

One in four emergency services workers has thought about ending their lives*

* Online survey 2016, Mind Blue Light Programme

The majority of us will have felt stressed at some point in our lives, either in our private lives or because of work, or sometimes a combination of both. Research has indicated that emergency service workers are at greater risk of suffering from poor mental health than other careers. Our staff are often asked to deal with stressful situations – call-handlers dealing with irate or abusive members of the public, or instructing a parent on how to administer CPR to a lifeless child; dispatchers trying to organise resources to attend multi-casualty incidents, or desperately looking for an available resource to attend a cardiac arrest when all their local crews are already dealing with other calls; technicians and paramedics having to inform a family that their wife/husband/mother/father/son/daughter/friend/loved one has died, or when they have been assaulted by someone they were sent to try and help. Regardless of the job we perform, we are all capable of suffering from stress.

**We're a team.
If one person struggles,
we all struggle.**

Breathing Space

for anyone experiencing low mood, depression or worry and in need of someone to talk to. Available Mon-Thurs 6pm-2am and Fri-Mon morning 6pm-6am. Call [0800 838587](tel:0800838587) or visit www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk tackling mental health stigma and discrimination

www.mind.org.uk/bluelightprogramme mental health support for emergency services

www.ruok.org.au a suicide prevention charity, encouraging people to start meaningful conversations with those who may be struggling with mental health issues

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/Pages/improve-mental-wellbeing.aspx> general information on stress, anxiety and depression

<http://www.theasc.org.uk/> – The Ambulance Staff Charity – supporting ambulance staff past and present in their time of need

<http://lifelinesscotland.org/phone/courses.html> – Staying Well Road Trip – a course on mental health and resilience

<https://www.seemescotland.org> – tackling mental health stigma and discrimination

<https://www.samh.org.uk/> – information on mental health and wellbeing

Useful contacts and websites

@SAS

access the Healthy Working Lives pages for more information on mental health and wellbeing. The following links on @SAS may also provide useful guidance for staff:

Stress Management and Wellbeing Policy and Guidance.
<http://weblive/cmsSasLite/PoliciesFrontEnd/PapersView.aspx?AutoID=22>

Employee Guidance Stress and Wellbeing.
<http://weblive/cmsSasLite/PoliciesFrontEnd/PapersView.aspx?AAutoI=357>

Managers Guidance Stress and Wellbeing.
<http://weblive/cmsSasLite/PoliciesFrontEnd/PapersView.aspx?AutoID=23>

Employee Assistance Programme
24hr confidential support and information service for a range of issues. Call 0800 587 5670 or visit www.sg.helpeap.com

The Samaritans
non-judgmental support 24hrs a day. Call 116123, text 07725 909090 or visit www.samaritans.org

**You're not alone,
Remember that.**

RUOK?TM
A conversation could change a life.

**YOU DON'T HAVE
TO BE AN EXPERT.
ASK
ARE YOU
OKAY?**



**Scottish
Ambulance
Service**
Taking Care to the Patient

What is it?

The campaign is focused on trying to ensure our staff members feel supported – that welfare checks are done and that staff feel empowered to say when they do not feel ok. We want to ensure that this is managed locally and follow-ups are provided. Due to the service that we provide, we are exposed to more stressful situations than almost any other job. This includes all grades of staff, both in our controls and on the frontline. Stressful incidents may include multiple casualty RTC's requiring specialist medical teams; fatal house fires; seriously ill or injured children; hangings; cardiac arrests; sudden deterioration in a patient's condition; verbally and/or physically abusive patients/relatives/bystanders; protracted "out of the ordinary" incidents. The likelihood is that if it sounded stressful to be involved with, it probably was! By asking our colleagues "Are you ok?", we legitimise their feelings and give them an opportunity to talk it through. Our aim is to improve communication between staff who may have been affected and support to be provided where needed, such as the opportunity for a Manager or Team Leader led "hot" debrief or the chance to just talk it through with colleagues, either in the control room or on station. The opportunity for feedback to be provided to the call handler who gave the initial help, stayed on the phone giving CPR instructions until the ambulance crew arrives, or to the dispatcher

who allocated the resource and arranged the police/fire/coastguard/medical team...

We accept that the working environments in ACC and on the frontline are different but the pressures and stresses are similar – we hear/see patients and callers at their most vulnerable and provide help in their time of crisis.

Where a colleague has identified the need for a "stress break", we aim to inform their Manager/Team Leader so that follow-up support can be offered in the days ahead.

Three words really could make a huge difference to someone who might be afraid, for a number of reasons, to speak up and say that they are struggling to deal with the emotions they are experiencing. No member of staff should leave work feeling isolated and alone.

You could be their lifeline!!

Why now?

Most of us will either have experienced a stressful situation ourselves, either at home or at work, or know someone who has – the very nature of the job we do means we may encounter situations on a daily basis that can be emotionally, mentally and/or physically demanding. One of our Paramedics has come up with this idea, in collaboration with a member of staff from East Ambulance Control Centre, having become frustrated that support was only offered haphazardly after some harrowing

incidents she had attended during her career. When she was then involved in a situation where she and her crewmate were threatened with a knife, she was left experiencing feelings that some of you may relate to – anger, despair, isolation, fear, "I'm just a resource, nobody cares". She decided that something had to change to try and prevent any other member of staff leaving work feeling unsupported. The "R U OK?" campaign is one step in trying to improve recognition of stress amongst our colleagues and has been trialled with some members of staff from East ACC. Initial feedback from that trial has been very positive and we are now looking to involve all members of staff.

How can we recognise stress?

Someone suffering from stress may become more withdrawn and "not their usual self". They may be prone to outbursts of anger or appear more irritable or tearful. They may take less pride in their appearance or their standards at work may begin to fall. They may take more time off work, suffer from loss of motivation or become prone to making mistakes.

Some people suffering from stress have developed coping mechanisms which could, in themselves, become problematic – drinking too much alcohol, smoking, over- or under-eating, or abusing drugs (prescribed or non-prescribed) for instance.

The physical impact of stress

Some stress can be a good thing in the short term used for helping us carry out tasks or reach specific deadlines. But prolonged or repeated exposure to stress can be harmful to our health, causing physical symptoms such as:

- palpitations
- raised blood pressure
- chest pains
- headaches
- abdominal cramps
- nausea
- sleep disturbance/tiredness
- aching muscles and neck/back pain

Signs of stress in a group workplace

- Increased sickness absence
- Increased staff turnover
- Increased grievances/complaints
- Increased disputes within and between workplace groups/teams.
- Poor performance

