreement. For many couples, infidelity is one such violation; bad behavior associated with alcoholism is another. Some couples separate due to the sheer exhaustion of trying to live together when significant personality or preference differences exist.

Another myth of marriage is that love will keep the couple happy. Although necessary, love is not sufficient to create a happy marriage. To have a happy marriage, the remainder of the relationship foundation blocks must also be present. In happy marriages, each of the foundation blocks is strong and sturdy.

A third myth of marriage is that the other person will never leave. The fact is that anyone can treat another so badly for so long, that the person will consider terminating the relationship. This marriage myth is founded in denial and narcissism. The person with this belief is convinced that the spouse is so in love, that the thought of leaving is not possible (denial). And even if the spouse thought about leaving, it would not be possible because of the specialness (narcissism) of the believer. Case in point—a police officer in a metro police department had engaged in numerous affairs during the past several years of his marriage. One of his affairs produced a child with a local prostitute for which he and his wife were paying child support. His wife begged him to stop the extramarital relationships. She had begged him for years. During this period, they entered marriage counseling at least three times. On each occasion, the wife would tell him that she loved him and wanted the marriage to work. He would promise to be faithful. On each occasion, the officer terminated counseling after a few sessions, dismissing it as “not helpful.”

Several months after the officer terminated the most recent marriage counseling, his wife discovered that he had begun a new affair. This time she had reached her limit. She contacted an attorney and filed for divorce. Upon learning this, the officer went into a

psychological tailspin. His friends arranged for him to see the police department psychologist. In counseling, he said that he could not believe that she would actually leave. He asked, “What’s going on? Why did she spring this on me? I had no warning!”

The serving of the divorce papers functioned as the critical stimulus. This act punctured his wall of denial. It became clear to him that he could not fix things this time. He had lost her. The divorce papers also stripped away his narcissistic defenses. He became very depressed and suicidal. He had to be relieved of duty. His firearms were collected and placed into lockdown due to concerns for his safety. Because of the severity of his depression, he entered a residential treatment facility. He did not reengage the department’s psychological services.

Couples Counseling

In counseling, police wives often discuss their husband’s in-home behavior in less than flattering terms. In these troubled marriages, officers are often described as angry much of the time, over-controlling, suspicious, demanding, verbally abusive, impatient, and intimidating. Such descriptions frequently conflict with the work reputation of these officers. At work, they are known to be professional, competent, compassionate, caring, and kind. They exercise good judgment and authoritative discretion. They are respected and well liked by their peers. They seldom receive citizen complaints. So how is it that very little of this behavior is seen at home? When asked this question, officers respond nearly universally, “There are consequences at work. I don’t want to lose my job or get in trouble. I want to get promoted. If I feel angry or frustrated at work, I handle it. I want to look good. Work is work. When I get home, I want to be myself. I don’t want to have to watch how I act.”

These officers are describing *role driven* behavior. The role is *police officer*, and the behavior is that which they see as appropriate for the role. This way of thinking is not in itself dysfunctional. All of us alter our behavior to some degree when acting in particular roles. However, within the officers’ responses, there are three interesting and clinically significant underlying implications:

- The first implication is that the officer believes there are no consequences for bad behavior at home (“There are consequences at work...”). *No consequences? The officer is sitting in the office of the police psychologist due to relationship problems. He may be close to losing his family. This is an extreme consequence.*
- The second implication is that the “real” person, when not being driven by the role of police officer, is not a very nice person (“When I get home, I want to be myself...”). *Is this true? Can it be that the compassionate, understanding, coping professional person seen at work is nothing more than a sham, a facade? No. If the officer is a kind and compassionate person at work, he can be a kind and compassionate person at home. Period.*
- The third implication is that stress coping strategies can stop at home (“If I feel angry or frustrated at work, I handle it...”) *Where did police officers ever get the idea that stress coping strategies can stop at home? This idea has no merit whatsoever. Officers must continue to utilize stress coping strategies at home. They must present their best thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to those they care about most.*

For happier marriages, officers must avoid getting caught in the police role driven behavior trap. It is unfortunate that some officers will treat peers, citizens, and even suspects kinder than they treat their spouses and other family members.

The Popeye Philosophy and PYLM

There is another trap lying in wait for police (and other) couples. This is the *Popeye philosophy*. The Popeye philosophy is represented within the cartoon character's often said statement, "I yam what I yam." Well, everyone is what they are, and there is something to be said for simply accepting oneself. This is normal and can be healthy. However, if this gets carried to an extreme, it becomes a rationalization for bad behavior. This philosophy can destroy efforts to improve behavior, and it can destroy relationships. In essence, the extreme of the Popeye philosophy is another way of saying, "I'll behave as I want, and you'll just have to deal with it." This is seldom a good way to maintain a happy marriage.

Just how far should persons go in self-acceptance? It seems to depend upon values and goals. Sorting out what is appropriate for self-acceptance and what should be targeted for improvement is a major challenge to everyone living a life-by-design. When confronting this challenge, it is important to keep in mind that self-acceptance and self-improvement are not mutually exclusive. It is possible to accept yourself for who you are *and* target behaviors or traits for improvement. This helps to maintain self-esteem while continuing efforts for desired change.

Frequently observed within the Popeye philosophy is the *prove you love me* (PYLM) transaction. PYLM transactions are characterized by behavior in which one member of the couple seems to consistently test the loyalty and love of the other. This is done by behaving badly (being overly rigid in disagreements, pouting, and outright challenges "If I'm so bad, why don't you leave!"). Following PYLM behavior, the perpetrator waits and observes the reaction of the other. If the other's response is satisfactory (sufficiently consoling, contrite, apologetic, etc) the goal has been accomplished. The person has "proved" their love. If the response is not satisfactory, the intensity of the PYLM transaction is increased until the desired "proof" is presented. PYLM transactions are often motivated by an internal and sometimes repressed sense of relationship or personal insecurity. They also involve dominance, manipulation and control.

PYLM transactions undermine relationship authenticity and are therefore undesirable. The issues that underlie PYLM transactions can be serious and are best confronted directly, with professional assistance if necessary.

My Job—Your Job

In addition to the Popeye philosophy and PYLM, there is the *my job-your job* (MJYJ) transactional pattern. Officers must be aware of MJYJ because it can cause significant marital problems. The MJYJ pattern is being played out when the officer diminishes or disregards the job stress of the spouse, based on the intensity of the stressors inherent in policing. It goes something like this: The spouse expresses a work frustration. The officer responds "Do you realize what I deal with everyday? It's danger. It's life and death. I can't get excited because some janitor didn't clean your office. That's nothing compared to the stress of my job." The MJYJ minimizes the importance of the issues identified by the spouse. It frequently leads to the spouse feeling invalidated and unimportant in the relationship. This is intimacy distancing and thereby dysfunctional.

Although policing includes unavoidable stressors and personal risk, listening to and supporting spouses when they are upset or overwhelmed by their job stressors (including the stressors of being a stay-at-home spouse or parent) is a fundamental feature of functional police marriages.

Psychological Defense Mechanisms and Police Marriages

There are many theorized psychological defense mechanisms. Some of them have been previously introduced. Psychological defense mechanisms were first discussed by Sigmund Freud as part of his approach to the treatment of anxiety (1920). Freud hypothesized that psychological defense mechanisms operate unconsciously. This means that they exist outside of conscious awareness.

Defense mechanisms are thought to protect us from undue psychological harm. They allow us to cope with stressful circumstances without actually changing them. *Denial* is a defense mechanism. So are *rationalization*, *intellectualization*, *suppression*, and *projection*, to name a few. In denial, we fail to recognize personal difficulties that may be obvious to others. Rationalization allows us to create false but credible explanations for our thoughts and behaviors, as well as the actions of others. Intellectualization is the process by which we use theoretical thinking to justify our thoughts and behavior. Suppression involves pushing stressful thoughts out of our consciousness. Projection is the process by which we attribute to others our own unacceptable thoughts and feelings.

In themselves, there is nothing pathological about psychological defense mechanisms. In fact, they can be thought of as adaptive in many circumstances. It is only in their overdevelopment that problems can result. Because defense mechanisms operate unconsciously, persons struggling with difficulties caused by defense mechanism overdevelopment have no insight into the cause of their problems. One particularly interesting psychological defense mechanism is *emotional insulation*. Emotional insulation is the process whereby feelings and emotional reactions are dampened. It is especially useful for police officers because they are required to remain calm in emotionally charged and stressful situations. Remaining calm in these situations permits police officers to better process information and achieve resolutions based on fact, not emotion. Emotional insulation helps to make this possible.

There are several factors that encourage the development of emotional insulation in police officers. The first is the work itself. In policing, unavoidable stressors include the exposure to domestic violence, traffic accidents, child abuse, natural death and homicide, violence, and personal danger. Without some sort of psychological protection against the negative effects of such exposure, officers would soon overload their coping capacity.

The second is police officers themselves. There exists a social value among police officers for calmness in situations which normally evoke strong emotion in others. It is not that officers never express emotion in the presence of one another, but only that there is a value placed on remaining calm. Case in point—an officer contacted two suspects for a minor violation. The suspects became uncooperative and attacked the police officer. During the altercation, the officer was able to radio for assistance. As other police units arrived and the suspects were taken into custody, the first thing the slightly injured and roughed up officer said was “How did I sound on the radio?” Many officers have suffered the taunts of other officers for “freaking out” or “screaming like a little girl” on the radio. One of the last things officers want is to be seen by their peers as fearful, excitable, or overly emotional.

The third is the court system. The court system encourages police officer emotional insulation by placing a premium on objective, uninvolved, and unemotional testimony. In fact, if an opposing attorney can demonstrate officer emotion in reference to a case, the

officer's testimony is discredited. Such attorney arguments usually center on "Officer, isn't it true that you were upset and angry? And isn't it true that your actions were based more on your anger than on appropriate police behavior?" and so forth. Another way that an officer's testimony can be impeached is if the opposing attorney can show some emotional connection of the officer to anyone involved in the case. This last circumstance is not quite the same as emotional insulation, but it is another example of the testimonial standard of objectivity expected of police officers.

Emotional insulation helps officers to function professionally in stressful situations. Its development is encouraged by repeated exposures to stressful events. What then is the problem? Problems, especially relationship problems, arise when officers' insulation becomes too "thick", too rigid, and impermeable. In clinical cases of emotional insulation, the officer appears emotionally numb. For the officer, the experience of emotion, on and off the job, becomes almost painful. Hence emotion is repressed. If emotional connections remain, they are often only with peers—not citizens, not family. The payoff for the officer is that no uncomfortable feelings are experienced. However, the down side is that the insulation works in both directions. Although there is protection from external stressors, the *expression* of emotion is also muted. Soon, the emotional shut-down becomes a factor in the officer's marriage. In response to lack of feelings expressed by the officer and the perceived withdrawal from the relationship, spouses often find themselves withdrawing, thereby widening the emotional gap between the couple.

Living with an overly insulated officer is difficult. This is because the officer acts more robot-like than a caring person. Wives of these officers describe the marriage relationship as cold and unfeeling. Sex, if it is occurring at all, is unemotional. One wife described it as "Wham bam, thank you, ma'am." Other family activities are also affected. Family transactions become brief and seem mechanical. If there is any emotion expressed by the officer, it is usually anger. Not much of any other emotion can penetrate the insulation.

On the other side, emotionally insulated officers complain that their spouses do not understand them. They say that their wives have become intolerant and "bitchy." Officer and wife appear to be at an impasse. Neither knows how their marriage got to this place. Wives of emotionally insulated police officers, when looking at their husbands in the psychologist's office, say "This is not the man I married. I don't know who this is." The officers say little until some comment provokes an angry response.

The course of therapy for such couples depends upon the actual situation. Mostly it involves finding a way to reduce emotional insulation so that the couple can emotionally reconnect.

Police officers must remain on guard to avoid the overdevelopment of emotional insulation. Good communication helps. Talking to spouses, staying involved in family life, and not living police work every day are buffers against emotional insulation. Taking time for one another and sharing couples activities (without the kids) are also important. Good boundaries are imperative. Happily married police officers strive to have a life outside of the police department. This helps the officer and the relationship to stay fun, interesting, balanced, and functional.

Dysfunctional Relationship Patterns

Dysfunctional relationship patterns are predictable sequences of behavior which result in undesirable or otherwise negative outcomes. For instance, have you ever wondered why you *always* end up leaving the house in a rage when you and your spouse try to discuss how family income should be spent? If this describes your relationship, you are experiencing a

dysfunctional relationship pattern. As you might expect, dysfunctional patterns can involve any topic and vary in degree of dysfunction.

When couples are locked into dysfunctional patterns, they often see each other as adversaries. It feels as if it is husband against wife, wife against husband, partner against partner. This feeling energizes the dysfunction and contributes to its maintenance. Couples can better alter undesirable patterns if they think about teaming up against them. This approach allies the couple in an effort to disrupt the pattern. It works like this: whenever either perceives the startup or presence of the dysfunctional pattern, it is identified and the couple's coping responses are engaged. The coping responses include a myriad of interventions such as taking a short break and reengaging, calming down and reengaging, lowering the intensity of the communication, and so on. In this way, the old pattern is disrupted and the probability for a better outcome is increased. When a couple thinks about attacking a dysfunctional pattern instead of each other, it changes the focus from *prevailing over each other* to *prevailing over the pattern*. As they succeed in their efforts, the new, more functional pattern is reinforced. With continued success, the previously dysfunctional pattern is eventually replaced.

To increase the probability of dysfunctional pattern replacement, both persons must agree beforehand to engage coping responses upon the request of the other. Such agreement is necessary because as the dysfunctional pattern unfolds, its habit-strength will naturally carry the couple to its undesirable outcome. Without a previous agreement, and following a call for pattern disruption (sometimes initiated by the use of a prearranged codeword), the other person may well want to continue fighting. The couple must trust one another to use dysfunctional pattern disruption coping strategies only when appropriate and not as a means to exert control over or otherwise manipulate the other. The coping strategy for dysfunctional pattern disruption must not be transformed into another element of relationship dysfunction.

At first, the person who identifies the dysfunctional pattern and calls for coping responses may feel weak, as if it is tantamount to backing down. That is, by refusing to participate in acting out the old pattern, it may feel that the other person has somehow won. While the feeling of backing down is common, it is not truly reflective of the circumstances. When dysfunctional patterns are interrupted and improved outcomes achieved, both persons win. The reward is an improved relationship. In fact, it is usually the stronger person in the couple that first breaks the habit-strength of the dysfunctional pattern.

Protect Less—Communicate More

In highly functional relationships, there is less protecting and more communicating. So *protect less-communicate more*. This is accomplished by a reduced effort to protect the relationship from disagreement and a greater effort on initiating discussion when appropriate. This does not mean that you should become hypersensitive to everything. There is a place for just letting things go and moving on. Do not get caught up in the minor and unimportant aspects of everyday living. It is not necessary to confront every issue. However, if it is important to you, you should open a discussion. If your partner approaches you with something important, remain open minded. It may be difficult to listen to an account of how your actions hurt or otherwise affected your spouse, but try to understand without judging. "That would not have bothered me" or "You're too sensitive" is never a good response. Focus on the pattern. Work together to resolve problems and to prevent similar future occurrences. Apologize—this should not be difficult with your special status person. Make an effort to alter your behavior based on the discussion. This is a wonderful

courtesy that can be extended to your spouse. Remember, a courtesy rendered frequently results in a courtesy returned.

Keep the communication functional. Good relationships are characterized by good communication. Do not forget the relationship imperative: *Make it safe!* Making it safe involves remaining calm and attentive. A single conversation wherein you “blew your top” or appeared disinterested can discourage communication for years. Spouses should be able to come to one another with *any* issue and expect respectful discussion. In the end, discussing and successfully resolving a perceived difference, no matter how minor, is intimacy enhancing.

Complaint versus Criticism

Every person has a right to complain. If your husband says he will do something, and he fails to do it, you should register a complaint. “You said that you were going to get the car washed, and you didn’t. I’m disappointed that the car is not clean.” Complaints are valid and are factually based. They differ from criticism. Criticism attacks the person, “You said that you were going to get the car washed, and you didn’t. You always let me down. You can’t be trusted to do anything!”

Notice that in complaint, the wife (as complainant) is talking about herself, “*I’m disappointed that the car is not clean.*” In criticism, the wife (as criticizer) is talking about her husband, “*You always let me down. You can’t be trusted to do anything.*” Complaints encourage continued communication and improve the prospects for problem resolution. Similar to *protecting less and communicating more*, resolving a complaint is intimacy enhancing and strengthens the relationship. Criticism damages the relationship and should be avoided. Criticism is intimacy distancing and weakens the couple’s bond (Gottman and Silver, 1999). Of course, the best way to avoid a complaint and enhance intimacy is to follow through on what you say.

Extramarital Affairs

There is a true test of marital fidelity. The test has three components: (1) you are attracted to a person not your spouse, who is also attracted to you, (*yes, it is possible to be attracted to a person who is not your spouse*), (2) the person makes it known to you that he or she is available and willing to engage in romantic or sexual activities, and (3) you believe that you can engage in such activities and not be discovered. You pass the test if you walk away and redirect your emotional energies to your spouse and into your marriage.

Some marriages are troubled most of the time. Some marriages are troubled some of the time. Many marriages are not troubled at all. Having an extramarital affair will normally cause trouble for most of the time in a marriage. Although affairs are frequently the result of an unhappy marriage, they can also destroy “good” marriages. Persons who have had an affair sometimes say “I don’t know what I was thinking. I have a good marriage.”

Marriages can survive affairs. However, even if the marriage survives, it is changed forever. The emotional wounds caused by affairs seldom completely heal. These emotional injuries, often deeply repressed, will remain with the offended party for life. These feelings are so much a part of the offended person that they will continue to exert their influence after the death of the unfaithful spouse.

Some couples say things like, “The affair was a good thing. It helped us seek counseling and focused our problems.” Although an affair may be responsible for the initiation of counseling and the focusing of problems, I have never known an affair to be good for a marriage. For most, statements like this help to rationalize the affair and distribute

responsibility (“It’s part your fault that I had an affair because you . . .” or “It’s part my fault that you had an affair because I . . .”). Rationalization serves the purpose of allowing the couple to move forward, and in this sense is useful. As demonstrated, it is seen in the offended as well as the offending party. Unfortunately, in some cases, once this initial purpose is served, regardless of the rationalization, at least one of the couple will decide that the marriage is over.

There are at least three general categories of extramarital affairs: (1) the emotional affair, which may involve little or no physical contact, (2) the infamous one night stand, and (3) the ongoing affair, which can last from days to years. Some marriages do not survive emotional affairs, in spite of claims from the offending spouse that “I didn’t do anything wrong” (did not have sex). In such instances it is normally the sense of emotional betrayal that causes the breakup. Other marriages seem to endure after years of known sexual infidelity. The reasons for these differences? Too numerous to specify. As you might expect, the actual effect and outcome that an affair has on any marriage is dependent upon complex interactions among various psychological, emotional, economic, and social factors.

In some cases, both spouses have had affairs. These can occur concurrently or years apart for various reasons. Sometimes they occur as a component of revenge or “getting even.” No matter, it normally spells trouble for the relationship.

There are various rationales for having an affair. One of the most common is “I had an affair to save my marriage.” The rationale is “I am unhappy in my marriage. If I act on this, I’ll have to divorce. I don’t want to divorce (for the kids, religious reasons, money, ongoing emotional attachment to spouse, etc). So I had an affair to compensate for what is lacking. This way, I meet my needs and my marriage is saved.”

Another affair rationale is “If I can get it, why not take it. You only live once.” This rationale is readily understood and has to do with self-centeredness and the pursuit of personal pleasure. It disregards any sense of marital commitment and the emotional well-being of the spouse.

A third rationale is “It just happened.” It is difficult to make headway in counseling with this rationale. This is because the person is not accepting responsibility for personal behavior. Such an explanation for an affair normally leaves the spouse plagued with thoughts that similar behavior could easily be repeated. Affairs do not “just happen” . . . intentional behaviors must be engaged.

There are other rationales for affairs. Sometimes the rationale includes a myriad of factors. No matter, extramarital affairs are difficult to overcome. This is true regardless of whether the couple remains married or chooses to divorce. Affairs can be so emotionally difficult to manage that some persons resort to violence, including homicide, suicide, or both after learning of an affair.

Affairs and Sex Addiction

Are some affairs related to an addiction to sex? Can a person be addicted to sex? This is a current controversy in psychology. There are many clinicians that advocate for the authenticity of sex addiction. They specialize in treating persons considered to be addicted to sex. Supporters of this position not only maintain the belief that sex addiction is real but also feel that it is acted out in various ways, including affairs.

The current Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (fifth edition) (DSM-5) (APA, 2013), does not recognize sex as an addiction. The DSM-5: “...groups of repetitive behaviors, which some term *behavioral* (or *process*) *addictions*, with such subcategories as “sex addiction,” “exercise addiction,” or “shopping addiction,” are not included (in this manual) because at this time there is insufficient peer-reviewed evidence to establish the

diagnostic criteria and course descriptions needed to identify these behaviors as mental disorders” (481).

For those clinicians that support the idea of behavioral or process addictions, sex could be considered an addiction even though there is no such designation within the DSM-5. There is a clinical conception of “excessive sexual drive,” which includes *nymphomania* (uncontrollable sexual desire in a woman) and *satyriasis* (uncontrollable sexual desire in a man), but this is not intended to describe sex as an addiction per se.

Incidentally, in contrast to an excessive sexual drive, it is also possible to experience a less than normal sex drive. While it is normal for a person’s sex drive to wax and wane, if low sex drive is persistent and certain other conditions are present, *female sexual interest/arousal disorder* (302.72) or *male hypoactive sexual desire disorder* may be diagnosed (302.71)(DSM-5).

When considering sex drive, you may have heard that “sex is ninety-five percent psychological and five percent physical.” While this statement captures the importance of being “turned on” when it comes to sex, low sex drive and sexual performance difficulties can have their origin in physiology (this is also true for excessive sexual drive). One of the most common physical causes for low sex drive and an inability to perform sexually is the inadequate production of sex-related hormones. This condition can be readily diagnosed and treated by qualified physicians.

The treatment of low sex drive often includes the administration of supplemental sex hormones, a treatment not without risk. Persons experiencing low sex drive or other sexual difficulties should discuss the possible benefits and risks of available treatments with their physician.

Housekeeping and Sloppy Factor

A major complaint in some officers’ marriages is housekeeping. This may sound like a minor problem, but it can have serious consequences. This problem often gets expressed in statements like “I work all day, and I have to come home to a pig sty.” It is easy to see in statements like this that some relationship foundation damage has already occurred. This issue can be especially difficult when the spouse does not work outside the home. For the officer, there is often a sense that the other is not keeping up the marriage bargain or “does nothing all day.” In this area, the actual circumstances and issues vary, but it places an additional strain on the marriage. Even in relationships where housekeeping is not a major problem, there exists the *sloppy factor*.

Sloppy factors differ for most couples. Spouses with the least tolerance for sloppiness often find themselves doing most of the housework. This is because their tolerance for sloppiness is exceeded before it reaches critical levels for their spouses. Therefore, the spouse with the least tolerance for sloppiness is consistently picking up the house. This may occur with or without resentment. If there is no resentment, there is little problem. If there is resentment, more destructive patterns develop. These patterns are usually characterized by criticism and dysfunction. For example, a husband might say something like, “I can’t take this mess.” This normally leads the wife to respond, “I’ll clean the house, but does it always have to be on your timetable?” Frustrated, the husband begins to clean. The wife, angered by her husband’s cleaning because it implies that she is an inadequate housekeeper, yells, “I’m gonna do it. Leave it alone!” To which the husband responds, “When? I told you I can’t take this mess! And I’m tired of you never doing anything around here!” (The exchange has now become the housekeeping argument.) The argument goes on until it reaches its predictable end. Exchanges like this are intimacy distancing and do nothing to solve the problem. In situations like this, couples must access a MOB (mindful of

blocks) mentality. Only then does the couple have an opportunity to productively address the issue and make the desired changes.

Intentional and Unintentional Harm

Some couples will intentionally harm one another. They do this psychologically, emotionally, and physically. One pattern of intentional harm involves playing the relationship *trump card*. The relationship trump card is played when a spouse implies or threatens to leave the relationship unless the other person does what is desired. This is different than being dissatisfied with the relationship and honestly discussing the possibility of separation. Playing the trump card is inherently manipulative and dysfunctional. It is intended to hurt, dominate, and control. It is intimacy distancing and risks the relationship. It has several variations including, “If you don’t do this, I’ll leave” “If you don’t like it, there’s the door” “I’m not sure I’m coming home” and “Don’t let the door hit you on the way out.” The use of the relationship trump card is one level below the threatened use of violence, which is one level below actual violence, to obtain what is desired in a relationship.

There are many relationship patterns capable of producing harm. There are also many motivations which maintain these patterns, including anger, intimidation, hatred, revenge, punishment, and control.

Fortunately, most couples would not intentionally harm one another. Even if they become angry, frustrated, or disappointed with their spouses, most persons would not look to harm them in any real manner. This is an important characteristic of most marriages. It has clinical significance for couples in counseling. *If a couple would not intentionally harm one another, then it makes sense to believe that any harm experienced must be unintentional.* This realization can move a couple forward not only in counseling, but also in everyday life.

When considering unintentional harm, two points should always be kept in mind: (1) you do not have to intend harm to do harm (this is the very definition of unintentional harm), and (2) if you feel harmed, you should talk about it. Do not let the feeling of being harmed, even unintentionally, build resentment or lead you to unfounded conclusions.

It is reasonable to assume good faith and good intention on the part of your spouse. If you feel harmed, tell your spouse that you believe the harmful behavior was either unintentional or had a motivation other than harm (many jokes or attempts at humor can unintentionally harm others). Open the discussion in an appropriate manner. Choose where, when, and how you will initiate the discussion. Confront the issue gently and work for resolution.

If you are advised that your behavior has caused harm, even though you did not intend harm, try to remain open minded and listen non-defensively. Once you know that some part of your behavior unintentionally harmed your spouse, it is incumbent upon you to alter the behavior. In functional relationships, one spouse would not continue to engage in behavior that he or she now knows harms the other.

Silent Treatment

There are few patterns of couple’s behavior that are as destructive to intimacy as the *silent treatment*. It is often used to punish someone for behavior deemed inappropriate. Remaining silent allows the other person to project their worst fears into the silence. Becoming upset, taking a break, and remaining quiet for a short period of time will not normally damage a relationship, especially when the couple reengages to resolve the issue.

However, long periods of silence, days or weeks of silence, place the relationship on a very undesirable course. When there is an issue to address, it is better to confront it than to bury it in silence.

Change

People do not change easily (think about what happened to your last dieting effort). In order for persons to bring about consistent change, effort must be applied throughout the change process. Initial effort must be applied to achieve what is desired; secondary effort must be applied to maintain the result. It is effort for change and effort for consistency.

The process for change involves (1) accepting responsibility for your behavior, (2) identifying what you want to change, (3) developing a plan for change, (4) implementing the plan, (5) evaluating for success, and (6) altering the plan or means of implementation if not successful.

As it pertains to couples, a plan for change can involve skills to be learned. Spouses can learn to be better mates, fathers, mothers, and partners. For individuals, persons can learn how to alter their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Most importantly, when it comes to change, keep in mind that good intentions and plans, while necessary, are not sufficient for change. Like a blueprint for construction, even the best intentions and the most detailed of plans must be put into action before any results are observed.

Healthy Marriages and Gottman's Marriage Tips

Couples researcher, psychologist John Gottman identified seven tips for keeping marriages healthy. In combination with the Foundation Blocks of Functional Relationships and Some Things to Remember, they provide an excellent framework for those wishing to maintain or enhance their marriage.

- *Seek help early.* The average couple waits six years before seeking help for marital problems (and keep in mind, half of all marriages that end do so in the first seven years). This means the average couple lives with unhappiness for far too long.
- *Edit yourself.* Couples who avoid saying every critical thought when discussing touchy topics are consistently the happiest.
- *Soften your "start up."* Arguments first "start up" because a spouse sometimes escalates the conflict from the get-go by making a critical or contemptuous remark in a confrontational tone. Bring up problems gently and without blame.
- *Accept influence.* A marriage succeeds to the extent that the husband can accept influence from his wife. If a woman says, "Do you have to work Thursday night? My mother is coming that weekend, and I need your help getting ready," and her husband replies, "My plans are set, and I'm not changing them". This guy is in a shaky marriage. A husband's ability to be influenced by his wife (rather than vice-versa) is crucial because research shows women are already well practiced at accepting influence from men, and a true partnership only occurs when a husband can do so as well.
- *Have high standards.* Happy couples have high standards for each other even as newlyweds. The most successful couples are those who, even as newlyweds, refused to accept hurtful behavior from one another. The lower the level of tolerance for bad behavior in the beginning of a relationship, the happier the couple is down the road.

- *Learn to repair and exit the argument.* Successful couples know how to exit an argument. Happy couples know how to repair the situation before an argument gets completely out of control. Successful repair attempts include: changing the topic to something completely unrelated; using humor; stroking your partner with a caring remark (“I understand that this is hard for you”); making it clear you’re on common ground (“This is our problem”); backing down (in marriage, as in the martial art Aikido, you have to yield to win); and, in general, offering signs of appreciation for your partner and his or her feelings along the way (“I really appreciate and want to thank you for . . .”). If an argument gets too heated, take a 20-minute break, and agree to approach the topic again when you are both calm.
- *Focus on the bright side.* In a happy marriage, while discussing problems, couples make at least five times as many positive statements to and about each other and their relationship as negative ones. For example, “We laugh a lot;” not, “We never have any fun”. A good marriage must have a rich climate of positivity. Make deposits to your emotional bank account. (Copyright 2000-2010 by John M. Gottman. Reprinted with permission from the website of the Gottman Institute at www.gottman.com)

In summary, a good marriage is like a traditional mechanical clock. Wind it up, input positive energy to keep it going, and it ticks away faithfully for years.

From: *Reflections of a Police Psychologist* (2nd edition), Chapter 7. (2015).

Police Officer-Husband Modes of Transaction

Have you ever tried to assist your wife with a problem that *she* brought to *you*, only to have her become upset when you provided problem solutions? Did it seem like she became more frustrated each time you told her how to solve the problem? If you answered “yes” to either of these questions, it is most likely that you have unwittingly violated the *mode zone*.

Police officers have at least two possible transactional modes when it comes to discussing problems presented by their wives. There is the *cop mode* and the *husband mode*.

In the cop mode the officer transacts with his wife in a manner similar to that involving any citizen: when she presents a problem, he fixes the problem, tells her how to fix the problem, or advises that he cannot help.

In the husband mode the officer listens to his wife as she describes the problem. He tries to understand her and supports her efforts to explore, discuss, and address the problem. He does not try to fix things. He helps her to work through it in her own way. This may include a request from her for further husband involvement.

Over the years, I have learned that for the most part when wives bring up a problem for discussion, they are seeking their husbands and not a police officer . . . good to know.

When your wife is looking for her husband, and finds only the cop, you can rest assured that she will leave the conversation feeling frustrated, disappointed, and maybe angry. Too frequently, wives of police officers have reported feeling minimized and “treated like a child” when spoken to in the cop mode by their husbands. In essence, the wives responses are the result of transacting with a somewhat emotionally uninvolved police officer instead of a supportive and empathetic husband. To avoid an unintentional excursion into the cop mode, keep in mind that most wives want and need their husbands when they are confronting difficulties. In such circumstances, cop mode will fall short and produce less than desirable outcomes.

The next time your wife comes to you with a problem, turn the transaction into something positive (regardless of the problem). You can strengthen your marriage and enhance intimacy by remaining in husband mode.

The characteristics of the “cop” and the “husband” transactional modes apply equally to unmarried police couples, female officers and their husbands, and gay and lesbian police couples. They can also be seen in other personal relationships, such as parent-child and friendships.

The development of cop mode is related to the defense mechanism *emotional insulation* and appears to be an occupational hazard for police officers.

From: Digliani, J.A. *Reflections of a Police Psychologist*, 2nd ed. (Chapter 12), 2015.

Marriage and Couples Exercise

Ever wonder why things seem to go so well at the beginning of a relationship only to deteriorate as time passes? This early period, when it seems that things could not be much better, can last from weeks to years. It is sometimes called the “honeymoon” period, and it is characterized by the best behavior of each person. Then, in many relationships, something seems to change. There are greater demands for perfection, less flexibility, and less tolerance for other-person differences. This results in more disagreement and discord. In some cases, the discord is sufficiently intense to cause the break-up of the relationship.

Couples relationships are characterized by recurring patterns of behavior. These behavioral patterns often lead to predictable outcomes. Pattern outcomes range from *functional* to *dysfunctional*. It is the dysfunctional patterns within a relationship that undermine the honeymoon period.

If you are trying to improve your relationship by altering a dysfunctional pattern, it is often helpful to share information with your partner. The *Marriage and Couples Exercise* is designed to help you share and focus important relationship information.

Helpful hint: If you think “It’s me and you against the dysfunctional pattern” instead of “It’s me and you against each other” some very positive things can happen.

Marriage and Couples Exercise

Instructions for partners: In section 1, write in what your partner might do differently to help you. Exchange information verbally or by reading each other’s responses. Based upon what your partner has written in section 1, write what you are willing to do differently for your partner in section 2. Once completed, discuss your responses with one another. Negotiate if necessary. Work until you have a positive plan for pattern change.

Section 1: It would help me if you would:

- (1) _____

- (2) _____

- (3) _____

Section 2: To help us enhance our relationship, I am willing to:

- (1) _____

- (2) _____

- (3) _____

Critical Incident Information

Critical incidents:

are often sudden and unexpected
disrupt ideas of control and how the world works (core beliefs)
feel emotionally and psychologically overwhelming
can strip psychological defenses
frequently involve perceptions of death, threat to life, or involve bodily injury

It is not unusual for police officers to experience several out-of-the-ordinary perceptions and responses during and following a critical incident. These are normally of short duration and resolve over time without difficulty.

Officers: If you have experienced or are now experiencing distressing perceptions or responses following a critical incident you should contact an available professional resource.

Perceptual distortions possible during the incident:

slow motion	visual illusion or hallucination
fast motion	heightened visual clarity
muted/diminished sound	vivid images
amplified sound	memory loss for part of the event
slowing of time	memory loss for part of your actions
accelerated time	false memory
dissociation	temporary paralysis
tunnel vision	automatic pilot

Possible responses following a critical incident:

heightened sense of danger
anger, frustration, and blaming
isolation and withdrawal
sleep difficulties
intrusive thoughts
emotional numbing
depression and feelings of guilt
no depression and feelings of having done well
sexual or appetite changes
second guessing and endless rethinking of the incident
interpersonal difficulties
increased family discord
increased alcohol or drug use
grief and mourning

Officers and Spouses: Critical Incident Information

Many officers have asked about how much incident information should be provided to their spouses. There are several factors that should be considered. Two of the most important are (1) is the officer retraumatized by recounting the information and (2) how much information is desired by the spouse. For some officers, talking about the incident is not a problem. They can recount the event and their experiences without emotional or other difficulty. For others, this is not possible. For them, each recounting of the incident is retraumatizing. In the latter cases, responding to a spouse's repeated request for more information may be detrimental to the officer.

Following a traumatic incident, some spouses want to know every detail. They want to see photographs, read case reports, listen to dispatch tapes, and so on. Other spouses desire or can tolerate only a broad description of the incident. For these spouses, providing more than general information may result in vicarious traumatization. This is especially true if the incident details involve blood, body damage, and gore. To keep officers from being retraumatized and spouses from being vicariously traumatized, a healthy balance must be struck between how much information officers can provide without detriment to themselves and how much information is desired by spouses.

A particularly difficult circumstance arises when the officer's need to talk about the incident exceeds the capacity of the spouse to listen. Capacity may be overwhelmed by the nature of the incident or the sheer number of times that the spouse has heard the story. Even if the officer is still struggling with the incident and feels better after talking about it, at some point most spouses will become *incident-info saturated*. They want to move past the event and get back to normal. For these spouses, like the spouses that cannot tolerate much incident detail, further exposure may result in vicarious traumatization, an exacerbation of pre-existing problems, or the creation of problems that did not exist prior to the incident.

Officer: if your spouse becomes incident-info saturated, limit further discussion of the incident with him/her and initiate or continue to process the incident with alternative support resources. Spouse: if not already started, consider that it may be helpful for you to engage counseling support services.

After a critical incident

Although things generally improve with time, there may be no getting back to what was previously normal. Some traumatic events will change persons and relationships forever. The officer and spouse (the entire family) must find a *new normal* and live on from there. The new normal may be better than the old, but the opposite is also possible. Some police officer relationships do not survive traumatic incidents. The incident either creates new and unbearable difficulties or intensifies previously existing problems. Some relationships collapse under the strain, and the couple separates. Other relationships appear to be strengthened by the pulling together of couples following traumatic exposure.

Do not become a critical incident statistic. Seek appropriate professional assistance if your relationship becomes troubled following involvement in a critical incident.

Police Spouse Anxiety and Critical Incidents

Some police spouses that have not experienced anxiety about the risks of policing prior to a police critical incident become anxious following a critical incident. This is because prior to the incident, three primary psychological defenses mechanisms function sufficiently to keep police spouse anxiety in check. These psychological defenses are known as *rationalization*, *intellectualization*, and *denial*. Together they create a protective buffer against policing-related anxiety. For police spouses, these psychological defense mechanisms work something like this:

- (1) Rationalization - I am confident that *my* police officer has the skills to survive any work circumstance and return home safely after every shift. Therefore, I do not have to think or worry about it.
- (2) Intellectualization - the chances that *my* police officer will be harmed or killed in the line of duty is a slight and unlikely theoretical possibility. Therefore, I do not have to think or worry about it.
- (3) Denial - if a police officer is killed or seriously injured it would not happen here, and if it did it would not happen to *my* police officer. Therefore, I do not have to think or worry about it.

Psychological defense mechanisms

Rationalization, intellectualization, and denial are three of several hypothesized psychological defense mechanisms. In general, psychological defense mechanisms operate below the level of conscious awareness. Another way of saying this is that we seldom recognize the role that defense mechanisms play in our psychological life. Psychological defense mechanisms are normal components of our psychological composition. However, when over-developed they can create a myriad of problems, including relationship, family, occupational, and social difficulties.

Police spouse anxiety and psychological defense mechanisms

Following a critical incident, especially those in which the officer could have been killed, some spouses come to realize the true dangers of policing. The dangers of policing now feel much more “real” and generate officer-safety anxiety. In such cases, the reality of the critical incident has overwhelmed the psychological defenses which previously protected the spouse from the anxiety associated with the risks of policing.

Police officers, police spouse anxiety, and psychological defense mechanisms

It is important to know that the critical incident does not have to involve actual death or serious injury, nor must it involve the officer of a particular spouse. Spouses can be affected by what happens to officers that are not their husband, wife, or partner. Spouse anxiety following a police critical incident can be mild and temporary, or become chronic and so problematic that some officers have chosen to leave policing. Police officers involved in critical incidents can help lessen spouse anxiety by openly discussing the dangers of policing and how they managed the risks or threat of the actual incident. It also helps to discuss the three T’s of policing (*training*, *tactics*, and *technology*) and how they help to counterbalance police occupational dangers.

Not surprisingly, the psychological defense mechanisms of rationalization, intellectualization, and denial are also employed by police officers. Like anyone else, police officers too can have their psychological defenses overwhelmed.

Recovering from Traumatic Stress

Police officer: Recovering from traumatic exposure takes time. The most difficult challenge for action-oriented officers is to be patient in recovery. If you are exposed to a traumatic event, accept your feelings. Depending on actual impact, the intensity of your emotional experiences may surprise you. Many officers have reported crying like a baby following shootings and other traumatic incidents. They describe the experience of strong emotion as *having lost it*. They are talking about feeling as if they lost control—control of their emotions.

In fact, they have not lost anything. Instead, they have *found* something. They have found the emotion that underlies their traumatic experience. When strong feelings surface, let them in, let them fade. Experience and explore the emotion. It is a natural part of recovery. Imagine intense emotion as an ocean wave. It will come, and it will go. Although it may feel overwhelming for a brief time, you can manage it. You know what it is: it is the healthy expression of strong emotion. You know what to do about it: you breathe through it.

Keep in mind that physical symptoms sometime accompany strong emotion. These will normally subside as recovery continues. Additionally, remember that family members may not fully understand your experiences. Try not to become angry or frustrated. They cannot know what it is like for you. Be patient with yourself and with your family. Maintain your family connections. Keep your lines of communication open.

Police Spouse: Understanding the likely responses of your spouse will help you to provide appropriate support. Keep in mind that you will also respond to the incident in some way and that you may also need to process your feelings. Utilize available support resources.

For the police officer: What if I develop posttraumatic stress disorder after a critical incident and my symptoms persist? Can I be disabled by posttraumatic stress disorder?

Unfortunately, yes. If you develop PTSD after a critical incident, and the symptoms are severe and enduring, you can become *totally* or *occupationally* disabled.

Total disability occurs when the severity of the symptoms renders an officer incapable of engaging in any employment. Occupational disability occurs when an officer experiences disabling symptoms in the policing environment, but remains relatively symptom free in other work environments. This renders the officer incapable of returning to policing, but able to perform other work.

Occupational disability can occur following a critical incident because traumatic experiences have the power to “split” environments. That is, whereas officers are normally symptom free in their work environment prior to the traumatic incident, following the incident their work environment transacts to produce significant posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms. In such cases, the officer cannot safely return to the type of environment that produced the traumatic event. In essence, work environments have been split into symptom and non-symptom producing environments.

Fortunately, most police officers do not develop PTSD after a critical incident, and many of those that do are successfully treated. They are then able to return to work and continue their police career without significant difficulty.

Trauma: Chronological History and Psychological History

Most officers who have experienced traumatic events want to place the incident behind them and move on. The difficulty for many officers is that the incident continues to impact their lives in less than desirable ways. This is because the incident, while in *chronological history*, is not yet in *psychological history*. The incident is in chronological history the instant that it is over. However, this is not the case with psychological history. When thoughts and other stimuli associated with the incident evoke powerful distressing responses following the incident, the incident is not in psychological history.

Placing the incident into psychological history involves disconnecting the memory of the incident from the gut-wrenching or negative emotional responses experienced during or immediately following the incident. When an incident is in psychological history, conditioned responses are minimized. Thoughts of the incident may produce emotional responses, but they will not be disabling. The person will be able to move forward, no longer being psychologically stuck in the incident.

A major component of traumatic incident recovery is placing the event into psychological history.

The ability to place experiences into psychological history is also important in everyday life. This is especially true of functional interpersonal relationships. In functional interpersonal relationships persons are able to emotionally move beyond the memory of minor transgressions and prevent such memories from continually exerting an undesirable influence on the relationship.

According to psychologist Albert Ellis, PhD (1913-2007), author of *Rational-Emotive Behavioral Therapy* (REBT) there are 12 primary irrational ideas that cause and sustain psychological difficulty. Irrational idea number 9 is presented here because of its relevance to “placing the event into psychological history” and as a reminder of what can be accomplished:

REBT Irrational Idea Number 9: *The idea that because something once strongly affected our life, it should indefinitely affect it* - Instead of the idea that we can learn from our past experiences but not be overly-attached to or prejudiced by them.

Ellis, A. (2004). *Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy: It Works for Me--It Can Work for You*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Tips for Recovering From Disasters and Other Traumatic Events

Disasters and other traumatic events are often unexpected, sudden and overwhelming. In some cases, there are no outwardly visible signs of physical injury, but there is nonetheless a serious emotional toll. It is common for people who have experienced traumatic situations to have very strong emotional reactions. Understanding normal responses to these abnormal events can aid you in coping effectively with your feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, and help you along the path to recovery.

What happens to people after a disaster or other traumatic event?

Shock and denial are typical responses to terrorism, disasters and other kinds of trauma, especially shortly after the event. Both shock and denial are normal protective reactions.

Shock is a sudden and often intense disturbance of your emotional state that may leave you feeling stunned or dazed. Denial involves your not acknowledging that something very stressful has happened, or not experiencing fully the intensity of the event. You may temporarily feel numb or disconnected from life.

As the initial shock subsides, reactions vary from one person to another. The following, however, are normal responses to a traumatic event:

- Feelings become intense and sometimes are unpredictable. You may become more irritable than usual, and your mood may change back and forth dramatically. You might be especially anxious or nervous, or even become depressed.
- Thoughts and behavior patterns are affected by the trauma. You might have repeated and vivid memories of the event. These flashbacks may occur for no apparent reason and may lead to physical reactions such as rapid heartbeat or sweating. You may find it difficult to concentrate or make decisions, or become more easily confused. Sleep and eating patterns also may be disrupted.
- Recurring emotional reactions are common. Anniversaries of the event, such as at one month or one year, as well as reminders such as aftershocks from earthquakes or the sounds of sirens, can trigger upsetting memories of the traumatic experience. These 'triggers' may be accompanied by fears that the stressful event will be repeated.
- Interpersonal relationships often become strained. Greater conflict, such as more frequent arguments with family members and coworkers, is common. On the other hand, you might become withdrawn and isolated and avoid your usual activities.
- Physical symptoms may accompany the extreme stress. For example, headaches, nausea and chest pain may result and may require medical attention. Pre-existing medical conditions may worsen due to the stress.

How do people respond differently over time?

It is important for you to realize that there is not one 'standard' pattern of reaction to the extreme stress of traumatic experiences. Some people respond immediately, while others have delayed reactions - sometimes months or even years later. Some have adverse effects for a long period of time, while others recover rather quickly.

And reactions can change over time. Some who have suffered from trauma are energized initially by the event to help them with the challenge of coping, only to later become discouraged or depressed.

A number of factors tend to affect the length of time required for recovery, including:

- The degree of intensity and loss. Events that last longer and pose a greater threat, and where loss of life or substantial loss of property is involved, often take longer to resolve.
- A person's general ability to cope with emotionally challenging situations. Individuals who have handled other difficult, stressful circumstances well may find it easier to cope with the trauma.
- Other stressful events preceding the traumatic experience. Individuals faced with other emotionally challenging situations, such as serious health problems or family-related difficulties, may have more intense reactions to the new stressful event and need more time to recover.

How should I help myself and my family?

There are a number of steps you can take to help restore emotional well being and a sense of control following a terrorist act, a disaster or other traumatic experience, including the following:

- Give yourself time to heal. Anticipate that this will be a difficult time in your life. Allow yourself to mourn the losses you have experienced. Try to be patient with changes in your emotional state.
- Ask for support from people who care about you and who will listen and empathize with your situation. But keep in mind that your typical support system may be weakened if those who are close to you also have experienced or witnessed the trauma.
- Communicate your experience in whatever ways feel comfortable to you - such as by talking with family or close friends, or keeping a diary.
- Find out about local support groups that often are available such as for those who have suffered from natural disasters, or for women who are victims of rape. These can be especially helpful for people with limited personal support systems.
- Try to find groups led by appropriately trained and experienced professionals. Group discussion can help people realize that other individuals in the same circumstances often have similar reactions and emotions.
- Engage in healthy behaviors to enhance your ability to cope with excessive stress. Eat well-balanced meals and get plenty of rest. If you experience ongoing difficulties with sleep, you may be able to find some relief through relaxation techniques. Avoid alcohol and drugs.
- Establish or reestablish routines such as eating meals at regular times and following an exercise program. Take some time off from the demands of daily life by pursuing hobbies or other enjoyable activities.
- Avoid major life decisions such as switching careers or jobs if possible because these activities tend to be highly stressful.
- Become knowledgeable about what to expect as a result of trauma.

How do I take care of children's special needs?

The intense anxiety and fear that often follow a disaster or other traumatic event can be especially troubling for children. Some may regress and demonstrate younger behaviors such as thumb sucking or bed wetting. Children may be more prone to nightmares and fear of sleeping alone. Performance in school may suffer. Other changes in behavior patterns may include throwing tantrums more frequently, or withdrawing and becoming more solitary.

There are several things parents and others who care for children can do to help alleviate the emotional consequences of trauma, including the following:

- Spend more time with children and let them be more dependent on you during the months following the trauma - for example, allowing your child to cling to you more often than usual. Physical affection is very comforting to children who have experienced trauma.
- Provide play experiences to help relieve tension. Younger children in particular may find it easier to share their ideas and feelings about the event through non-verbal activities such as drawing.
- Encourage older children to speak with you, and with one another, about their thoughts and feelings. This helps reduce their confusion and anxiety related to the trauma. Respond to questions in terms they can comprehend. Reassure them repeatedly that you care about them and that you understand their fears and concerns.
- Keep regular schedules for activities such as eating, playing and going to bed to help restore a sense of security and normalcy.

When should I seek professional help?

Some people are able to cope effectively with the emotional and physical demands brought about by a natural disaster or other traumatic experience by using their own support systems. It is not unusual, however, to find that serious problems persist and continue to interfere with daily living. For example, some may feel overwhelming nervousness or lingering sadness that adversely affects job performance and interpersonal relationships.

Individuals with prolonged reactions that disrupt their daily functioning should consult with a trained and experienced mental health professional. Psychologists and other appropriate mental health providers help educate people about normal responses to extreme stress. These professionals work with individuals affected by trauma to help them find constructive ways of dealing with the emotional impact.

With children, continual and aggressive emotional outbursts, serious problems at school, preoccupation with the traumatic event, continued and extreme withdrawal, and other signs of intense anxiety or emotional difficulties all point to the need for professional assistance. A qualified mental health professional can help such children and their parents understand and deal with thoughts, feelings and behaviors that result from trauma.

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20 Considerations and Suggestions for Spouses of Officers Involved in a Critical Incident

1. Express caring feelings. Saying something like, “I love you, I’m here for you” reinforces your emotional bond and lets your spouse know where you stand. In some relationships this might be communicating something that is often said, in others it may represent the first time in awhile that such emotions have been expressed. Either way, it makes a difference.
2. Be patient. Critical incidents can cause some undesirable emotional changes in the officer. These changes are normally temporary and subside over time. If this happens in your relationship, keep communication open and try to remain supportive. It is also possible that positive change can occur. Positive change should be reinforced.
3. Be emotionally available to your spouse. Listening is important. Stay connected without being intrusive. After a critical incident some officers need to talk a lot about the incident, others will “open up” gradually and only after a period of time.
4. Be gentle in your communication, verbal and non verbal. The period immediately following a critical incident is not the time to discuss pre-existing sensitive topics.
5. Touching is important. Caring touch without overstimulation is a significant expression of love and support. Following a critical incident, some officers will want to be touched often, others not so, even by their spouses. Note on touching: if you are transported to the police department to be with your spouse following a critical incident, *do not touch the officer until approved to do so*. This is especially true if your spouse was involved in a shooting. Officers are normally restricted from touching anyone in these cases in order to protect possible trace evidence on their person or uniform. Do not take this personally. Every officer is aware of this and accepts this element of the incident investigation.
6. Anticipate “internal processing” on the part of the officer. This often leads to some degree of physical or emotional isolation as the incident replays itself over and over in the officer’s mind. This mental preoccupation with the incident is normal and usually subsides within a few weeks.
7. Anticipate some change in the officer’s mood. It does not occur in every instance, but for some officers their mood “flattens” following a critical incident. This means that the officer will seem to have little expression of happiness or sadness, and may appear uninvolved, disengaged, or simply neutral. Another possibility is that the officer’s mood will appear energized and almost giddy. Again, these reactions normally moderate over a few weeks time.
8. The officer’s desire and ability to engage in sexual activities may vary with mood. This can range from no desire to heightened desire for sex. Remain aware that the officer’s mood can vary with changing thoughts of the incident.
9. Sleep can be fitful for both of you for several nights following a critical incident. Mild exercise and staying within the limits of your regular consumption of caffeine during the day is helpful in restoring normal sleep patterns.

10. Gently encourage appropriate couples or family activities.
11. Do not encourage alcohol or other drugs as a primary means to cope with the emotional and psychological aftermath of a critical incident. While there is a place for a glass of wine or a beer at dinner, using alcohol to numb feelings resulting from a critical incident is not the best way to work through issues, for you or your spouse.
12. If the officer exhibits any behavior that concerns you, talk to him or her about it. Talk in a caring manner. Describe the behavior first, then communicate your concerns.
13. Occasionally, officers will become depressed after a critical incident. If you observe behaviors associated with depression, talk to your spouse. If necessary, arrange for proper assessment, treatment, and support interventions. Do this together, as a team.
14. Call for help immediately if you think that your spouse is or is becoming suicidal. Know the warning signs of suicide. (see *Law Enforcement Critical Incident Handbook*)
15. Help your spouse but also help yourself. Remain aware of vicarious traumatization and moderate your involvement to remain within healthy boundaries. Use available resources if you become *incident-info saturated* (see *Officers and Spouses: Critical Incident Information*, page 27)
16. Monitor and try to mitigate outside stressors. Life demands do not stop following a critical incident. Ask for help with everyday chores and responsibilities if necessary. If you find it difficult to ask for help, think about this: You would be happy to assist those you care about if they were experiencing stressful times. It is likely that they feel the same way about you. Why not give them a chance to help?
17. If you have children, talk to them with your spouse. Talk to them about the incident in an age-appropriate manner. Answer any questions with age-appropriate honesty. Reassure them that they are safe, that you are ok, and that you are there for them.
18. Work as a team to address any particular stressors arising out of the incident.
19. Seek support early from available resources. Many police agencies maintain employee assistance programs, peer support teams, and staff psychologists or counselors. Stay in touch with supportive friends and trusted spouses of other officers.
20. Seek support even if everything looks ok. Although it is not unusual for officers to do well after a critical incident, engaging support services is a good idea. Some police departments have specific support protocols which are automatically initiated following a critical incident. Many do not. If the officer's agency does not have a protocol or support services, ask for what you need. Most agencies respond favorably to requests for support from officers and spouses.

Some Things to Remember

When confronting change and managing stress there are things you can do that help. Most of the items listed below are self-explanatory. Some are not. This is because some things to remember have special application within individual counseling or support programs.

Some things to remember:

- Watch how you talk to yourself (relationship with self)
- Relaxation breathing-*breath through stress*-inhale nose/exhale mouth
- Maintain a high level of self-care, make time for *you*
- Keep yourself physically active, not too much too soon
- Utilize positive and appropriate coping statements
- Enhance your internal (self) awareness and external awareness
- Remember the limits of your personal boundary
- Practice stimulus control and response disruption
- Monitor deprivational stress and overload stress
- Use “pocket responses” when needed/consider oblique follow-up
- Apply thought stopping/blocking to negative thoughts
- Identify and confront internal and external “false messages”
- Confront negative thinking with positive counter-thoughts
- Break stressors into manageable units; deal with one at a time
- Relax, then engage in a graded confrontation of what you fear
- A managed experience will lessen the intensity of what you fear
- Only experience changes experience, look for the positive
- Things do not have to be perfect to be ok
- Stressor strategies: confrontation, withdrawal, compromise (combination)
- Remember: transactions and choice points = different outcomes
- *Work*: do not forget why you do what you do
- Utilize your physical and psychological buffers
- Healing involves changes in intensity, frequency, and duration
- Use your shield when appropriate
- Create positive micro-environments
- Think of strong emotion as an “ocean wave”-let it in, let it fade
- Trigger anxiety: “I know what this is; I know what to do about it”
- *Walk* off and *talk* out your anxiety, fears, and problems (walk and talk)
- Being vulnerable does not equal being helpless
- Develop and practice relapse prevention strategies
- Develop and utilize a sense of humor, learn how to smile
- Things are never so bad that they can’t get worse
- Time perspective: past, present, and future (positive and negative)
- Do not forget that life often involves selecting from imperfect options
- Access your power: the power of confidence, coping and management
- Stay grounded in what you know to be true
- Keep things in perspective: keep little things little, manage the big things

About the Author

Jack A. Digliani, PhD, EdD is a licensed psychologist and a former deputy sheriff, police officer, and detective. He served as a law enforcement officer for the Laramie County, Wyoming Sheriff's Office, the Cheyenne, Wyoming Police Department, and the Fort Collins, Colorado Police Services (FCPS). He was the FCPS Director of Human Services and police psychologist for the last 11 years of his FCPS police career. While in this position he provided psychological services to employees and their family, and clinically supervised the FCPS Peer Support Team. He received the FCPS Medal of Merit for his work in police psychology.

Dr. Digliani also served as the police psychologist for the Loveland Police Department and Larimer County Sheriff's Office (Colorado). During his service he provided psychological counseling services to department members and their families. He was also the clinical supervisor of the agencies' Peer Support Teams. He has worked with numerous municipal, county, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. He specializes in police and trauma psychology, group interventions, and the development of police, fire, and other first-responder peer support teams.

Dr. Digliani is the author of *Contemporary Issues in Police Psychology*, *Reflections of a Police Psychologist*, *Law Enforcement Peer Support Team Manual*, *Firefighter Peer Support Team Manual*, *Law Enforcement Critical Incident Handbook*, and *Law Enforcement Marriage and Relationship Guidebook*. He is a contributor-writer of Colorado Revised Statute 13-90-107(m) *Who may not testify without consent*, the statute and paragraph which grants law enforcement, firefighter, and medical/rescue peer support team members specified confidentiality protection during peer support interactions. He is also the principal author of the peer support section of the *Officer-Involved Incident Protocol* of the Eighth Judicial District of Colorado.

In 1990, Dr. Digliani created the *Psychologist And Training/Recruit Officer Liaison* (PATROL) program, a program designed to support police officer recruits and their families during academy and field training. This concept was later extended to the fire service. The *Firefighter Recruit Support* (FIRST) program supports firefighters and their families during recruit training.

Dr. Digliani developed the FreezeFrame method of critical incident debriefing. Through his work, he advanced the conceptualizations of Option funnel versus Threat funnel, Level I and Level II peer support, Life-by-Design, the 2-and-2, and the *Comprehensive Model for Police Advanced Strategic Support* (COMPASS). COMPASS is a career-long psychological health and wellness strategy for police officers. COMPASS was adapted for firefighters in the *Comprehensive Model for Peer Advanced Strategic Support*.

In 2013, Dr. Digliani developed the conceptions of primary and secondary danger. He then created the Make it Safe Police Officer Initiative, a 12-element strategy designed to reduce the secondary danger of policing. The Initiative was later extended to firefighters and EMS in the Make it Safe Firefighter and EMS Initiatives. In 2015, Dr. Digliani crafted the *Peer Support Team Code of Ethical Conduct*.

Law Enforcement



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