

# WELLBEING TOOLKIT



OSCAR KILO



# INTRODUCTION

Police officers and staff do a critical job in keeping our society safe and it's only right that you feel supported in the work that you do.

The types of issues you face can be some of the most difficult and challenging in society – you have the potential to see the best and the very worst of humanity, whilst trying to lead 'normal' lives which is why it is so important that we do what we can to support you.



The National Police Wellbeing Service is designed specifically by policing, for policing, and is led by serving and retired officers and staff from around the country. We work with experts from across the UK and abroad to bring the most relevant and effective resources to you and your force.

Policing isn't a 9 to 5, Mon to Friday job – so we try our best to make sure that the resources and support we offer are available in a way that means you can access them whenever is most convenient.

This booklet is a collection of some of the guidance and support all designed as part of the National Police Wellbeing Service that you can take away and keep to help you look after yourself and others.

## We hope this booklet will:

- › To help you recognise the signs and symptoms of stress, burnout and secondary trauma
- › To provide useful tips and exercises to help you cope or deal with these issues when they arise.
- › For you to think about these issues, not just for yourself, but for your teams, friends and family
- › Point you in the right direction so you know what to do, or where to go when you need support.



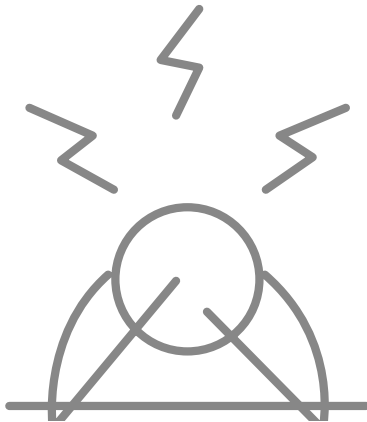
Don't forget, the National Police Wellbeing Service has lots of other things available to you and your force, so please visit the Oscar Kilo website [www.oscarkilo.org.uk](http://www.oscarkilo.org.uk) for things like:

- › Better Sleep - online learning resources tackling fatigue
- › Individual resilience training sessions online
- › Online mindfulness training – MindFit Cop
- › Wellbeing news, blogs and real stories, including videos and animations
- › Signposts to helpful resources and services
- › The wellbeing vans – Did you know your force can book a visit from a wellbeing van?
- › Peer Support
- › Downloadable resources, signposts and campaign materials

# SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF BURNOUT

Here are some of the common signs and symptoms of burnout. This can happen to anyone and it's important if you notice these signs and symptoms that you ask for help. To be clear, what you're looking for, in yourself or others, are changes in behaviour.

For information on what to do if you notice any of these signs visit [oscardkilo.org.uk](http://oscardkilo.org.uk) or contact your wellbeing team.



## Emotional exhaustion symptoms

- › Tired all the time even after a good night's sleep.
- › Unwilling to take on a new project or anything that would involve extra effort.
- › Avoiding offering support to others.

## Depersonalisation symptoms

- › Developing unfeeling and impersonal responses towards victims and colleagues.
- › Feeling isolated and cut off from partner and family.
- › Finding it difficult to respond to happy or sad events.

## Loss of sense of personal achievement

- › Feeling incompetent at work and loss of self-esteem.
- › Talking about being a failure or self-disparaging comments.
- › A loss of belief in a positive future.

# SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF SECONDARY TRAUMA

Here are some of the common signs and symptoms of secondary trauma. This can happen to anyone and it's important if you notice these signs and symptoms that you ask for help. To be clear, what you're looking for, in yourself or others, are changes in behaviour.

For information on what to do if you notice any of these signs visit [oscarkilo.org.uk](http://oscarkilo.org.uk) or contact your wellbeing team.

**IT'S OK  
TO  
ASK FOR  
HELP**

## Re-experience symptoms

- › Unable to switch off from the work.
- › Upsetting dreams or flashbacks.
- › Overreactions to work related issues.
- › Victimised feelings of hopelessness and helplessness.

## Arousal symptoms

- › Unreasonable anger or irritability focused at family, colleagues or situations.
- › Self-destructive behaviour such as driving too fast or having an affair.
- › Jumpy, or an inability to sleep or relax.
- › Inability to concentrate, leading to increased numbers of accidents or errors.
- › Sensitivity to noise and bright lights.

## Negative thinking symptoms

- › Negative self-beliefs eg, "I'm incompetent"; "The world is bad"; "No one can be trusted."
- › Lack of interest in things that used to be enjoyable.
- › Negative outlook on life leading to unreasonable fears, beliefs and attitudes.
- › Feelings of isolation from family and friends.
- › Emotional numbing and difficulty in showing sensitivity or positive emotions.

## Avoidance symptoms

- › Putting off doing work or dealing with demanding cases.
- › Not looking too deeply.
- › Avoiding questions that might lead to upsetting responses.
- › Blocking out or forgetting the most distressing areas.
- › Using alcohol to block out feelings.

# TRAUMA SUPPORT IN THE WORKPLACE

## INTRODUCTION

This information leaflet has been designed as part of the National Police Wellbeing Service Trauma Support Programme to help officers and staff who are exposed to actual disturbing and shocking events as part of their daily work. When those incidents at work take place, people may be likely to experience a range of unfamiliar feelings and reactions associated with the shock of the event and may have difficulty in collecting their thoughts and handling their emotional reactions about what has happened.



Our aim is to describe some common reactions to such events, helping you understand and recognise indicators and where to access further help or support if you feel that is needed. It must be emphasised that there are no 'right' or 'wrong' ways to react, and different individuals exposed to the same event may respond in quite different ways.

Having to deal with traumatic events is part of police life. While most officers and staff involved in an extremely stressful or traumatic incident will be shaken by what has happened, some adjust to their experiences with little or no apparent distress. This would be considered a quite common response.

Sometimes people may in fact feel satisfied by the way that they have acted when faced with a traumatic event (e.g. if they have been able to help colleagues and others who have been involved). Although everyone's experience will be unique and personal, the process of psychological adjustment and recovery will often be different and there may be times that even the most experienced officer will find it difficult to cope.

When those incidents at work take place, you should have an opportunity to speak to your supervisor about what happened, be reminded of the support that is available to you including, where appropriate, a defusing meeting by your supervisor or a Peer. As a partner, family member or friend it is important that you understand what you can do to support the process of recovery.

# SOME COMMON PSYCHOLOGICAL REACTIONS

- › Emotions of fearfulness, nervousness or occasional panic, especially when faced by reminders of the event.
- › Hyper-vigilance—constantly scanning the environment for cues of danger or seeing threat in things that would have appeared innocent before. This could mean being overly protective of children or loved ones.
- › Sleep disturbance—difficulty in getting off to sleep, restless sleep, vivid dreams or nightmares.
- › Memories—thoughts/images of the incident, which can appear to ‘come out of the blue’, without any triggers or reminders. Other thoughts, images or feelings may be prompted by something on the media, which have a resonance to their experience.
- › Guilt—feelings of regret, about not having acted or coped as well as one would have wished, feeling that you may have let one’s self or others down.
- › Sadness—feelings of low mood and tearfulness.
- › Irritability and anger—at what happened or the injustice of the event. Irritability can often be directed at loved ones, close family friends or colleagues.
- › Feeling numb or detached from others or being unable to experience emotions such as love or happiness. There can be a withdrawing from loved ones, which is difficult to understand when what they want more than anything is reassurance.
- › Withdrawal—avoiding social and family contact.
- › Mental avoidance—avoiding thoughts to do with the event. People often try to push distressing thoughts out of their head, often unsuccessfully, and in the longer term this can cause further problems.
- › Behavioural avoidance—avoiding thoughts, feelings, activities that are reminders of the trauma. These can be often subtle at first, such as avoiding noisy or crowded environments, taking a different route to work and so on.
- › Becoming ‘jumpy’ or easily startled by sudden noises or movements, e.g. a door slamming, the phone or doorbell ringing.

# SOME COMMON PHYSICAL REACTIONS

Some individuals may also have certain bodily sensations, with or without the psychological reactions described above. Many of these symptoms are signs of anxiety, tension, or stress. For example:

- ▶ **Shakiness and trembling.**
- ▶ **Tension and muscular aches (especially in the head and neck).**
- ▶ **Insomnia, tiredness, fatigue.**
- ▶ **Poor concentration, forgetfulness.**
- ▶ **Palpitations, breathing difficulties, dizziness.**
- ▶ **Feelings of nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea.**



# WHAT YOU CAN DO

## In the first few days after the traumatic event:

First of all remember, it is normal to experience some distress after exposure to a major trauma. This may include difficulties in sleeping, distressing thoughts and memories popping into mind, nightmares, irritability, feelings of helplessness, reliving aspects of what has happened and thinking that you should have done more to help.

- › Seeking social support from family, friends and people that are trusted is important during the first few days.
- › Although talking about what happened can be helpful, you should not be forced to talk about your experiences. It may be more important for you to have quiet time to think things through. Do what works for you.
- › It has been shown to be helpful to talk to colleagues in a debriefing as this gives you an opportunity to organise what has happened into a coherent story which can reduce feelings of helplessness.
- › Trying to get back to the routine things in life can be helpful, for example having times for getting up, going to bed and eating can give a sense of normality to life.

- › Spiritual beliefs can be strengthened and tested by disasters. For some people, faith groups can be a source of support.
- › For parents and child carers providing open, honest and direct information to children about what is known and explanations of their own and other adult reactions they may have seen can be helpful.

## In the following weeks and months:

- › Most people find their initial difficulties settle down and they can return to a more normal life within a few weeks.
- › For a few people, the problems persist or get more intense. It is important for you to contact your Occupational Health if your difficulties go on for longer than a month.
- › Sometimes there is a delay in the response to the trauma, the experience of “shock” and unreality allows a gradual intake of what happened – be aware of this.
- › People can begin to experience other difficulties such as avoiding people or places or developing panic attacks or anxiety when faced with reminders of what happened.

# PROMOTING RECOVERY - SUPPORTING OTHERS

It is very comforting to receive practical, social and emotional support from colleagues and others. It is important not to reject support by trying to appear strong or trying to cope completely on your own.

Talking to close colleagues or others who have had similar experiences, or understand what you have been through, is particularly important. You know yourself and the people you love best, so you are best placed to decide what works and is helpful for you.

If a colleague, friend or family member approaches you for support:

We do hope that you find this helpful, but if you are still concerned please contact your Occupational Health or Wellbeing Services.

## DO

- › Be there to listen
- › Make sure that they eat regular meals
- › Encourage them to take some exercise - it may help for you to go with them
- › Recognise that their anger, irritability and upset is due to the incident although sometimes it may be directed to you
- › Allow them to express strong feelings about the incident – this may include crying or anger
- › Be aware that after a traumatic incident it is common to feel some guilt about the things that might have been done better
- › Explain what is happening if you have children, in simple language

## DO NOT

- › Suggest that they would feel better if they went down to the pub
- › Tell them that they should stop thinking about it
- › Invite lots of people to the house to visit (a few close friends and family is okay)
- › Expect them to be able to show loving feelings during the first week after the incident
- › Encourage them to stay in the house (they need to go out and meet people)
- › Give them any un-prescribed medication
- › Stop them going back to work (they will benefit from meeting colleagues)

# THE A-B-C OF SELF CARE

## A

### Awareness

- › Look at what events or cases can cause compassion fatigue, Burnout, Stress, Anxiety for you?
- › If you can recognise these events then you can look at ways to help avoid or control them.

## B

### Balance

- › Keep your life in Balance
- › Practice excellent self-care
- › Nurture yourself by putting activities in your schedule that are sources of pleasure, joy and diversion
- › Allow yourself to take mini-escapes; these relieve the intensity of your work
- › Transform the negative impact of your work (find meaning, challenge negativity, find gratitude) Get medical treatment if needed to relieve symptoms that interfere with daily functioning - don't use alcohol or drugs to self-medicate
- › Get professional help when needed to get back on track - we all need coaches and consultants at times

## C

### Connections

- › Talk out your stress - process your thoughts and reactions with someone else (co-worker, therapist, clergy, friend, family, and supervisor)
- › Build a positive support system that supports you, not fuels your stress
- › Pets accept whatever affection you are able to give them without asking for more
- › Pets are invulnerable to "provider burnout" Blood pressure and heart rate decrease when interacting with animals

# PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

Progressive relaxation involves slowly tensing and then releasing each muscle group individually, starting with the muscles in your feet and legs and finishing with your head. Tension can go unnoticed but if you use this exercise regularly you will find a reduction in the levels of stress and burnout.



## 1 Tensing the muscles

Take a slow, deep breath and tense the muscles as hard as you can for five seconds. It's important to really feel the tension in the muscles even when it causes some discomfort or shaking.

## 2 Relaxing the tensed muscles

After five seconds, let all the tightness flow out of the tensed muscles. Exhale as you do this. The muscles should be loose and limp as the tension flows out. It's important to acknowledge the difference between the tension and relaxation.

Remain in this relaxed state for about 15 seconds, then move on to the next muscle group. Repeat the tension-relaxation steps. After completing all the muscle groups, take some time to enjoy the deep state of relaxation.

# HOW TO TENSE MUSCLE GROUPS

**1 FOOT:**  
curl your toes downward

**2 LOWER LEG AND FOOT:**  
tighten your calf muscle by pulling your toes towards you

**3 ENTIRE LEG:**  
squeeze thigh muscles

**4 BUTTOCKS:**  
tighten by pulling your buttocks together

**5 HAND:**  
clench your fist

**6 STOMACH:**  
suck your stomach in

**7 ENTIRE ARM:**  
clench your fist and pull your forearm towards your shoulder

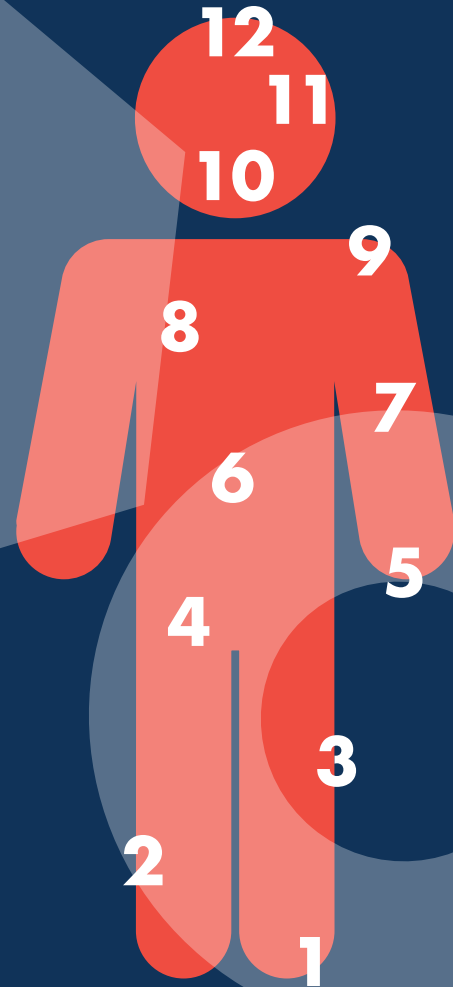
**8 CHEST:**  
tighten by taking a deep breath

**9 NECK AND SHOULDERS:**  
lift your shoulders up to touch your ears

**10 MOUTH:**  
open your mouth wide enough to stretch your jaw

**11 EYES:**  
clench your eyelids tightly shut

**12 FOREHEAD:**  
raise your eyebrows as far as you can

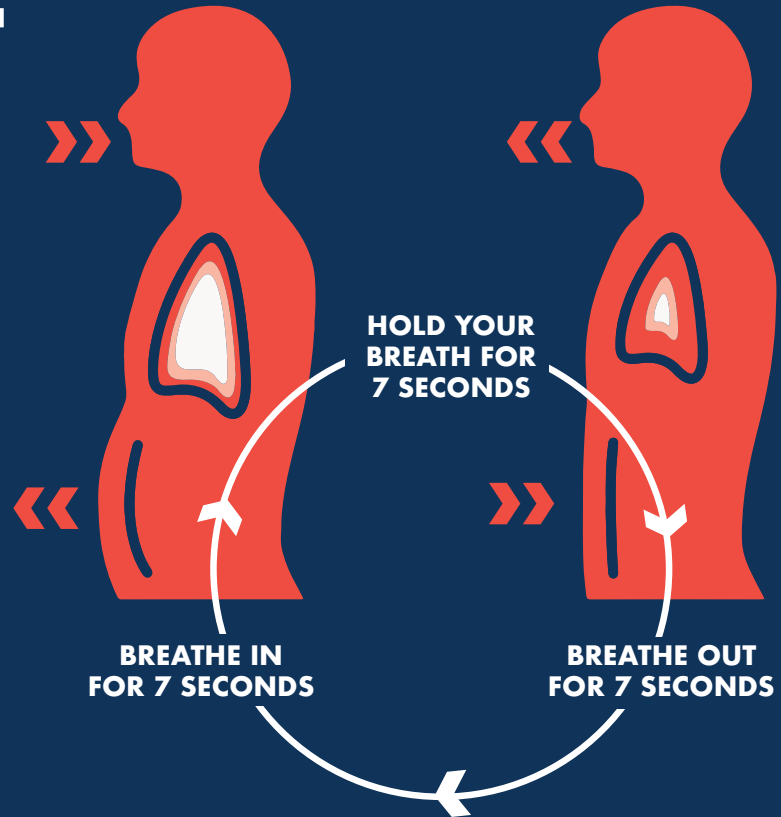


# TAKE TIME TO BREATHE

One of the simplest deep breathing exercises involves you breathing in to the count of seven seconds, holding your breath for seven seconds, and then breathing out to the count of seven seconds.

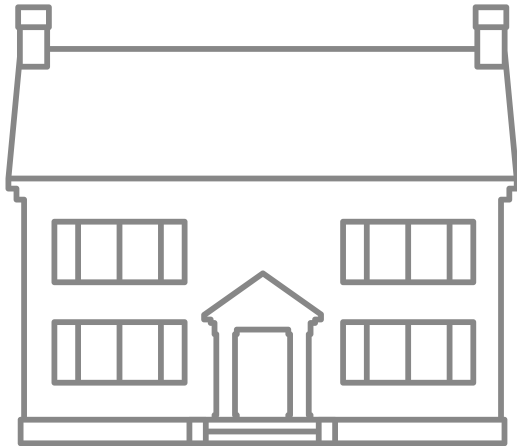
Repeat this deep breathing exercise at least five times, concentrating on the feeling of the air going through your nostrils and into your lungs.

Deep breathing each day can **reduce anxiety and stress**

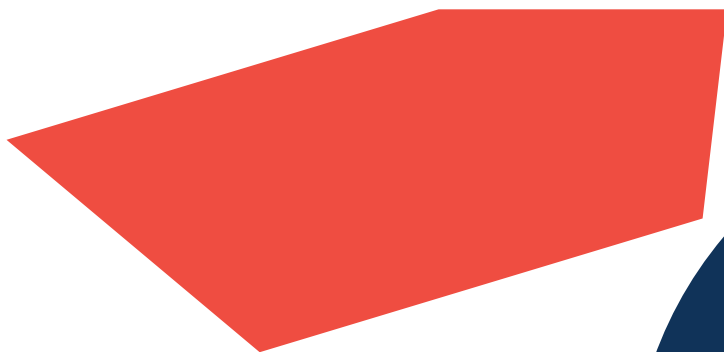


# BEFORE YOU GO HOME...

## ARE YOU OK?



- › **Stop** and have a think about your day
- › If there was something challenging for you today, acknowledge it, but allow yourself to **let it go**
- › Think about **three** things that went well today
- › Be really **proud** of the work you have done
- › Ask a colleague how they are before you leave: **are they OK?**
- › **Are you OK?** If not, ask for help, your team and management are here to support you
- › Shift your attention to home – **Rest and Recharge**



For more tips and information visit our website [oscarkilo.org.uk](https://oscarkilo.org.uk)