

Reducing Job Stress: Tips for Federal Law Enforcement

Law enforcement careers consistently rank among the most stressful jobs in the U.S. Studies indicate that up to [30 percent of police officers](#) experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder on a regular basis. Add in the extra pressure associated with working for the federal government, and it's easy to see why federal law enforcement careers are considered among the most stressful in the country.

There are many causes of career-related stress. Factors such as physical demands, shifting schedules, constant scrutiny, frequent work travel, interaction with the public, and the potential for exposure to human suffering, or violence all contribute to the intense nature of law enforcement work. Indeed, those who work in federal law enforcement jobs often experience multiple stressors in the course of their day-to-day duties.

Finding effective ways to manage work stress is key. The following tips will help you stay cool and collected while on the job.

Identify Stressors

Let's face it: Working in law enforcement requires a certain measure of toughness in order to withstand job demands. However, that very toughness can contribute to stress and anxiety. For many, even admitting that they feel stressed may seem like admitting to vulnerability or weakness.

Realizing that stressors exist, identifying them, and acknowledging their negative effects is an essential part of mitigating the impact. Once you identify the factors that lead to stress, you can start taking steps to mitigate its impact.

Emphasize Physical Fitness

When your body is healthy, you're more equipped to bounce back from stress. But physical fitness means more than simply getting in 30 minutes of cardio or lifting weights. When it comes to dealing with stress, physical fitness encompasses the whole body. That means exercising regularly — with a regimen that includes strength training, cardio and flexibility — and eating a well-balanced diet.

One of the best ways to fight stress? Getting enough sleep. [Studies](#) show that less than eight hours per night leads to higher stress levels and increased feelings of irritation, anger, and impatience. Even worse, stress can actually prevent quality sleep, which then leads to more stress in a vicious cycle. Get better, stress-reducing sleep by:

- Going to bed and waking up at the same time daily
- Avoiding naps
- Sleeping in a cool, dark and quiet bedroom (earplugs or white noise can help)
- Avoiding screens in the hour before bed

Build a Support System

Discussing stress with someone who relates to the specific challenges federal law enforcement personnel face is an effective stress management technique. An advisor who's "been there, done that" can truly understand what it's like on the job, from the constant public scrutiny to feelings of lack of control over the system. Speak to a fellow employee, a stress coach or an agency counselor, and have your experiences validated by someone who "gets it."

Building a broad support system means including friends and family, as well. Granted, they may not understand what your job is really like. In many cases, you may not be able to discuss sensitive parts of your work. However, keeping the lines of communication open with those in your life who offer positive interactions, support and guidance can go a long way toward building your resilience to on-the-job stress.

Change Your Focus

When you're immersed in a negative work environment, it's all too easy to get stuck in patterns that exacerbate your stress level. Constant complaining sessions with colleagues might make you feel better in the moment, but in the long run, a focus on the negative will bring you down.

Challenge yourself to shift the conversation. The next time your co-workers start grumbling, don't add to the litany. Switch to a more positive topic. It doesn't even have to be work-related: Did your team win last night? Did you eat at a great new restaurant recently? The topic doesn't matter, as long as you shift the conversation away from rehashing all that's wrong in the workplace.

Can't break the habit? It's within your power to simply disengage and walk away, removing a source of negativity and stress.

Assume Ownership

Working for the federal government means that you don't have control over the system. Outside factors such as your workload, your direct reports or your supervisor may be out of your hands. For many, this can be a source of anxiety — but allowing factors that you can't control determine your job satisfaction doesn't do anything other than increase your stress level.

You may not control your job, but you do control the way you react to it. When you feel your hands are tied at work, giving in to frustration and anger may be the easiest reaction, but it will also feed your stress.

Instead, focus on identifying and taking any steps you can take to improve the situation. Your mental health will thank you.

Ensure You're Covered

Those who work in federal law enforcement face constant scrutiny. Whether it's your supervisor, a committee, a legislative body or the public eye, your actions are under close examination. This leads to stress over the threat of lawsuits or accusations — a threat that, in our litigious society, is quite real. We've all heard stories of those who were accused, then had to drain their bank accounts to defend themselves in an investigation or in a court case.

That's why the right insurance protection is important to many in the federal law enforcement community. Among other things, the right insurance can defend against financial ruin.

Your job may be stressful, but it shouldn't overwhelm you. Make a commitment to prioritize your own well-being and take action to overcome work-related anxiety and stress. As a member of federal law enforcement, you've made a commitment to take care of your country; you'll be even more effective if you make a commitment to take care of yourself, too.

Article sponsored by Starr Wright USA.

Starr Wright USA is an insurance agency specializing in insurance solutions for federal employees and federal contractors. For more information, visit WrightUSA.com. Starr Wright USA is a division of Starr Insurance Companies, which is a marketing name for the operating insurance and travel assistance companies and subsidiaries of Starr International Company, Inc. and for the investment business of C.V. Starr & Co., Inc.

Sources

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28206785>

<https://www.careercast.com/jobs-rated/2018-most-stressful-jobs>

<https://www.officer.com/training-careers/article/12304324/stress-management-training-for-law-enforcement-professionals>

<https://www.rti.org/insights/stress-reduction-programs-police-officers-what-needs-change>

<https://www.nij.gov/topics/law-enforcement/officer-safety/stress-fatigue/Pages/causes.aspx>

http://users.soc.umn.edu/~samaha/cases/police_stress.htm

<http://www.policemag.com/channel/patrol/articles/2017/06/coping-with-stress-on-the-job.aspx>

<https://www.lexipol.com/resources/blog/how-self-care-can-reduce-police-officer-stress/>

<https://www.stress.org/workplace-stress/>