

# What it is to be a dispatcher

Dedicated to you, our family and friends.

By: Shannon Polito



Welcome! This booklet/packet contains information with you, the family and friends of 911 dispatchers, in mind. We want you to know that you are seen, and we want to share with you what it means to be a dispatcher, and how it affects us physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally. We are hoping that it might help explain some of our behavior, our thought processes, choices we make (or don't make), and why we continue to do it despite all of that. We share this because we love you and we want you to be understood and also to understand that your dispatcher does not ever consider this just a job. It is a calling. They are helping people on their worst days, all day, every day. They are serving a much higher purpose than simply working a job.

# For our family and friends

If you are feeling lost, hopeless, and helpless about the fact that you are so close to a dispatcher and that you will simply have to accept what will be within this document...do not fear! There are things that can be done to help mitigate the stress, trauma, and the entrenchment in the job that can be associated.

What does this mean for you?

- Firstly, you matter as a family member or friend. Your needs and wants in the relationship are no less important than your dispatchers'. There are, however, some things that are different that changing how you approach and process the relationship will actually make it easier for everyone involved.
- Sometimes you will feel what is called Ambiguous Loss. This is when your dispatcher is home, but they aren't really there with you. They are often distant, disconnected and are not vulnerable with you. This in turn makes you feel unsafe to be vulnerable with them, which only increases the distance and disconnect.
- If you have a family with your dispatcher, it can make you feel like you are a single parent sometimes. When they are home they are sleeping, and then they go right back to work. This leaves you feeling alone, and sometimes sad, lonely and resentful of their job.
- Whether you are a friend or family member of the dispatcher, you can often feel neglected, forgotten, and unimportant. Even though that is not how the dispatcher feels about you, it is still how it makes you feel, and that's still valid.
- You might feel as though your job, and the things in your life aren't a priority because the needs of the dispatcher's job are such a massive commitment in time and all forms of energy.
- You may feel like your dispatcher is only half listening to you, waiting for you to get to the point, and/or always try to solve your problems when you are trying to talk and share with them.
- Not having your dispatcher at family time/get togethers/functions can often make you feel lonely, neglected, and resentful of having to always explain why you are there without them.

# What your dispatcher wants you to know

\*written personally by dispatchers\*

I want my family and friends to know that being a dispatcher means sometimes not knowing the outcome of situations. It is helping others in serious and not so serious situations. Working long hours, it means at times feeling guilty of missing out on family and special events, learning to keep a balance. It also means sometimes coming home and needing silence or to breakdown and cry. But please don't tell me to quit my job because at the end of the day, I LOVE it! Support me, tell me, tell us, we can do it, and not give up.

Sometimes when I come home and go straight to bed, it's not because I don't miss you guys. It's because I worked something that hit too close to home and I need time to decompress. I've given my all to being the strength for a stranger, and I don't want to take it out on you. So I would rather rest first. I am sorry if you feel that I am not always present. I hope you know I love you.

My schedule is grueling and I need time to unwind. It's not personal when I choose down time over socializing.

Sometimes being a dispatcher is very rewarding but also sometimes it can be mentally draining. Please don't be offended if I don't call you right away. I just spent 10+ hours talking all day. Sometimes I just need a break.

Compassion fatigue

Little or no patience

Often feel numb or blocking my emotions to protect myself and my brain from further damage or injury

Sometimes when I have a hard day at work, I feel bad about myself.

Some days, I will not be ok, I will be 180-different. Allow me time to process and heal, but please don't feel any different, don't love me any less. Thank you for being my support system.

Being a dispatcher means not showing up to every event/celebration but still trying to be connected in the ways I can be and are available to be. Our hours are unconventional and long but we try to balance the important people in our lives. I sometimes disassociate thinking about work, but I find comfort in the normalcy of conversation. I feel out of touch or disconnected with my non-work groups, and I wish they put in the effort to check in when they can, as much as I do. I can be hypervigilant looking out for the wellbeing of others, but I mean well.

Being a dispatcher means assisting citizens, deputies, callers, patients, animals - domestic and wild, with their time of need. All without thanks sometimes.

There are days where I am emotionally/mentally tapped and I have nothing left in the tank. It's not that I don't want to talk, I'm just tapped on communicating.

My perspective on people has changed. I hope people are good, but I expect them not to be.

I am not ignoring your stories/conversation when I am on my phone. My brain no longer just focuses on one thing at a time.

It means no say in mandatory overtime due to low staffing. This also results in cancelled family dinners and gatherings on days off or it means one parent will not be present.

Being a dispatcher means: wanting to mindlessly disconnect from everything when I get home from work. Then when I am not able to, reacting to the unwanted stimuli in a negative way...and regretting it shortly thereafter. Being a dispatcher is



reminding myself to give grace and have patience for those in my life that matter most.

Just because I let out emotions about my work day does not mean I am not capable of my job.

I am tired after work and on my days off. Working graves is hard on the body. Don't make me feel lazy for not wanting to "go anywhere" or "participate."

Being a dispatcher is a very rewarding and stressful job. I would like my family and friends to know if I don't feel like talking to not take it personal, I am just exhausted from talking on the phone all day.

Please don't ask me about "the worst call I have ever taken!" I promise you don't want to know and I don't want to relive it.

There are times when I get off of work and all I want is peace and quiet. I am not being rude and antisocial, I just need time to decompress

When I interrupt you while you're speaking and ask you to get to the point, don't take it personally. We have been professionally brainwashed to get information from callers as quickly and concisely as possible. We still love and respect you. It's just a bad habit carryover.

I would want my family to know that some day won't be good days. That sometimes I may not be full of joy or want to be around people or the public. Some days I may just want silence and other days they may not be able to shut me up! I would want my family to know I absolutely love what I do and enjoy my job, but that I am the person someone calls when they are having their worst moment and it takes a toll.

Being a dispatcher means: wanting to mindlessly disconnect from everything when I get home from work. Then when I am not able to, reacting to the unwanted stimuli in a negative way. Then regretting it shortly thereafter. Being a dispatcher is reminding myself to give grace and have patience for those in my life that matter most.

Being a dispatcher is definitely a rewarding career. The idea of helping people and being able to is fulfilling. It's not always an easy thing to do, but I am glad to do it. People do need to know that it's nothing like it's portrayed in movies or on TV shows. That really gives the public the wrong idea about how it all works.

I'm tired. Even on a slow day, having to be alert and ready to go at a moment's notice for an entire 10 hour shift is very taxing. It's like driving for long periods of time, yeah you aren't physically doing much at all but you're still tired at the end of the road trip. And after a busy day I literally don't have the mental energy to do anything else for the day. I need time to recharge my battery, both physically and mentally.

It means that no day is like the day before. It means that some days I want to come home and talk, and other days I am so mentally and emotionally drained that I can't seem to form a sentence or piece together how my day was when asked. It means you are worried about the smallest things in fear that what you have heard others experience, will happen to your loved ones.

Loss of empathy towards others

Decision fatigue

When I come home from work, sometimes I don't feel like talking. I am not in a bad mood, I am just tired of processing people's situations for 10-14 hours and I need a break. Nothing personal, I love you!

This job will give you a good life, but it should not be your life.

Being a dispatcher means sometimes not wanting to talk on the phone when a text message will do.

It's not that I have become less caring, it's that the things I care about have a higher threshold and the things I used to only care about a little, I just do not have the patience for anymore.

Why does your dispatcher feel the ways they do? Act the way they do? Think the way they do? Struggle the ways they do? The next few sections will hopefully shed some light on these questions.

# Stress Cycles

**Understanding stress cycles, and how they affect our bodies, minds and emotions is the foundation to understanding what a dispatcher goes through daily.**

## 1. Acute Stress

Experienced as an immediate perceived threat, whether physical, emotional or psychological.

**Acute Stress:** known as the fight or flight experience

- When our brain perceives a threat, it immediately goes into fight or flight.
- The perception of threat is different for each individual, it does not have to be a threat to life/limb, it can be a perceived emotional or psychological threat as well.
  - For dispatchers this can mean many things, including but not limited to: phones ringing off the hook without anyone to answer, knowing a large scale law/medical/fire event is coming, someone screaming in their ear, hearing a baby/child screaming in pain, a field unit coming up yelling on the radio to send them help, when their units are fighting with a subject, when their units don't answer their radio...the list goes on.
- What happens to your body in this mode:
  - Rapid, shallow breathing



- Adrenaline is dumped into the body which causes rapid heartbeat and shaking
- Sweating
- Feeling like you have to go to the bathroom (your body is preparing to fight by wanting to get rid of anything it doesn't need)
- Lose peripheral focus and get tunnel vision
- Extremities get tingly as the body draws blood from the hands and feet to the core
- Cortisol, the stress hormone, also floods the body. Cortisol can only leave the system via exercise or full night's sleep, neither of which many dispatchers are capable of
- Due to the high levels of cortisol and adrenaline being dumped into the body, the brain also releases the body's coping chemicals, dopamine and serotonin. These are our "feel good" chemicals and the brain uses them to soothe us when we are struggling
- The depletion of our feel good chemicals leaves us feeling agitated, angry, sad, and depressed

## 2. Episodic Acute

Experienced as frequent bouts of acute stress that can be mitigated by lifestyle choices

### Episodic Acute

- Occurs when someone gets frequent bouts of acute stress.
- People with this kind of stress will oftentimes take on more responsibilities and projects than they can handle.
- Those with this experience seem like they are constantly in a rush, always running late and are disorganized.
- What happens to your body in this mode:
  - Tension Headaches
  - Migraines
  - Hypertension
  - Heart Disease

### 3. Chronic Stress

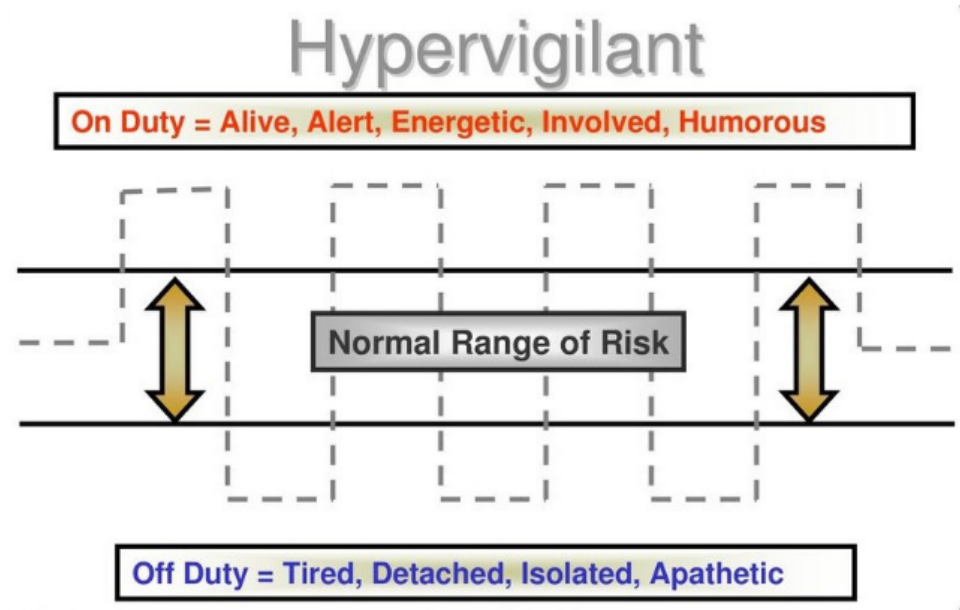
Experienced as ongoing acute stress with no perceptible end

#### Chronic Stress

- Occurs when there is a consistent sense of feeling pressured and overwhelmed over a long period of time.
- Dispatchers experience acute stress over and over again in a shift, so their bodies live in a state of perpetual acute stress = chronic
- The kind of stress that starts to significantly wear down a person's physical and mental health
- The exposure to stress hormones over a long period of time is what's thought to be the culprit for the health issues linked to chronic stress.
- The brain believes it is in a chronic state of fight or flight, so it shuts down internal systems it feels the body does not need in the moment if it is fighting for its life. Therefore, the immune system and fertility systems both get shut off chronically to the point of altering a person's genetic structure in these areas.
- What happens to your body in this mode:
  - Immune system deficiencies
  - Fertility system deficiencies
  - Anxiety
  - Depression
  - Heart disease
  - Weight gain
  - Stroke
  - Sleep, memory and concentration issues
  - Depleted bone density of women (chronic stress eats away at the bone structure)

## 4. The Hypervigilance Cycle

The state of extreme hypervigilance at work versus the extreme low when at home



### Hypervigilance Cycle

- This cycle is indicative of what any first responder, dispatchers included, go through during their on and off duty times.
- Those that do not have jobs that require high levels of hypervigilance tend to exist in the middle normal range of risk.
- Due to the extreme levels of hypervigilance they face on shift (this comes from never knowing what's coming next; it could be a barking dog call or someone screaming about a loved one not breathing), when they are working, the dispatchers are on high alert.
- Being on high alert means that their body is always tense, they are always anticipating something going sideways or wrong (as a means of being prepared)
- Being on high alert also means the brain is tense and anticipating
- While it is stressful, the dispatcher feels focused, that they have a sense of purpose in their work, that they are there to help people, and have a feeling of invincibility in terms of handling anything that happens.
- Then, because of their bodies and brains being so alert and ready to go for such a long time during their shift, when they get home, they crash. Hard.
- Their brain has difficulty processing what is happening at home, it struggles to make decisions, it wants to interact and problem solve as little as possible.

The brain does not care that decisions need to be made, or plans have been in place for months, all it wants to do is...nothing.

- ❑ The body, depleted of all its coping neurochemicals from the stressful shift (even if nothing big happened, it is the anticipation that still wears them down), also wants to do nothing. The tolerance for noise, chaos, extreme physical movement is all close to nothing. It takes extreme effort at times to get out of bed and even move to a different place in the house, much less offer enthusiasm for anything other than rest.
- ❑ This often leads to a feeling of depression when at home. It has NOTHING to do with not wanting to be at home with family and friends. It has everything to do with the body and brain being depleted and exhausted at a level most cannot understand. This also comes with the trepidation of knowing they have to go back possibly the next 1-15 days in a row and keep doing the same thing.

# PTSD or PTSI

In this job, it is impossible to avoid stress and/or trauma injuries.

“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet”

Rachel Naomi Remen, Kitchen Table Wisdom 1996

## POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER/INJURY

### What is PTSD/PTSI?

According to the American Psychiatric Association it is a disorder that can occur in people who have witnessed or experienced a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, serious accident, rape, violent personal attacks, combat etc.

### What are the symptoms?

- Intrusive thoughts
  - When a person cannot stop thoughts of the event/trauma from entering into their mind. It happens without warning, and can be debilitating.
- Avoiding reminders
  - When struggling with post traumatic issues, the person will avoid anything that reminds them of the traumatic situation. It can be any type of sensory reminder: smells, sights, sounds, crowds, etc.
  - For those in which the issue arose during work, it becomes a monumental task to continue to try and go to work, and at times, it is impossible to make themselves go
- Negative thoughts and feelings
  - When someone sees the world as a very dark place, they often assign blame for the event to themselves believing that somehow they should have been able to control the events that unfolded.



- They feel unworthy, unlovable, useless and unredeemable
- Reactive symptoms
  - Due to an alteration that PTSD/PTSI makes in the brain (will have example later), those struggling with this will often have large (over) reactions to seemingly innocuous stimulus, i.e. when a child knocks over blocks and the sound is so loud it triggers the sufferer into believing there is a present threat and they yell and overreact before realizing it was just their child and they are not under attack.

Many people who are exposed to a traumatic event experience symptoms like those described above in the days following the event. For a person to be diagnosed with PTSD, however, symptoms last for more than a month and often persist for months and sometimes years

# Cumulative PTSD/PTSI

## What is Cumulative PTSD/PTSI?

Traumas are not always one time life shattering events. They can be experienced repeatedly and this is what can create a cumulative effect.

The ongoing emotional anxiety can be as destructive as one time exposure to extreme danger or death

Being continually exposed to graphic, traumatic details of events as part of one's job does fall into the definition of trauma

**Dispatchers have the auditory equivalent of what field officers experience visually and tactilely in the field.**

Why is this?

In order to fully process what has happened, our brains need a beginning, middle and end to the story. Oftentimes, in our jobs, we only get the beginning of the story, which can be very dramatic, scary, sad, horrific etc. Rarely do we get the middle or even the end as we are separated from our units. It has been scientifically proven that it is more traumatizing to only hear something distressing rather than just see it, or see and hear it together.

Because of this, our brains work against us and use our imaginations to come up with what is happening and the ending of the story. Most times, what we create in our heads is much worse than what actually happened and we carry that with us. This often leads to rumination on the call or event, which leads to a lack of processing of the trauma.

Officers/medics/firefighters are able to get the full story, and see how it ends, which is key to their brains being able to fully process what happened. It is less damaging for them to witness a tragic outcome than it is to not have the information because their brain gets an end to the story and can move through the trauma more effectively.

## Symptoms of Cumulative PTSD/PTSI

Persistent anxiety	Hypervigilance both at work and off-time	Emotional distance
Nightmares	Emotional outbursts	Anger management issues
Sleeping disorders	Substance abuse and addiction	Depression
Suicidal thoughts or actions	Panic attacks	Flashbacks
Self-injury	Eating disorders	Inability to focus or be "present"
Avoidance of previously enjoyable experiences		A desire to numb feelings

Cumulative PTSD/PTSI has four symptom clusters:

1. Avoidance - avoiding thoughts, memories, or feelings that bring back memories of a particularly upsetting call
2. Numbing - feeling detached, feeling as though the world has changed and that the world is a bad, malicious place
3. Hypervigilance - having a strong startle response, feeling on edge all the time, having trouble concentrating or sleeping
4. Re-experiencing - flashbacks, unwanted thoughts, thoughts about the call that come up repeatedly

The most commonly reported symptom by dispatchers was hypervigilance: the feeling of being keyed up or agitated, feeling on edge, trouble concentrating and sleeping.

As dispatchers, we are often exposed to a constant stream of other peoples' crises, mixed with abnormal hours, time away from families, and an underdeveloped life outside of work. Dispatchers also often feel a constant pressure to take care of everyone else and not taking care of ourselves.

# How Cumulative PTSD symptoms can manifest

## Physically:

- Weight gain/loss
- Lack of sleep
- Chronic Pain
  - Headache
  - Backache
- Digestion Issues
  - Heartburn
  - Nausea
  - IBS
- Anxiety

## Mentally:

- Depression
- Lack of emotional connection due to compartmentalizing to the point of disconnect
- Lack of motivation
- Inability to see beyond the current struggle
- Suicidal thoughts

## Emotionally:

- Irritability/Anger
- Inability to handle small frustrations
- Mood swings
- Apathy
- Increased sensitivity to criticism
- Lack of empathy
- Lack of self-awareness about how one is feeling
- Constant feeling of being overwhelmed

## At home:

- Ambiguous loss - refers to when someone is physically present, but emotionally absent
- Not wanting to talk
- Exhausted all the time
- Is not able to make even simple decisions without significant struggle or agitation



# Normal effects of the job

- Exhaustion - mental, physical, and emotional
- Desire to avoid talking to anyone they don't have to
- Avoiding talking on the phone at all costs
- Not wanting to be social, just wanting to stay home
- Being extra cautious about certain people and situations
- Hypervigilance of any possible issues, suspicious people, or need to protect
- Not having patience for long drawn out stories, wanting people to get to the point
- Trying to fix any problems someone presents rather than being able to just listen
- Either avoidance of all true crime/dramatic/sad shows and movies or obsession with them
- Making choices, even very simple ones, becomes very difficult (more details below)
- FOMO in relation to what is happening at work while not there
- Having little empathy for people and/or thinking everyone is stupid
- Seeing people in only two categories: perpetrators or victims
- Lack of motivation to do much more than basic life activities
- Other people's problems seem small in comparison to what is heard/dealt with in a work day
- Guilt about missing family events/celebrations
- Not wanting to attend family events/celebrations in order to avoid passive aggressive comments about missing them due to work
- Not wanting to say what job is done in order to avoid the questions regarding the worst calls, or the worst things that have happened
- Sacrificing much needed sleep due to shift work in order to make sure family functions/time aren't missed.
- Over compensating when spending time with family with treats/gifts to "make up" for time lost

## Decision Fatigue

### What is decision fatigue?

Decision fatigue is when someone has to make so many decisions in a day/shift that they are then unable to continue to make any decisions. They freeze as a stress response to having to make even simple choices.

### Why does it occur?

Our mental energy is finite, and when faced with making constant, and quite often, life altering choices, those in first responder positions hit a decision wall. They are required to be vigilant, efficient, sharp, and most importantly, always right in the decisions they make at work. Then couple those shifts with the near constant physical exhaustion, it is inevitable that a dispatcher's brain will want a break.

### What does it look like?

When overwhelmed, our brains look for shortcuts in two possible ways:

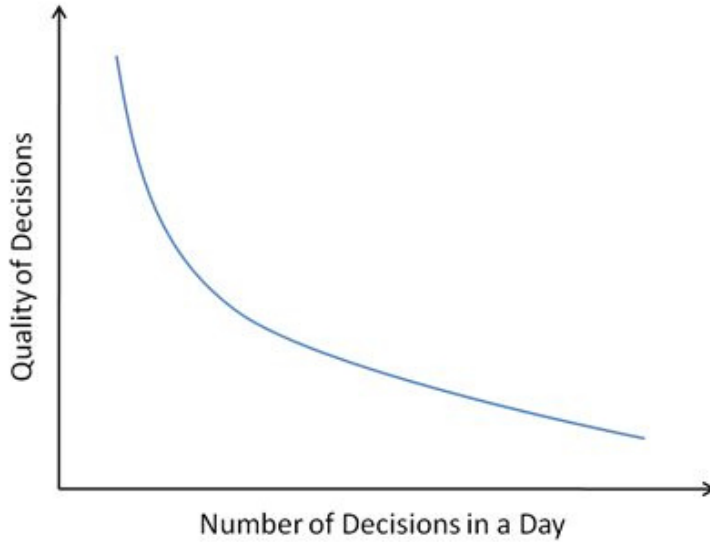
1. Become reckless/act impulsively
2. The ultimate energy saver = do nothing. Avoid any choice. You start to resist any situation that will present choices to be made.

This means that in the life of a dispatcher, when home, they won't want to make any choices, including but not limited to: what they want for dinner, what to do over the weekend, future trip planning, what the kids should do this summer, what friends to see, what color to paint the wall, if the dog needs a walk, if they need to make a doctor's appointment... the list goes on.

### How do you combat decision fatigue?

1. Avoid choice overload - when your day is full of decision making by necessity of the job, having less decisions to make outside of work helps. This means having predetermined routines, cutting out options for various things etc.
2. Avoid perfectionism - there is no need to make every decision a perfect decision. Many of them have very little consequence to major parts of life, so go for it.
3. Flip a coin - many of those decisions do not carry catastrophic weight to them, let the universe decide which restaurant to get food, which place to visit, which chore to do first, which pants to wear etc.
4. Make a list of pros and cons - some decisions are big and life changing, not ones for coin tosses. Making a list of each side will help, but it is a matter of doing it to help make the choice; not *instead* of making the choice.
5. Learn to live with uncertainty - there is no way to always know what will happen and what every decision will bring. Working on being comfortable with feeling uncomfortable will help in many areas of life.

# Decision Fatigue



## Symptoms of decision fatigue

### Become reckless

Act impulsively instead of taking the time to think through the consequences of your decisions

### Too many options

Too many choices can tax your mind leaving less energy for making further decisions

### Stuck with analysis paralysis

Chase a perfect solution instead of making the best decision under the given circumstances

### Choose the status quo

Cause you to stay inside your comfort bubble and resist the idea of a change

### React aggressively

Your brain's regulatory power weakens causing you to lose control over your emotions

## Compassion Fatigue

What is compassion fatigue?

Compassion fatigue is when the first responder feels burnt out by helping those they are meant to help. It is characterized by a burnout feeling that positive change is unachievable and that nothing can be done to make a situation better. Physical and emotional exhaustion are prerequisites to this mental state.

Signs of compassion fatigue:

- Emotional exhaustion
- Feeling drained or "used up" after work
- Hopelessness, as if nothing you can do will help
- Pervasive negative attitude
- Low feeling of accomplishment
- Decreased job satisfaction
- Lower productivity
- Intention to leave job/turnover
- Reduced commitment to the job
- Cold/dismissive attitude
- Cynical outlook on everything

How do you combat compassion fatigue?

There are several steps that can be taken to help offset decision fatigue

- Focus on the four components of resilience: relaxation, adequate sleep, nutrition, physical activity
- Speak openly about how you feel with coworkers who understand
- Educate yourself about the people you are serving
- Notice, acknowledge, and appreciate the work that you do
- Be willing to take time away from work
- Not isolating from family and friends
- Identify and focus on things you have to look forward to

# Helpful Actions to Take

What can be done to help the dispatcher, the family, and the relationships?

The wonderful news is there are so many things that can be done to help all of this! This list has only some ideas, it is certainly not all inclusive. Find what works best for your relationship with your dispatcher.

- Taking care of yourself is a huge priority. The families of first responders also carry a substantial weight. You help them help everyone else. That is not a small thing, and that creates a need for you to make sure to care for your own physical/mental/emotional health
- It often means that there need to be specific boundaries in place regarding when your dispatcher comes home and their need for transition time from work mode to home mode
- The household, as much as possible, should function around giving the person sleeping the priority. Without sleep, it is difficult to not just function in normal life, but nearly impossible on the job
- Understanding much of what is listed above as part of the job, part of the stress and/or trauma injury and that how your dispatcher behaves often has very little to do with you and their thoughts/feelings about you
- Being aware of the signs and symptoms of PTSD/PTSI, & Cumulative PTSD/PTSI so that you can help alert your dispatcher when you notice symptoms appearing
- Encourage your dispatcher to share about their day, even if they don't go into details. This way they can still unburden but you are still protected from the most painful parts



- On the flip side, understand when they don't want to share, it isn't because of anything you've done, and pressuring them to do so may cause more harm/damage
- Normalize therapy. You go, they go, you go together. Nothing even has to be "wrong" and you don't have to be in crises for this to be a powerful health tool
- Be active together. Physical movement is one of the greatest stress relievers and the best way to get cortisol out of the body. It also releases the happy chemicals and helps create healthy bonds
- If you are finding communication difficult, try the Gottman Card app. It offers up various topics and talking points to get the conversation going and then allows it to flow more naturally from there
- Get massages together
- Do yoga together
- Do whatever you can to protect some time to get away just the two of you. Even if it is just a quick adventure. Protect connection time

# Resources

## **Books:**

*The Wisdom of Your Body* – Hillary McBride

*You're Too Good to Feel This Bad* - Nate Dallas

*The Body Keeps the Score* - Bessel A van der Kolk

*Burnout* - Emily Nagoski, Amelia Nagoksi

*Mindfulness for Warriors* - Kim Colegrove

*Dispatcher Stress* – Adam Timm

*Navigating Adversity: Tactical Self-Care for First Responders* - Dr Renee Thornton and

Rodger Ruge

*MBSR Every Day* - Elisha Goldstein, Bob Stahl

*Atlas of the Heart* - Brene Brown

For a more fully exhaustive list: <https://www.1strc.org/recommended-readings>

## Apps:

- Gottman Card Deck (free)**- The Gottman Institute's research-based approach to relationships. Inspired by the popular card decks from The Art and Science of Love weekend workshop for couples, this fun app offers helpful questions, statements, and ideas for improving your relationship.
- Healthy Minds (free)** – With a combination of podcast-style lessons and both seated and active meditations, you'll learn what the science says about the brain while developing skills to tap into these learnings for a healthier, happier you.
- Woebot** – (free) This is an app in which the computer is trained in CBT (cognitive behavioral therapy) and will create an emotional/mental health profile of you based in your interactions with it in the app. It asks you questions about how you're feeling/doing and responds with questions to help you dig a little deeper and redirect specifically negative thoughts/self-talk.
- What's up** – (Free) An amazing app that uses Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT) methods to help you cope with Depression, Anxiety, Stress, and more. Use the positive and negative habit tracker to maintain your good habits, and break those that are counterproductive. The "Get Grounded" page contains over 100 different questions to pinpoint what you're feeling, and the "Thinking Patterns" page teaches you how to stop negative internal monologues
- MoodKit** – (\$4.99) uses the foundation of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and provides users with over 200 different mood improvement activities. Developed by two clinical psychologists, MoodKit helps you learn how to change how you think and develop self-awareness and healthy attitudes. The journal feature is a great way to practice self-care by reflecting on the day, noting any distressing thoughts, and documenting how you overcame them.
- Mindshift** - (Free) Rather than trying to avoid anxious feelings, Mind Shift stresses the importance of changing how you think about anxiety. Think of this app as the cheerleader in your pocket, encouraging you to take charge of your life, ride out intense emotions, and face challenging situations.
- CBT – Thought Record Diary** – (free) The centerpiece of cognitive-behavioral therapy is changing your emotions by identifying negative and distorted thinking patterns. You can use CBT Thought Record Diary to document negative emotions, analyze flaws in your thinking, and reevaluate your thoughts. This is a great app for gradually changing your approach to anxiety-inducing situations and your thinking patterns for future situations.
- IMood Journal** – (\$2.99) Part personal journal and part mood tracker, IMoodJournal can be used to record everything from mood and symptoms, to sleep, medications, and energy cycles. By tracking these various factors, you're able to analyze your daily feelings through summary charts that indicate where your stress levels rise and fall
- Happify** – (free) Need a happy fix? With its psychologist-approved mood-training program, the Happify app is your fast-track to a good mood. Try various engaging games, activity suggestions, gratitude prompts and more to train your brain as if it were a muscle, to overcome negative thoughts.
- PTSD Coach** – (free) Rated by the VA's National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), PTSD Coach offers everything from a self-assessment for PTSD, to opportunities to find support, positive self-talk, and anger management. What's great about this app is that you can customize tools based on your own individual needs and preferences, and integrate your own contacts, photos, and music.
- Breathe to Relax** – (free) Sometimes you just need to breathe and remind yourself you are okay. Breathe2Relax is made for just that. Created by the National Center for Telehealth and Technology, this app is a portable stress management tool that teaches

users a skill called diaphragmatic breathing. Breathe2Relax works by decreasing the body's 'fight-or-flight' stress response, making it a great option for people suffering from PTSD.

- Calm** – (\$12.99/mo) Calm provides people experiencing stress and anxiety with guided meditations, sleep stories, breathing programs, and relaxing music. This app is truly universal: whether you've never tried meditation before or regularly practice, you'll find the perfect program for you.
- Headspace** – (\$12.99/mo) The Headspace app makes meditation simple. Learn the skills of mindfulness and meditation by using this app for just a few minutes per day. You gain access to hundreds of meditations on everything from stress and anxiety to sleep and focus. The app also has a handy "get some headspace" reminder to encourage you to keep practicing each day.
- 10 Percent Happier** (\$12.99/mo) Want to sleep better, find relaxation, be more mindful and, well, ten percent happier? This is the app for you. Ten Percent Happier has a library of 500+ guided meditations on topics ranging from anxiety and stress to parenting and sleep, as well as videos, bite-sized stories, and inspiration you can listen to on the go. New content is added weekly so you'll never tire of having to do the same meditative practice again and again.

## Websites:

**988 Suicide Hotline** - <https://988lifeline.org/> The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals in the United States.

**Crisis Text Line** <https://www.crisistextline.org/> Text "BLUE" to 741741. This will identify you as a first responder and let you communicate via text message with a trained crisis counselor from anywhere in the United States 24/7

**FRSN** - First Responder Support Network - [frsn.org](http://frsn.org) - FRSN provides first responders and their families tools to reduce personal and family stress, encourage appropriate career decisions and reduce the effects of traumatic incident stress on an individual's life.

**COPLINE** <https://www.copline.org/> 800-267-5463 Confidential 24/7 hotline answered by retired law enforcement officers who have gone through strenuous vetting and training process to become an active listener

**Responder Strong** - <https://responderstrong.org/> - A collaboration between emergency responders and our advocates (clinicians, educators, researchers, health care organizations, and foundations), ResponderStrong's mission is to improve mental health supports for emergency responders and our families through joint focuses on intervention and prevention.

**Code 4 NW** - <https://code4nw.org> - Code 4 Northwest provides a comprehensive and holistic community of confidential support to people within the first responder and critical care family

**The Code 9 Project** - <https://thecode9project.org> - The Code 9 Project's mission is to educate, train and advocate for the prevention of PTSD and suicide for all first-responders and their families.

**Reboot Recovery** - <https://rebootrecovery.com/> - REBOOT exists to help people overcome trauma through our faith-based, peer-led programs

**The Clarity Collab** - [www.christinejean.net](http://www.christinejean.net) - The Clarity Collab offers emergency first-responders professional life coaching services that empower them to find healing after experiencing trauma.

**Dispatch Wellness** - [www.dispatchwellness.com](http://www.dispatchwellness.com) - Dispatch Wellness works with first-responders and organizations to find solutions that consider individual and collective wellness through nutrition, yoga, mindfulness, and meditation.

**First Responder Coaching** - <https://1strespondercoaching.org> - Offering a proactive approach for all members of the first responder community.

**The Resiliency Project** - [www.theresiliencyproject.info](http://www.theresiliencyproject.info) - The Resiliency Project aims to end the silent suffering of our nation's first responders by providing peer support and funding for treatment, recovery and psychological services in an effort to treat post traumatic stress, build resilience and end suicide.

**First HELP** - <https://1sthelp.org> - First H.E.L.P. works to reduce mental health stigma through education, advocate for benefits for first-responders suffering from post-traumatic stress, acknowledge the service and sacrifice of those lost to suicide, assist them in their search for healing, and to bring awareness to suicide and mental health issues.

**First Responder Family** - <https://firstresponderfamily.org> - working for our local emergency services families to create "a proactive, first responder family resource that will equip our families to thrive."

**NAMI** - National Alliance on Mental Illness <https://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Frontline-Professionals/Public-Safety-Professionals/Family-Support>

**911 At Ease** - <https://911aei.org/> 911 At Ease International (911AEI) exists to support first responders and their families, so they can be their best to serve their community. 911AEI is committed to keeping our first responders strong.

**Hecht Trauma Institute** - <https://www.traumainst.org/> The vision of the Hecht Trauma Institute is to make a positive difference in the lives of persons affected by Trauma.

**PTSD/TRAUMA GROUP** <https://www.firstresponder-wellness.com/supportgroups/> Support groups on Zoom and In Person for all first responders, run multiple nights a week, contact individual group leaders

**NENA** - Wellness Resources <https://www.nena.org/page/Mental-HealthResouces>  
<https://www.nena.org/page/Physical-HealthResources>

**APCO** - Wellness Resources <https://www.apcointl.org/community/humanresources-toolbox/health-and-wellness/>