

# Fundamentals of Counseling

## Law Enforcement & First Responders



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for Marriage & Family  
Therapists

# Law Enforcement Seasons of “Why”



When will they show up  
to your office?

Why they show up.

What you need to know.





**Firefighter / Rescue**



**Military**



**EMT / Paramedic**



**Federal Bureau of  
Investigation  
FBI**



**Police Officer**

# Identity Work

OpenAI. (2025). *Firefighter badge in front of fire and hose* [AI-generated image]. ChatGPT. <https://chat.openai.com/>

OpenAI. (2025). *United States Armed Forces emblem representing all military branches* [AI-generated image]. ChatGPT. <https://chat.openai.com/>

OpenAI. (2025). *Paramedic standing near an ambulance* [AI-generated image]. ChatGPT. <https://chat.openai.com/>

AI-generated image, OpenAI DALL-E, 2026

OpenAI. (2025). *Police badge with Charlotte city skyline* [AI-generated image]. ChatGPT. <https://chat.openai.com/>

# 1st Responder Relationships



- ★ Offset guilt with intentionality
- ★ Be where your boots are
- ★ Make Traditions
- ★ Know Your Love Languages

# How to Love... the way the other person needs it

## The 5 Love Languages:

1. Quality Time
2. Touch
3. Acts of Service
4. Gifts
5. Words of Affirmation

\*Learn the way your partner or child feels loved best

\*Give what the other person needs

\*Love languages rarely match

\*If you withhold their primary love need - it's 10xs worse!

# If someone's not talking... we guess what they're thinking!

Her: hes probably thinking about other girls

Him: why are the lights still on



G.O.D.X.J.L.L.E.R | Memedroid

Her: He's probably thinking about the mortgage, utility bills, grocery bills, taxes, medical bills..



MemeTheVersed | Memedroid

## Mystery Creates Anxiety

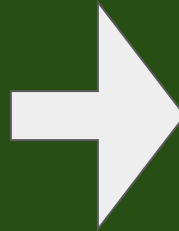
# How to talk about work...

Listen for what affects them...

It's not about what happened as much as how it affected them

**Details of Event  
(Facts)**

4  
%



>Notice when something affects them. Ask how THEY are doing.

>Ask if there's something you can do to help (listen, give them space/grace, let them sleep in/work out, etc...)

>1st Responders: Offer what you can.

# Avoidance or Intentionality





What do you see?

# Critical Incidents, Accumulated Stress, Post Traumatic Stress (PTS-D), Moral Injury



# What is Moral Injury?

“Moral injury... comes from having transgressed one’s basic moral identity and violated core moral beliefs... or

Seeing someone else violate core moral values or feeling betrayed by persons in authority can also lead to a loss of meaning and faith...

People who witness and fail to prevent atrocities experience moral injury.”

# Moral Distress is often over:

- > Mistakes
- > Lack of Support + Scrutiny
- > Unnecessary harm or excessive force
- > Exposure to evil
- > Feeling that God is distant, silent or doesn't care

## When 1st Responders feel let down they often feel:

- A loss of moral innocence or trust in people
- Judgmental of others or ashamed of themselves
- Justified in not doing their best or in emotionally checking out

# Turning off our feelings protects us at work but hurts us at home



“It is a paradox, that the same work habits that make a good cop can be hazardous to being a good mate and parent.”

I Love a Cop, The Police Officer's Paradox

# Typical Reactions to Work Stress + Trauma = Don't Deal, Avoid the Feels!

Turn off Feelings



Stuff it in + Keep Moving



Distract! (Beer or Busy)



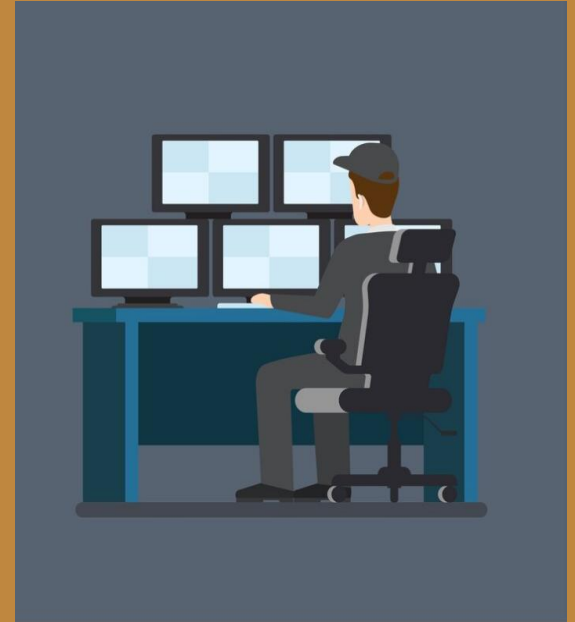
OpenAI. (2025). A long to-do list next to a beer [AI-generated image]. ChatGPT. <https://chat.openai.com/>  
OpenAI. (2025). A hand turning off a light switch [AI-generated image]. ChatGPT. <https://chat.openai.com/>  
OpenAI. (2025). An open empty cardboard box [AI-generated image]. ChatGPT. <https://chat.openai.com/>

# “To function effectively in our job...

you must annihilate, smother and suppress normal emotions like fear, anger, revulsion and even compassion. To do otherwise is to invite overwhelming doubt or hesitation when decisive action is required.

The penalty for your achieved competence is a mindset that might as well be a foreign language to your contemporaries. We are...victims of our own success.

When these same normal and appropriate emotions surface in personal relationships, we automatically shut down and wonder why, over time, that the people we care about the most complain that we are aloof, cold and uncommunicative.”



“People often try hard to not feeling anything – and sometimes use substances to be numb. When people do such things, they spend their lives controlled by the trauma because everything they are doing is about running from it.

It is as much in charge of their lives as when it was occurring.”

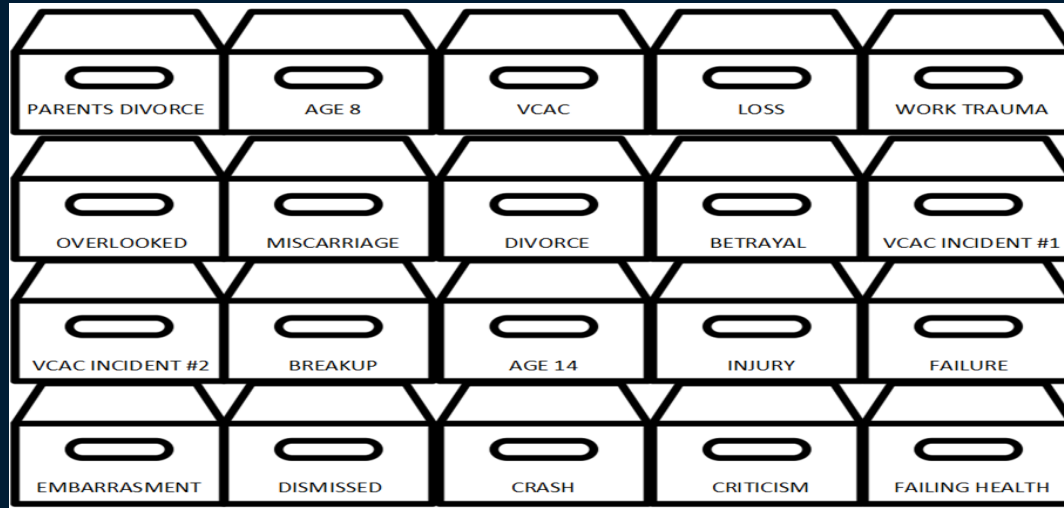
Suffering and the Heart of God  
Diane Langford

# Compartmentalization

*Label Your  
Compartments*



*Regular box cleanup  
is necessary*



# How to “Process” /or/ Clean out your Compartments

“Processing” is going towards the memory that affected you so you can get past it.

Name the Incident

Then, Ask Yourself:

- What did I feel about it then \_\_\_\_\_? What do I feel about it now \_\_\_\_\_?
- What did I think about it then \_\_\_\_\_? What do I think about it now \_\_\_\_\_?
- How did this incident affect me?
  - >Physically? (made me nauseous, couldn't sleep, racing heart...)
  - >Emotionally? (made me hypervigilant, worried, angry)
  - >Mentally? (How did it affect the way I see myself, others, God?)
  - >Relationally? (Did I become more protective? Less protective? More Isolated?)
- How did this incident affect my beliefs? (People can't be trusted, I'm not safe, take care of yourself...) Then ask yourself, is that belief still true? If it is, hold to it. If it isn't - begin to create a new, secure belief.
- Release - Once you've processed the incident, ask yourself if there's something you need to do now to make it better. If there is nothing you can actively do, choose to emotionally let it go.



Y

Moral Apathy ← Moral Injury → Moral Agency

- Reactive Beliefs  
Based on Experience
- Negative Narrative
- Extremes
- Isolation; Cynicism

- ★ Actively Choose How to Believe and Act
- ★ Focuses on 'What Now'
- ★ Looks for Meaning; Purpose
- ★ Works to Release, Forgive, Trust



## Goals in Working Through Moral Injury

Identify Moral Injury + Find Reactive Negative Beliefs



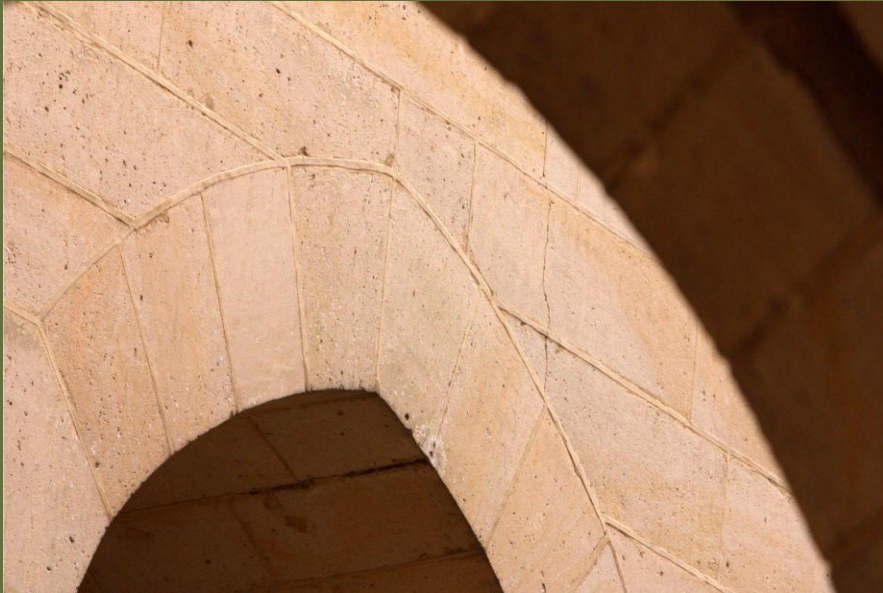
Examine, Process and Re-calibrate Morals + Beliefs.

*Recalibrate: "To re-examine one's thinking or a system of values and correct it through a new understanding or purpose."*



Moral Agency is about Taking Action: Find Meaning or Purpose from the Moral Injury. Choose how you will Live + Act going forward.

# Final \_\_\_\_\_ Thoughts...



- 01 Expect Stigma
- 02 Fast Scheduling
- 03 Adjust Intake Forms
- 04 Care over Clinical