



USING THIS GUIDE

This Participant's Guide is intended to assist individual viewers of the video material outside of a facilitated group or classroom setting. The scenarios presented do not necessarily depict a correct or incorrect way to handle a situation. The goal is to prepare participants to later engage in discussion of the scenarios and topic and how it relates to them and to their agency policy and procedures. See the explanation for "Informational/Individual Viewing" on next page.

VIEW THE VIDEO

To access this video online, visit the [POST Learning Portal](#).

ABOUT THIS VIDEO

This training program is designed to enhance the ability of California's Public Safety Dispatchers and their supervisors in recognizing common issues affecting dispatchers' well-being while identifying meaningful steps toward continued personal and professional wellness.

Program segments include a general introduction and definition of wellness, recognizing trauma, the role of personal and organizational leadership in dispatcher wellness, coping and resources, and a special section highlighting a simple, yet effective, breathing exercise useful to those in high-stress professions.

The program uses video scenarios with storylines that dispatchers will find familiar, including a case study of a significant event. Several segments utilize sensitive and very direct scenarios to expose the difficult challenges dispatchers often face when their personal and professional lives seem to run parallel. These combine with subject matter expert commentaries to provide dispatchers and their supervisors with valuable information and resources useful in achieving and maintaining overall health and wellness.

GUIDE CONTENTS

Video Viewing Options and Features

Describes how the training video is formatted and organized on screen and provides navigation instructions for facilitators or individual viewers. The video may be viewed in a single training session or broken up into shorter segments.

Program Overview

Lists the main teaching points and provides general information that is examined in greater detail within each scenario.

Scenarios

Each scenario features a brief overview and *Key Learning Points* to assist with quick review of the material during the presentation.

Participant's Self-Assessment

A self-assessment is provided at the end of this guide and must be reviewed with the designated training manager or supervisor for the participant to receive training credit.



VIDEO VIEWING OPTIONS AND FEATURES

Two different viewing options are offered with this training video: FACILITATED GROUP COURSE or INFORMATIONAL/INDIVIDUAL VIEWING.

FACILITATED GROUP COURSE

The **Facilitated Group Course** option should be selected when the video is being used in a classroom or briefing setting. The material may be delivered in a single session or broken up over several days, such as delivery during briefing or roll call. The material is divided into tabbed sections that the facilitator may play in whatever order they feel best meets the training need (see Navigating the Video section below). Once the material has been covered in its entirety, the instructor, supervisor, or training manager (as designated by the department) may [submit a completed training roster](#) via POST EDI for CPT credit for participants.

INFORMATIONAL / INDIVIDUAL VIEWING

The **Informational/Individual Viewing** option should be selected when a participant is viewing the video alone or without an instructor or supervisor present to facilitate the delivery of the material. This option should not be used in a group training session. This option is intended for participants who work in a remote location, for a smaller agency that cannot readily access group training, or for an individual who is simply interested in viewing the video for informational purposes. The segment order is preset, and the viewer will be guided through the video without live facilitator interaction.

At the discretion of the department-designated training manager or supervisor, participants of the Informational/Individual Viewing mode may receive CPT credit for viewing this video. To receive credit, individual viewers must be provided with the Participant's Guide (pdf). The individual watches the video and reviews and completes the Participant's Guide assessment as they follow along. The training manager or supervisor then facilitates a discussion of the video and assesses the participant's responses using the Participant Assessment Answer Key provided at the end of this guide. If the facilitator is satisfied that the participant has demonstrated an understanding of the concepts of the video, they may [submit a completed POST Course Roster](#) via EDI for CPT credit.

Facilitators should contact POST's [Training Delivery and Compliance Bureau](#) at (916) 227-7748 or their POST [Regional Consultant](#) for questions about completing and submitting POST Course Rosters via POST EDI for training video completion.

**PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

- Defining “wellness”
- Why people become dispatchers
- New dispatchers face unique stressors
- Identifying and mitigating common dispatch stressors
- A supervisor’s role in managing workplace stress
- Cumulative and vicarious trauma
- Changes in the dispatch culture
- The importance of maintaining proper perspectives
- Recognizing the normal reactions to significant events
- Common “triggers” affecting dispatchers
- Identifying and mitigating the effects of trauma
- Common traits of good leaders
- The need for organizational support of wellness-related programs
- The experience of helplessness
- Demands that public safety dispatching places on the individual
- Critical signs of foreseeable problems
- Dealing with the collision of personal and professional lives
- The concept of “balance”
- Asking for help is warranted, encouraged, and often needed
- The sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems and related exercise



SCENARIO 1 –WHAT IS WELLNESS?

***The Newcomers* - While typifying some of the reasons many come into this profession, new staff in the communications center reveal how the job may impact attitudes and perception over time.**

KEY LEARNING POINTS

“Wellness” defined: The integrated approach to overall health.

Recognizing and embracing the motivations for becoming a dispatcher:

- To help people
- Excitement
- Honorable profession
- Meaningful work
- Part of a team
- Only a select few can handle the job

Stressors new dispatchers may face:

- New technology and numerous systems to learn and master
- Becoming part of the law enforcement/agency culture
- CAD commands, radio codes, statutes
- Facing innumerable unknowns
- Loss of sleep
- Challenges with co-workers
- Probation status

Stressors common to dispatchers:

- Life and death calls
- Shift work
- Short staffed/mandatory overtime
- Negativity's ease of transference
- Little recognition for work done well

Methods for dealing with stress:

- Trust your knowledge
- Relax intentionally
- Breathing/meditation exercises
- Move/stretch
- Take regular breaks to “reset”
- Talk with someone you trust

The supervisor's role in managing workplace stress:

- Be available
 - One-on-one time with staff
 - Follow through and address concerns
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SCENARIO 2 – TRAUMA

Domestic Violence Call - The toll of cumulative stress is exposed both during and after a dispatcher's handling of an in-progress domestic violence call. Cumulative trauma's effects are evident and how one may deal with them are shown in this scenario reflective of many dispatchers' experiences.

KEY LEARNING POINTS

Cumulative and vicarious trauma:

- Are real threats to dispatchers' wellness
- Are wounding, and deserve proper care
- Affect individuals the same as the trauma from critical incidents

Supervisors and co-workers have a significant place in stress mitigation.

The dispatch culture has changed:

- Just getting through it is no longer acceptable
- Managing stress and well-being is paramount
- Staff expectations of one another and organization have shifted

The importance of maintaining proper perspectives:

- The worst doesn't usually happen
- Things often turn out as good as possible
- Continuing to focus on the negatives harms you and others

Reactions to significant events, as unwanted as they may be, are normal because our bodies react to trauma.

Trauma affects our responses:

- At home
- At work
- Toward self

Good mental health requires:

- Rest and recovery
- Action when imbalances occur
- Early intervention to prevent unnecessary suffering

Mitigating the effects of trauma (i.e., recovery) provides:

- Strength
 - Resilience
 - Character
 - Self-worth
 - Bonding with others
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SCENARIO 3 – LEADERSHIP

Debris Flow Case Study - A review of one significant event from a communications center perspective magnifies many of the professional and personal challenges dispatchers and their supervisors face and how both can assist each other with long-term goals and well-being.

KEY LEARNING POINTS

Leaders exist in, and come from, any position or rank.

Valued traits of good leaders and good supervisors include:

- Positively influence others
- Caring about others
- Giving direction
- Setting priorities
- Preventing chaos
- Empowering
- Leading by example

Valued traits of good managers include:

- Prepared in advance
- Locates and maintains needed resources
- Recognizes and values the knowledge of those around them

What supervisors permit, they promote.

Supervisory support and utilization of wellness programs, peer programs, and debriefings are critical to the programs' success and positive outcomes for staff.

Actions taken by good leaders proximate to critical incidents may include:

- Arranging for downtime/time off
- Debriefings (formal or informal)
- Event location tours
- Enabling discussions with staff from other units
- Providing perspective
- Recognizing and responding to traumatized staff
- Commendations

Although undesirable, helplessness will inevitably be experienced at times by public safety dispatchers due to the nature of the profession.

Keeping a balanced and humble view of your role and the public's needs will assist in keeping anger and resentment toward the public minimized.



SCENARIO 4 – COPING AND RESOURCES

Parallels - In this emotionally-charged scenario, we watch with familiarity three stark illustrations of the conflicts that occur when personal and professional lives parallel one another.

KEY LEARNING POINTS

Personal circumstances can affect-- and be affected by-- calls for service.

Peers and supervisors have an ability and a responsibility to act when seeing symptoms of stress or vicarious trauma in others:

- Available to talk/listen
- Counsel
- Encourage simple, positive steps

The process toward wellness usually involves others.

It is not the realities of the job-- but how they are dealt with-- that has the greatest effects.

The demands of public safety dispatching are amplified by mandatory shifts, overtime, and critical staffing levels.

Completely separating personal and professional lives is likely impossible and impractical.

There are recognizable signs of someone approaching a “breaking point”:

- Unusual quietness or solitude
- Short-tempered with others, irritable
- Lack of sleep
- Loss of appetite

Maintaining “balance” varies among individuals and is critical in overall health and wellness:

- Family life
- Physical and mental health
- Spiritual life
- Hobbies
- Education
- Meaningful employment
- Social activities and friendships

It's okay to *not* be okay; ask for help, and acknowledge this job is stressful.



SCENARIO 5 – BREATHING EXERCISE

Special Feature - In this segment, a subject matter expert demonstrates a useful breathing exercise designed to assist with the physiological reactions to stress.

KEY LEARNING POINT

Describing the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems as the body's "gas and brake pedals," Dr. Cherylynn Lee provides a meaningful and simple approach to better managing the parasympathetic responses to the frequent stressors encountered by public safety dispatchers and other first responders

**CONCLUSION**

After completing this course, participants should better understand:

- A working definition of “wellness”
- Common dispatch stressors and how to mitigate many of their effects
- A supervisor’s role in managing workplace stress
- Cumulative and vicarious trauma and how to deal with them
- Recognizing common traits of good leaders
- How to prepare for the demands and effects of unusual incidents
- Available wellness-related programs and sources of support
- How to better manage personal and professional lives
- Ways to positively affect the parasympathetic nervous system



ASSESS WHAT YOU LEARNED

The Participant's Guide Assessment is a separate document for individual viewers who wish to view the video outside a group or classroom setting and later work with the agency designated trainer or supervisor for POST CPT credit. This is not a formal testing tool. All answers should be evaluated by the trainer. The answers match the video content and are listed for general guidance.

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

As you watch the training video in the Informational/Individual Viewing mode, follow along and answer the questions below. You may pause the video and view a section again if needed. The goal is for you to complete this assessment and then discuss the material with your designated agency training manager or facilitator.

Which of the following are positive approaches to alleviating common stressors found in the communications environment? (circle all that apply)

- A. Remain sedentary to promote greater focus
- B. Make breaks a priority throughout the day
- C. Tell a newer employee about your stressors to gain a new perspective
- D. Speak privately with a supervisor about your experiences
- E. Add individual exercises to your routine at the terminal

Which of the following traits represent unhealthy actions not conducive to personal wellness? (circle all that apply)

- A. Makes self-care a priority
- B. Completes work tasks at home in preparation for the next day
- C. Focuses on others' needs before own
- D. Seeks help from various sources when needed
- E. Involved with several non-work associations and friends

How does the program define "wellness"? (circle one)

- A. Maintaining work-life balance
- B. Integrated approach to overall health
- C. Purposeful living with intentional actions
- D. A means to minimizing other's effects on oneself
- E. A means to managing escalating effects of stress and trauma

Which of the following is true about cumulative trauma? (circle all that apply)

- A. Is not a major threat to dispatchers' wellness
- B. Effects are the same as trauma from individual critical incidents
- C. Is unavoidable in a communications setting
- D. Should be considered like any other injury and given proper care
- E. Primarily affects the unaware and unprepared

Continued



ASSESS WHAT YOU LEARNED
CONTINUED

Little has changed in recent decades with respect to communications personnel and workplaces in dealing with the causes and effects of stress. (circle one)

- A. True
- B. False

Describe typical actions of communications personnel who develop and maintain good mental health practices.

Which of the following are not good traits for leaders in communications settings? (circle all that apply)

- A. Aid in preventing chaos through coaching, pre-planning, and assistance
- B. Fully aware of policy and prepared to share it when events occur
- C. Displays care toward others in word and deed
- D. Uses leadership role toward desired ends with minimal input from others
- E. Encourages dispatchers to “work through” calls’ aftermath at their terminal to build resilience

Which of the follow are usually not considered healthy actions following significant or critical incidents? (circle all that apply)

- A. Participating in informal or formal debriefings
- B. Reducing exposure to other involved units/staff to prevent information overload
- C. Minimizing potential trauma that seems unreasonable
- D. Encouraging downtime or time off
- E. Commendations for meritorious actions

Continued



**ASSESS WHAT
YOU LEARNED**
CONTINUED

Supervisory support of wellness-related programs provides minimal influence toward staff's use of available services. (circle one)

- A. True
- B. False

Which of the following reflect a supervisor's positive approach to their employees' well-being? (circle all that apply)

- A. Encourages other's work-life balance
- B. Practices what they tell others (e.g., taking breaks)
- C. Believes "time heals all wounds" and will delay before becoming involved
- D. Alert to changes in employees and willing to ask about their observations
- E. Willing to make adjustments to promote early intervention

Well-trained and knowledgeable public safety dispatchers will be able to maintain a separation of personal and professional lives. (circle one)

- A. True
- B. False

Which of the following signs could indicate to a supervisor that an employee is approaching a critical time personally? (circle all that apply)

- A. Unusual irritability
- B. New reservedness or quietness
- C. Leaving work promptly at the end of shift
- D. Taking up new hobbies
- E. Showing signs of sleeplessness and weight loss

Which of the following are considered *negative* coping mechanisms? (circle all that apply)

- A. Seeking peer, supervisory, or professional support
 - B. Avoiding addressing even small issues
 - C. Taking up new hobbies
 - D. Substance abuse
 - E. Minimizing or eliminating non-law enforcement associations
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