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# JAIL BULLETIN

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NUMBER 33

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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 III

### STRESS REDUCTION AT BOOK-IN:

The jail staff play an important part in stabilizing inmates during their incarceration time so that personality disintegration does not occur. The book-in process is the first contact the arrested person has with a jail. The jail climate is set at that time and first impressions have been made hopefully for better than worse. . .the inmates feel safe and emotionally secure because the booking officer was competent, courteous, and exhibited professional attentiveness to their situation. At this point, the inmates' stress is being managed. Had the book-in officer displayed abrupt and dehumanizing behavior toward the inmates, the stress of the inmates may have reached unmanageable proportions which would, in turn, create a great deal of stress on the jail staff. How well inmates and their time are managed will generally dictate the stress levels jail officers will have to deal with.

### RATIONAL EMOTIVE THERAPY:

Everyone has felt the effects of a stress response. It begins suddenly . . .your body responds like it is being physically attacked and it automatically prepares for peak physical and mental response. Adrenaline is immediately released into the bloodstream causing a short span of . . .

- Increased alertness
- Improved vision and hearing
- Increased blood flow to muscles, and
- Increased respiration

As you are threatened, you experience a warm flush as your body suspends nonessential tasks (such as digestion) and gears up to protect itself. At this point, it is important to realize that the event that has caused this stress is inherently neutral, value-free, and has no emotion or other significance, except what we give to it. It has much to do with the way our

self-concept perceives the event, either as beautiful or ugly, good or bad, positive or negative, experiences to be approached or avoided. Contrary events and perceptions to our self-concept create anxiety and, therefore, stress. According to Dr. Albert Ellis, author of Rational Emotive Therapy (RET), what we need to do is break down the intensity of our emotional reaction. We need to critically evaluate what we are thinking about this event that is beginning to cause us stress. We now "self-talk" about the situation in the following dialogue. . . .

"Why is this event stressful . . . is it because of the way I perceive this event . . . am I perceiving it correctly . . . do I have all the facts? What is the worst thing that could happen because of this situation . . . could I lose my life . . . well, no . . . should I always expect things to go my way . . . well, no . . . can I do anything about this situation . . . well, yes . . . I may have to change my attitude and behavior and probably will be the better for it." (This self-talk is positive because the event was not denied, and the narrator was trying hard to understand and overcome the effects of the event.)

The most difficult part of positive "self-talk" is distinguishing between rational and irrational ideas. Dr. Albert Ellis, in his book Reason and Emotion, identified eleven irrational ideas that are the primary causes of misunderstandings. They are . . .

1. It is absolutely essential for an individual to be loved or approved of by every significant person in his environment. (The idea is irrational because it is impossible to be loved and approved of by everyone and still be self-directed. It's the adage, "You can't please everyone but if you please yourself, you might influence others by your well-being.)
2. It is necessary that each individual be completely competent, adequate, and achieving in all areas if the individual is to be worthwhile. (The pressure to be totally competent is tremendous and the goals, doomed for failure. An individual who ascribes to this idea views any activity in terms of competition rather than for the enjoyment.)
3. Some people are bad, wicked, or villainous, and these people should be blamed and punished. (Everyone makes mistakes, and blame and punishment are ineffective in behavior change. One is not worthless because he or she errs; the "crime" is in being human.)
4. It is terrible and catastrophic when things are not the way an individual wants them to be. (When life is not going your way, it is unpleasant but hardly a catastrophe. "Catastrophizing" doesn't change a thing and only causes us to feel worse. If we could view situations as merely bothersome, then we could either change the situation or accept it. Agonizing over situations is painful and solves nothing.)
5. Unhappiness is a function of events outside the control of the individual. (Unless one is physically abused or deprived, people and events do little harm to individuals. It is a person's perceptions of experiences that do psychological damage and perceptions are, indeed, under the control of an individual.)

6. If something may be dangerous or harmful, an individual should constantly be concerned and think about it. (This is an irrational idea since thinking about a dangerous situation doesn't change it, it may lead to its occurrence, and can even make it worse than it actually is. Rationally, one should attempt to evaluate an event objectively and, if possible, alleviate or eliminate the fearful elements.)
7. It is easier to run away from difficulties and self-responsibility than it is to face them. (Running away from a problem never solves it. The situation remains and eventually must be dealt with if it is to be resolved.)
8. Individuals need to be dependent on others and have someone stronger than themselves to lean on. (Being dependent on others always puts one in a subordinate position and is not conducive to self-growth.)
9. Past events in an individual's life determine present behavior and cannot be changed. (What has happened in the past is real and, as such, cannot be changed. However, an individual's past need not determine her or his future behavior. One does have the ability to effect any changes in present and future behavior.)
10. An individual should be very concerned and upset by other individual's problems. (If the problems of another places an overwhelming burden upon an individual, one compounds the problem and is, thus, less able to help the person whose problem it actually is.)
11. There is always a correct and precise answer to every problem, and it is catastrophic if it is not found. (Searching for the perfect solution is a frustrating and futile activity. Believing that there must be a correct solution to a human situation inevitably results in continuing dissatisfaction, since a precise answer does not exist.)

Ellis maintains that these illogical ideas are taught by parents, reinforced by society, and are the primary causes of emotion dis-easiness. If we can reason our way through these irrational ideas, we will perceive others and events in a more positive light and reduce the amount of stress that these irrational thoughts were creating.

#### MANAGING STRESS

We must recognize that stress will have a lifelong influence on us and that it's effects will overwhelm us if we do not prepare ourselves mentally and physically. First, ignoring and denying stress effects is common. Most uninformed individuals will handle stress in a detached, unemotional, and invulnerable style. This "John Wayne Syndrome" which has existed in jail and prison work seems to demand that the officer be invincible, unaffected, and uninvolved. The danger in this syndrome is that these stress effects will be carried over into an officer's life style and create family conflicts.

It is easy to ignore and deny, and believe, somewhat unrealistically, that stress will never affect us. We must be alert to the early warning signs and recognize the physical, emotional, and behavioral changes caused by stress. This is the vital first step, the recognition that a tension headache has been occurring and has been occurring for some reason.

What happens next is how we handle the situation. People who mismanage stress usually try a "quick fix." An officer is tense after his shift so he begins going to a bar for a couple of drinks to relieve the discomfort. This may provide short-term relief but will generally cause even greater long-term problems. The few drinks may evolve into heavy drinking, family problems, compulsive eating, overspending and gambling--A high price for a situation that could be managed.

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 III                      NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

1. What is released into your bloodstream as an effect of stress response?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Past events in an individual's life determine present behavior and cannot be changed.

\_\_\_\_\_ TRUE                      \_\_\_\_\_ FALSE

3. Handling stress in a detached, unemotional, and invulnerable style can be called the \_\_\_\_\_ Syndrome.

4. Drinking is a good way to reduce the long term effects of stress.

\_\_\_\_\_ TRUE                      \_\_\_\_\_ FALSE

5. What are three general things a booking officer can do to help reduce stress during the admissions process?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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

ANSWER SHEET SHOULD BE RETAINED BY JAIL ADMINISTRATOR

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SUBJECT: STRESS MANAGEMENT - PART III

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

1. What is released into your bloodstream as an effect of stress response?

ADRENALINE

2. Past events in an individual's life determine present behavior and cannot be changed.

\_\_\_\_\_ TRUE      XXX FALSE

3. Handling stress in a detached, unemotional, and invulnerable style can be called the \_\_\_\_\_ Syndrome.

JOHN WAYNE

4. Drinking is a good way to reduce the long term effects of stress.

\_\_\_\_\_ TRUE      XXX FALSE

5. What are three general things a booking officer can do to help reduce stress during the admissions process?

SHOW COMPETENCE

BE COURTEOUS

EXHIBIT PROFESSIONAL ATTENTIVENESS

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