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UAMS

If you are actively feeling suicidal,
please call 911 or the
Suicide Prevention Lifeline at:
1-800-273-8255

Continuing the Conversation

*Understanding and recognizing
common mental health concerns
within the fire culture*



UAMS

A partnership with the
**Little Rock Fire
Department for
Mental Health &
Wellness**

Defining the most common mental health issues among firefighters:

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):

A diagnosis of PTSD requires exposure to an upsetting traumatic event. However, exposure could be indirect rather than first hand. It can also occur as a result of repeated exposure to horrible details of trauma.

Symptoms of PTSD fall into four categories. Each symptom can vary in severity but usually last for more than one month.

Re-Experiencing

- Intrusive thoughts or images
- Flashbacks
- Nightmares
- Distress at reminders of trauma
- Physical reactions to traumatic memories, such as pain,

Hyper-Arousal

- Easily startled
- Constantly aware of threats
- Easily upset or angry
- Difficulty sleeping
- Difficulty concentrating
- Reckless behavior

Avoidance

- Avoidance of people, places, or circumstances that may bring on distressing memories
- Dissociation
- Social isolation or withdrawal
- Constantly busy

Negative Thoughts/Feelings

- Inability to recall details of the trauma
- Distorted/negative beliefs about oneself or others
- Decreased interest in activities
- Difficulty experiencing positive

PTSD and the Brain

Traumatic stress can affect the functions of the amygdala, hippocampus, prefrontal cortex, and hypothalamus. Consequently PTSD can result in struggle with thought processes and decision making, faulty memory, and emotional regulation, along with many other symptoms.

Acute Stress Disorder (ASD)

Acute stress disorder occurs in reaction to a traumatic event, just as PTSD does, and the symptoms are similar. However, the symptoms occur between three days and one month after the event. People with acute stress disorder may relive the trauma, have flashbacks or nightmares and may feel numb or detached from themselves. These symptoms cause major distress and cause problems in their daily lives. About half of people with acute stress disorder go on to have PTSD.

Depression

Depression is a mood disorder that causes distressing symptoms that affect how you feel, think, and handle daily activities. Symptoms of depression can last from two weeks to two years or longer.

Depression may not look the same in everyone, and sadness is only one small part of depression, and some people with depression do not feel sadness at all. Some symptoms include:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” mood
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Restless or irritable
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies or activities
- Decreased energy, fatigue; feeling “slowed down”
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Difficulty sleeping, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping
- Appetite and/or weight changes
- Thoughts of death or suicide or suicide attempts
- Aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems without a clear physical cause and/or that do not ease even with treatment

Anxiety

Occasional anxiety is an expected part of life, anxiety disorders however, involve more than temporary worry or fear. For a person with an anxiety disorder, the anxiety does not go away and can get worse over time.

Symptoms of anxiety can interfere with daily activities such as job performance and personal relationships. These symptoms include:

- Feeling restless, wound-up, or on-edge
- Easily fatigued
- Difficulty concentrating; mind going blank
- Muscle tension
- Difficulty controlling feelings of worry
- Having sleep problems, such as difficulty falling or staying asleep, restlessness, or unsatisfying sleep

There are several types of anxiety disorders, including generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and various phobia-related disorders.

There is hope. Proper treatment of these can help “rewire” the brain back to health.