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# MANAGING TRAUMA SYMPTOMS

TIPS FOR YOURSELF & FOR YOUR 'OHANA

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# **TRAUMA? I'M TOO STRONG FOR TRAUMA!**

**If you're a First Responder who's ever been in a class or session with me, you might've heard my surfing analogy for trauma. It goes like this: Just like we would say it's unreasonable to tell someone to go surf, but not get wet... it's unreasonable to tell a First Responder to take the job and not get affected by the things they experience on duty. Doing one, will absolutely lead to the other.**

**You ALL have HUMAN bodies, which means you will be affected by tough shit. There's no shame in that. You can't choose it or refuse it- this is how the brain & nervous system are designed. What you should focus on is learning to recognize what your trauma triggers and reactions look like and then build skills to manage them. Doing this keeps you healthy, happy, & high-performing.**



## **TRAUMA RESPONSE MAY LOOK LIKE**

- Hypervigilance
- Irritable mood
- Isolation
- Being less affectionate/engaged
- Volatile behaviors
- Heavy substance use
- Difficulty sleeping
- Emotionally reactive
- Trouble concentrating
- Flashbacks/nightmares
- Suicidal thoughts



## **FOR THE 'OHANA**

1. Accept that your First Responder's stress response is "stuck", at times preventing them being able to control themselves. They are not "crazy" and they are not "weak" for having this experience or reaction.
2. Manage your own stress. Trauma adds pressure to relationships, so you must manage your health and emotions before you can really help them recover.
3. Learn to create and protect a safe haven in your relationship where your First Responder trusts they can get understanding and support.
4. Don't enable destructive patterns. Setting healthy boundaries is vital to find the balance between acknowledging their struggle and supporting them towards better health.
5. Learn to recognize their triggers and what helps them regain control. Then, help them in those moments.



## **TIPS FOR MANAGING SYMPTOMS**

1. Identify your triggers. They can be places, anniversaries, emotions, senses, media, or people. Knowing them increases your sense of control.
2. Understand that feelings of being trapped, frustrated, helpless, or feeling out of control can exacerbate reactions. Even exhaustion, hunger, or illness can trigger symptoms. (hint: rest & nutrition make a difference)
3. When triggered take deep, slow breaths-- 5 count in, 7 count out.
4. When triggered, label sensory info in your environment.
5. 'Ohana, avoid touching your FR when they're triggered. Ask first, but give them extra space as needed.
6. 'Ohana, when they're having a flashback, gently remind them it is a flashback and that while it feels real, it's not happening again.



## **TO THE FIRST RESPONDER**

It's okay if these symptoms sound too familiar. There's no shame in any of it. But, just like you get your workout in, count your macros, and drink your protein shakes, you gotta do something to take care of your mental health. If the tips above don't help enough, no need worry or be ashamed. You don't have to face this alone and we can often treat this while you stay full-duty. Let's talk and develop a strategy to manage it effectively.

*Dr. Alicia*





# WAVES OF INSIGHT

**Appointments available in-person or via video  
telehealth.**

**808-818-8850**