Stress, Trauma, and Mental Health in the Workplace: A Program to Build Organizational Resilience

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Mike Pigg – National Safety Director, Outward Bound USA
Resilience

The ability to rapidly and effectively rebound from psychological and/or behavioral distress associated with significant stress exposure
Introduction

A. What was the need at COBS?
B. What approach did we take?
C. Takeaway - Stress Continuum Model
What was the need at COBS?

1. Our staff were stressed
2. We didn’t prepare our staff well
3. Our business was stressed
4. Occupational stress was a hazard without controls
What was the need at COBS?

Our staff were stressed!

COBS staff were being exposed to unexpected stressful events (or multiple traumatic events) both of which were impacting individuals and the organization.
What was the need at COBS?

Our staff were stressed!

• We knew there were a high number of significant events
• We didn’t have a system to recognize and address occupational stress / staff stress injury
What was the need at COBS?

We didn’t prepare our staff well

• Staff ARE trained experts in wilderness risk management and emergency response.
What was the need at COBS?

We didn’t prepare our staff well

- Staff **ARE** trained experts in wilderness risk management and emergency response.

- Staff **ARE NOT** trained to manage critical incidents stress / psychological support.
What was the need at COBS?

Our business was stressed...

• Long courses, challenging conditions
• Packed seasonal workload
• Anti-social hours (shift workers)
• Remote locations
• Resources are at capacity
• Culture of feeling reactive
• Staff burn-out
What was the need at COBS?

Our business was stressed...

• Reduce burden on instructors
  • Simplify instructor role
• Reduce burden on organization
  • Simplify Operations
• Re-build admin capacity
  • Redesign core systems
What was the need at COBS?

Occupational stress was a hazard without controls

• Occupational stress and staff mental health wasn’t seen as a risk!

• Was time to move beyond a reactive approach
What approach did we take?
How did COBS identify and build for resilience?

1. Occupational Stress and Burnout
2. Overview of Tools in our Box
3. Dive into Incident Support Network
Burnout

WHO recognizes burnout resulting from chronic “workplace stress that has not been successfully managed”.

It is characterized by:

• Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;
• Increased mental distance from one’s job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and
• Reduced professional efficacy.
• Burn-out refers specifically to phenomena in the occupational context and should not be applied to describe experiences in other areas of life.

WHO 2019
Employer tools in mitigating stress
• Sense of community at work,
• Strong social relationships,
• Collegial environment,
• Workload that's not too burdensome,
• Sense of agency at work, and a healthy work-life balance
COBS Building for Organizational Resiliency

- Employee Assistance Program
- Mental Health Advisor
- Mental Health Training
- Sick Day Benefit Extended
- Work Schedule
- "Go Green" Stress Continuum Chart
- Incident Support Network
Incident Support Network

The ISN was set up by COBS in 2018 to support staff, students and other stakeholders or supporters in the event of occupational exposure to stress (whether cumulative or related to single event trauma).
ISN Aims...

• Outline and teach PFA processes that trained staff will utilize in the support of staff, students, and supporters after exposure to occupational stress or trauma.

• Provide a service and resources that staff can voluntarily access after occupational related stress or trauma.

• Minimize reactions to difficult situations and reduce initial post-trauma distress.

• Support short- and long-term adaptive functioning and minimize the likelihood of stress injury formation after exposure to a significant or traumatic incident (or near miss).
ISN Goals

• We needed more than an “intervention” post critical incident.

• We wanted a circuit breaker for staff affected by cumulative stress / burnout

• We wanted an organizational wide system to promote resilience.
What does the ISN look like?

Stressors

Potential Trauma
- Critical incident
- Near miss

Injured (impaired functioning)
- multiple stressful incidents
- extended work in hyper-arousal
What does the ISN look like?

**Stressors**
- Potential Trauma
  - Critical incident
  - Near miss
- Injured (impaired functioning)
  - multiple stressful incidents
  - extended work in hyper-arousal

**Recognition**
- Incident Support Network
  - Staff request support
  - Staff offered support (referral)
  - ISN deployed as part of an emergency response
What does the ISN look like?

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**ISN Session**
- Incident Support Session
  - Group IS Session
  - Individual IS Session
What does the ISN look like?

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**Follow-up**
- Professional Referral
  - EAP
  - Vetted local counsellor
- ISN Follow-up
  - 3 & 6-month ISN check-in
ISN Planning and Implementation

• Administration and Oversight
• Team Selection
• Communication
• Organizational Buy-in
Administration and Oversight

• Ongoing oversight and guidance by a mental health clinician who is knowledgeable of the organization, and the culture of staff offering and receiving peer support.

• Driven and overseen by HR.

• Similar to an in-house EAP aimed to support staff welfare.
Team Selection

• No connection to performance management
• “Green”
• Well respected
• Representative
Communication

• Pre-loading staff with PFA training

• Marketing / advertising and promotion

• Staff handbook

• Swag
Organizational Buy-In

(plus breaking the stigma)

• Leadership messaging

• Leverage within broader systems
  • Staff training
  • ERP
What approach did we take?

Incident Support Session (ISS)
**Incident Support Session (ISS)**

- Simple 5-step process (1-2 hours)
- Underpinned by Psychological F.A.
- Focus on the body’s **stress reaction** (and recovery)
- No focus **debriefing** or **diagnosing**!
Incident Support Session (ISS)

Step 1-2 STABILIZE

Validate (and normalize) reactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISN FRAMEWORK</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Set the scene</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Appropriate environment</td>
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<td>• Establish guidelines</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Tell the story (clarify facts!)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Calm</strong></td>
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<td>• Check-in / Temp check</td>
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**Incident Support Session (ISS)**

Step 3-4 MITIGATE

**Educate (and coach adaptive strategies)**

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</table>
| **Education** | • Stress response  
• Stress continuum  
• Adaptive coping strategies |
| **Action Plan** | • Create predictability  
• Plan coping strategies  
• Develop a script |
Incident Support Session (ISS)

Step 5  TRANSITION

Offer support for transition (and referral opportunities)

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<td><strong>Home-base</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Check out - What’s next?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Support for transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Follow-up and referral</td>
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Calm

Set the scene

Home-base

Education

Action Plan
## Incident Support Session (ISS)

*Schimelpfenig T. NOLS Wilderness Medicine. 6th ed*

### ISS FRAMEWORK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Set the scene (Safety)</th>
<th>Appropriate environment</th>
<th>Establish guidelines</th>
<th>Tell the story (clarify facts!)</th>
<th>Safety</th>
<th>Mitigating the scene by reducing chaos and removing patients from perceived threats</th>
<th>Reflecting evidence of safety</th>
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<td>Grounding (↓ arousal)</td>
<td>Normalize stress reactions</td>
<td>Calm</td>
<td>Calming yourself first</td>
<td>Emphasizing the present, the practical, and the possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Stress response</td>
<td>Stress continuum</td>
<td>Adaptive coping strategies</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>Involving the person in problem-solving, self-care, and rescue</td>
<td>Recognizing and reminding people of existing strengths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Plan (Self Efficacy)</td>
<td>Create predictability</td>
<td>Plan coping strategies</td>
<td>Develop a script</td>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>Building an on-scene relationship</td>
<td>Helping people contact friends, family, loved ones (including pets)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home-base (Connection/Hope)</td>
<td>Check out - What’s next?</td>
<td>Support for transition</td>
<td>Follow-up and referral</td>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>Reflecting specific, accurate, positive facts and predictable, realistic steps</td>
<td>Personally maintaining and communicating hope</td>
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Stress Injury Formation

Response system overwhelmed

Emotional Connection

Isolation

Helplessness
Psychological First Aid

Objective:

Mitigate Traumatic Stress Exposure to reduce injury

Safety
Calm
Engagement (Efficacy)
Connection
Hope
Incident Support Session (ISS)

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<th>ISS FRAMEWORK</th>
<th>Principles of Psychological First Aid *</th>
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Incident Support Session – “Education”

We adapted a combat stress continuum model
• Talk about the bodies reaction to stress
• Coach “green choices” and coping strategies

**COSFA**

**Stress Continuum**

“The goal of COSFA is simply to move towards green to restore health and readiness after stress injury”
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<th>REACTING</th>
<th>INJURED</th>
<th>ILL</th>
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<td>Sense of mission</td>
<td>Cynicism</td>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td>Hopelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritually and emotionally</td>
<td>Work avoidance</td>
<td>Sleep disturbances</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy</td>
<td>Loss of interest</td>
<td>Numbing and avoiding</td>
<td>Depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically Healthy</td>
<td>Distance from others</td>
<td>Burnout</td>
<td>Intrusive thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotionally</td>
<td>Short fuse</td>
<td>Nightmares</td>
<td>Feeling lost or out of control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability</td>
<td>CHANGE</td>
<td>Trapped</td>
<td>Insomnia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy Sleep</td>
<td>Life feels ‘bleh’</td>
<td>Distant from life</td>
<td>Thought of suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoying</td>
<td>Lack of motivation</td>
<td>Exhausted</td>
<td>Self blame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of Joy/Vitality</td>
<td>Fatigue/weariness</td>
<td>Physical Symptoms</td>
<td>Hiding out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room for complexity</td>
<td>Sleep Disturbance</td>
<td>“ I usta”</td>
<td>Broken</td>
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Change in worldview
WHAT'S YOUR BASELINE & HOW DO YOU RETURN TO IT?

**READY**
- Sense of mission
- Spiritually and emotionally
- Healthy
- Physically Healthy
- Emotionally
- Availability
- Innovation
- Healthy Sleep
- Sense of Joy/Vitality
- Room for complexity

**REACTING**
- Criticism
- Work avoidance
- Loss of interest
- Distance from others
- Short fuse
- CHANGE
- Life feels ‘bleh’
- Lack of motivation
- Fatigue/weariness
- Sleep Disturbance

**INJURED**
- Sleep disturbances
- Numbing and avoiding
- Burnout
- Nightmares
- Trapped
- Distant from life
- Exhausted
- Physical Symptoms “I usta”

**ILL**
- Hopelessness
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Intrusive thoughts
- Feeling lost or out of control
- Insomnia
- Thought of suicide
- Self blame
- Hiding out
- Broken relationships
- Careless mistakes
- Panic

Change in worldview
### ORGANIZATIONAL STRESS CONTINUUM

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>REACTING</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good to go</td>
<td>Mild distress</td>
<td>Severe distress</td>
<td>Very sick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy and focused</td>
<td>Temporary impairment</td>
<td>Lasting impairment</td>
<td>System shut down</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Overview
- **Good to go**
- **Healthy and focused**
- **Mild distress**
- **Temporary impairment**
- **Severe distress**
- **Lasting impairment**
- **Very sick**
- **System shut down**

#### Summary of Stress Reaction / Affect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ready</th>
<th>Reacting</th>
<th>Injured</th>
<th>Ill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission alignment, satisfaction</td>
<td>Mission ambiguity</td>
<td>Mission drift</td>
<td>Mission not guiding decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locations maintain positive, cohesive, inclusive cultures</td>
<td>Culture becomes competitive &amp;/or pessimistic</td>
<td>Culture becomes self-protective and people blame others</td>
<td>Culture of everyone for themselves, resentful, hopeless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems/processes are efficient and effective</td>
<td>Systems/processes are inflexible, inefficient, outdated</td>
<td>Systems/processes are disregarded or worked around</td>
<td>Systems/processes are not working or absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open to opportunities, eager to try</td>
<td>No strategy for opportunities, desire for same or “yes” to all</td>
<td>Opportunities missed / avoided</td>
<td>Closed to opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources are ample (human, financial, physical)</td>
<td>Resources are stretched / inadequate</td>
<td>Resources are scarce / reducing capacity</td>
<td>Resources are absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication down, and feedback up are balanced</td>
<td>Miscommunications, not feeling heard, less delegation</td>
<td>Top down communication, collaboration stops</td>
<td>Communication = orders and directives (sense of doom)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual trust b/w staff at various locations/depts.</td>
<td>Questioning trust b/w staff at various locations/depts.</td>
<td>Loss of trust b/w staff at various locations/depts.</td>
<td>Mistrust, hostility, calcified perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alignment on risk tolerance across depts.</td>
<td>Additional risk is normalized to meet goals</td>
<td>Unacceptable risks are accepted / ignored</td>
<td>Risks not evaluated / managed, and not discussed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergencies managed with comfort, creativity, flexibility</td>
<td>Respond to emergencies through overwork, workaround</td>
<td>Barely cope with emergencies, unsustainable, ‘survival’ mode</td>
<td>Next emergency could kill the organization</td>
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#### Suggested response
- **School Leadership** → **Board of Directors** → **Professional Intervention**

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# Organizational Stress Continuum

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## Summary of Stress Reaction / Affect

- Mission / purpose
- Culture
- Business systems/processes
- New opportunities
- Resources
- Communication
- Trust
- Risk
- Emergencies

## Suggested response

- School Leadership → Board of Directors → Professional Intervention
Recap

1. Stress injuries and occupational stress is a RM issue that impacts safety, quality and culture.
2. Stress injuries are common, predictable, exposure injuries that are reversible and treatable when recognized.
3. Incident support is just one tool in the box to support org. reliance.
4. Planning for psychological support is an organizational and person collaboration that should start well ahead of the need.
Questions?
“TO SERVE, TO STRIVE, AND NOT TO YIELD”

Outward Bound Motto