

# JAIL BULLETIN

NUMBER 32

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The Jail Bulletin is a monthly feature of the Crime Commission Update. The Bulletin may be used as a supplement to your jail in-service training program if officers study the material and complete the attached "open book" quiz. The Bulletin and quiz may be reproduced for use by your staff. We welcome any jail training materials you would like to contribute to the Bulletin.

## STRESS MANAGEMENT - PART II

### EFFECTS OF STRESS

It is possible for a relatively stable individual to be confronted with a situation so stressful or unpleasant that they display symptoms identical in many respects with those seen in serious mental disorders. Such reactions, which are more or less transient in nature and appear to be acute responses to situational factors, are considered separate from neurotic reactions or other more disturbed and lasting forms of emotional disorder. The current classification system of the American Psychiatric Association labels them "transient situational personality disorders."

Constant, inescapable stress produces intense fear and mobilizes the body's resources to deal with the situation. To understand how stress affects your overall health, consider your body's alarm reaction, the way it suddenly prepares for "fight or flight"; adrenalin floods the bloodstream, causing the heart to pound, the body suspends nonessential tasks, such as digestion, to divert blood to muscles and brain. Breathing becomes shallow; muscles tense, particularly in the lower back, neck and shoulders; the spleen releases red blood cells into the bloodstream to increase the oxygen supply; and the liver sends out stored vitamins and nutrients in the form of sucrose . . . hydrochloric acid pours into the stomach and stomach upset begins . . . the body's immune system is weakened.

These elaborate preparations for action appear with little provocation. Whenever a person enters the jail environment, their body begins to deal with fear and anxiety. When overlooking the stressors placed on persons during incarceration, it is easy to see why many act out emotionally. Many, whose lifestyle is regularly filled with stress, are constantly involved with this overmobilization of their bodies which, in the long run, causes dis-easiness or disease.

Normal, healthy personalities may react with overwhelming fear to situations that cause stress. As a consequence, they will resort to established patterns of reactions either positive or negative. Under extreme stress (jail sentence, money/marital problems, loss of job) the individual's capacity to carry on could break down, and the resulting disturbance would resemble the symptoms of more serious personality disorders. These transient disturbances may be distinguished from more serious mental conditions on three grounds:

1. No previous history of the kind of behavior that is displayed under the stressful situation.
2. Reactions are reversible: the individual eventually resumes his normal mode of behavior.
3. Reaction is short-lived.

The main criteria for effecting an analysis of an inmate's psychological state are the transient (passing) nature of the reaction and the certainty that it occurred in response to a stressful situation (for example: arrest and book-in). Many situational reactions do occur in the jail environment since arrested and incarcerated persons are at their lowest point and they become desperate about their situation. Hostile arrest techniques, poor officer-inmate relations, an unexpected long sentence, the denial of work release or deferred payment, the isolation from their normal lifestyle, and other situations all tend to make incarceration extremely stressful. Couple these stressors with marital problems, alcohol/drug use, debts, loss of job, and other distresses and you have a person (the inmate) that is really struggling to keep things together.

Many situational reactions are resolved without the benefit of formal treatment. Where treatment is needed, it is usually short-term and superficial. The inmate will need time to "cool down" and "get their stuff together." Calm attending (which could include possible referral action to a supervisor, nurse, or mental health professional) by a correctional officer and proper classification (housed in area where the inmate is not a danger to themselves, danger to others and/or is free from harm of others) will diminish the reaction.

In sum, persons who exhibit a healthy personality, tend to deal promptly and realistically with events that are stress producing and the stressor event becomes a short-lived experience. Less healthy personalities have greater difficulty perhaps because of less self-insight, greater defensiveness because of irrational attitudes, and their faulty perception of the event. In this situation, the stressor will persist until evaluation of the event, acceptance, attitude change, and positive steps are effected to manage it.

#### STRESS AFFECTS THE BODY:

Stress has been described as a physical buildup of energy without a constructive release. This bottled-up energy causes damage as it debilitates the body. The negative affects of unrelieved stress are so common that it is estimated that close to 90% of all disease is either caused or made more serious by stress.

Some of the body problems which have such a strong relationship to stress that they are labeled "stress problems" include:

- o stomach ulcers
- o migraine headaches
- o bowel problems
- o cancer
- o sexual difficulties
- o lower back pain
- o high blood pressure
- o heart disease (often first indicated by chest pain)
- o psychosomatic illness

### STRESS AFFECTS FEELINGS (EMOTIONS):

Unmanaged, upset feelings can play an important role in all diseases. Emotions cannot be separated from our thoughts, perceptions, or internalized beliefs about situations or events. Dr. Albert Ellis is credited with the development of Rational Emotive Therapy, an active-directive approach to healthy coping. Ellis believes that the human is both rational and irrational, irrationally being the source of emotional problems (stress), such as guilt, anxiety, anger, and depression. What we tell ourselves (self-talk) about an event or situation gives the event or situation identity, since all events or situations are really value free, inherently neutral, and have no emotional quality. From this, it would follow that emotional responsiveness is, for all practical purposes, learned, not inherited. Emotions, then, consist of a state of bodily arousal (we see, hear, or feel an event or situation) and cognitive appraisal (we tell--self-talk--ourselves about the event/situation) from our experience and knowledge background. Three facts of life further support this thought and they are:

1. Different people react differently to one and the same event/situation; there are few single happenings to which all people respond in the same manner.
2. A given person reacts differently at different times to one and the same event/situation.
3. Each individual is irrevocably tied to their past in the psychological sense that their evaluation of the present takes place in terms of their internalized personal record of all past conflicts, successes, failures, relationships, goals, and standards.

We have to realistically assess the situation that is stressing us . . . is it stressing us, or, are we stressing ourselves? If negative emotions can produce negative changes in our body chemistry, why wouldn't positive emotions produce positive changes?

STRESS AFFECTS BEHAVIOR:

Stress generated emotions can remain bottled up for only so long and then leakage begins to occur through our changing behavior. These behaviors might be:

- |   |                         |   |                     |
|---|-------------------------|---|---------------------|
| o | making obvious mistakes | o | sleep problems      |
| o | mind-wandering          | o | stuttering          |
| o | over or under eating    | o | withdrawal          |
| o | sexual problems         | o | accident proneness  |
| o | outburst of anger       | o | compulsive gambling |
| o | drug/alcohol dependency | o | suicide             |

These behaviors can create all kinds of problems in corrections work. Problems that can involve an officer's personal safety, the safety of other officers, the safety of inmates, and serious breakdowns in security. Inmates will experience the same behavior changes and will usually go through stages of gradual personality disorganization if the environment is abnormal or excessively stressful.

--Material contributed by: Jay Kucera,  
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## QUIZ

Nebraska Jail Standards require that jail staff receive eighteen (18) hours of in-service training each year. The Jail Bulletin may be used to supplement in-service training if an officer studies the Bulletin, completes the quiz, and this process is documented by the jail administrator for review during annual jail inspection.

SUBJECT: STRESS MANAGEMENT - PART II

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

1. When reacting to constant, inescapable stress, the body's immune system is \_\_\_\_\_ strengthened \_\_\_\_\_ weakened.

2. List five symptoms the body may display as a reaction to stress.

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3. It is estimated that close to \_\_\_\_\_% of disease is either caused or made more serious by stress.

4. List six ways stress can affect behavior:

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CREDIT: 1/2 HOUR CREDIT FOR JAIL IN-SERVICE TRAINING REQUIREMENT.

ANSWER SHEET SHOULD BE RETAINED BY JAIL ADMINISTRATOR

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NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

1. When reacting to constant, inescapable stress, the body's immune system is \_\_\_\_\_ strengthened XXX weakened.

2. List five symptoms the body may display as a reaction to stress.

STOMACH ULCERS, MIGRAINE HEADACHES, BOWEL PROBLEMS, CANCER,

SEXUAL DIFFICULTIES, LOWER BACK PAIN, HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE,

HEART DISEASE, PSYCHOSOMATIC ILLNESS

3. It is estimated that close to 90 % of disease is either caused or made more serious by stress.

4. List six ways stress can affect behavior:

MAKING OBVIOUS MISTAKES, MIND-WANDERING, OVER OR UNDER EATING,

SEXUAL PROBLEMS, OUTBURSTS OF ANGER, DRUG/ALCOHOL DEPENDENCY,

SLEEP PROBLEMS, STUTTERING, WITHDRAWAL, ACCIDENT PRONENESS,

COMPULSIVE GAMBLING, SUICIDE.

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