



A Snapshot of Law Enforcement Wellness Mindfulness

AT A GLANCE

- Mindfulness is the practice of non-judgmental awareness within the present moment.¹
- You can incorporate mindfulness into your day by paying attention to your thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, and environment.¹
- Mindfulness can benefit law enforcement by strengthening attention and emotional regulation which allows for calm, clarity, and focus when managing the stress of police work.⁵
- Meditation is the most effective tool for strengthening mindfulness and is a skill that needs repeated effort to build over time.¹

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Scholars define mindfulness as “self-regulation of attention toward the present moment to both internal experiences (thoughts, feelings, memories, etc.) and external experiences (sights, sounds, touch, etc.).” It is how you live your life from moment to moment. You can incorporate mindfulness into every aspect of your day by paying attention to your thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, and environment.¹ When you are being mindful and encounter a stressful event, you are able to regulate your emotions and act with more clarity and focus.^{1,2}

Simply stated, mindfulness is paying full attention to the present moment without allowing thoughts to drift off to the past or to worry about the future, and finding a sense of contentment without wishing things were different. Maintaining a mindful disposition does require continuous effort and practice, similar to building muscular strength in the body.¹

“The more you practice [mindfulness], the more comfortable you begin to feel in your own skin. And the more comfortable you feel, the more you can realize your anxiety, fears, and aggression are not you and do not have to rule your life”

- Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of the mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program.¹

WHY PRACTICE IT?


Mindfulness improves cognitive resilience, which is the ability to use attention effectively to solve problems when under stress. It creates the space to pause and make wise decisions, even when facing a threat. When the stress response is regulated, and heavy emotions such as anger, fear, and grief are managed, you are better able to consider all of your options. This helps you respond with full awareness in the present moment.³ You can improve communication with team members, supervisors, family, and civilians and increase the safety of you, your team, and those you serve.

Studies have shown mindfulness in law enforcement improve resilience, emotional intelligence, emotional regulation, mental health, and physical health while reducing stress and burnout, anger, fatigue, and sleep disturbance.⁴

HOW DO I PRACTICE IT?

Cultivating mindfulness into your daily life involves developing new habits that may be very challenging to grasp at first. It’s common for people to feel overwhelmed with the idea of sitting with their thoughts and emotions, especially for those who are managing many daily stressors. Start where you can and increase your practice as it becomes more comfortable.



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HOW DO I INCORPORATE MINDFULNESS?

Here are some ways to incorporate mindfulness into your daily life:

- As you are getting ready to go to work, tune-in to sensations that arise as you are in the shower, brushing your teeth, making coffee, or putting your uniform on (water hitting your skin, tension in your body, noting any emotions, etc.)
- Practice being fully present in your conversations with others. Make eye contact and tune into your breath as the other person is talking. Notice how your body feels or if your thoughts are drifting somewhere else.
- Take time between calls to do a short meditation to release any trauma or emotions accumulated during the previous event. A few breaths won't take much time but can make a positive impact.
- As you are driving away from a stressful call, try to focus in on your breath and note any emotions that are surfacing (anger, fear, shame, etc.). Acknowledge the emotions as you inhale and release them as you exhale.
- Increase your awareness as you are walking. Feel your feet connect with the ground and your muscles engage as you move your legs. Notice any sounds, sights, or smells in your environment.
- When you arrive home after work, take a few minutes in your car before going inside. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. With each exhale, consciously release any tension you feel from your day. As you inhale, imagine how you would like to show up as you enter your home. Notice any sensations that arise as you do this.

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH & RESOURCES

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