

Why Is Your Sanity So Important?

Police officers have tough jobs, and they understand the need to keep in good physical shape. Regular courses in defensive tactics, emergency driving, and shooting keep you focused on your physical skills, but what about your mental health? Is it really as important as physical health?

What we call “mental health,” police officers might call “sanity.” Officers have strange work hours, can be on-call, and work in very stressful environments (both inside and outside the office.) Stress is a constant partner—the stress of staying awake all night; the stress of dealing with all of society’s unpleasantness; the stress of making death notifications; the stress of office politics. Add to this the stress of maintaining a relationship with your family, and you have tipped the balance completely out of whack. Black humor and a strong cup of coffee can only go so far.

Stress left unchecked can cause all sorts of physical ailments—the kinds of things exercise or a beer won’t cure. Stress can cause anxiety, depression, weight gain in your abdomen, cognitive impairment, hypervigilance, and chronic fatigue, to name a few. The more you control your stress, the healthier you are and the better you do at decision making and communication, and that keeps both your supervisors and your families happier. It is worth thinking about.

Some simple ways to help control stress include getting a set number of hours of sleep the same time every day. It may only be 5 hours, but make those 5 hours sacred. Anything more is great. Take 5 minutes at the very start and very end of your day to do a quick assessment—are you breathing deeply? Do you feel tense anywhere? What frame of mind are you in and should you change it? Did you have any victories today? Leave the unhappy and unfinished business in another room, then move on. Exercise in a non-focused way 5 times a week. By non-focused, I mean without the intent on being bigger and badder than the last guy you arrested. Shoot hoops with your kids; walk the dog; take your spouse or partner to the park; go swimming.

Five hours of sleep, 5 minute assessments, non-focused exercise or activity 5 times a week. Take 5 and think it over. Keep checking in here for information that can help you control and manage your mental health. And stay sane out there!

References

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