

# OFFICER INVOLVED SHOOTING

## DEFUSING HANDOUT

You have been involved in a law enforcement shooting. This is a high stress event by everyone's definition. A high stress event has the potential to change you to the point of disruption in your ability to function 'normally.' Of people involved in high stress events, 1/3 have most of the reactions listed below, 1/3 have a moderate amount of reactions listed below, and 1/3 have little or none of the reactions listed below. So whatever category you fall into, you are normal. You are a normal person experiencing normal reactions to a very abnormal event. You may experience some of these reactions immediately while others may surface over the next few days or even weeks to come. Sometimes, a symptom can go away only to return later. Whatever you are experiencing, you are normal; don't label yourself as going crazy. Anything you say to a Peer Support Member is confidential and privileged (*Alabama Statute 36-21-14*).

Listed are commonly described reactions: Remember these are only **POSSIBLE** reactions:

### Physical Reactions

- Fatigue
- Nausea/vomiting
- Muscle tremors/shakes
- Elevated BP and heart-rate
- Thirst
- Headaches/ body aches
- Teeth grinding
- Profuse sweating
- Chills
- Fainting
- Non-specific body complaints
- Vision change
- Appetite loss
- Defecation/urination
- Itching
- **If these occur, dial 911\*\*\*\*\*.**
- **Chest pain\* Difficulty breathing\***
- **Shock symptoms\* Loss of consciousness**
- **Stroke symptoms\***
- **Panic attacks\***
- **Bleeding \***

### Cognitive Reactions

- Blaming someone
- Confusion
- Nightmares
- Suspiciousness
- Poor attention
- Poor decisions
- Heightened or lowered alertness
- Poor concentration
- Significant Memory problems (especially of the event itself)
- Hypervigilance
- Poor problem solving
- Difficulty identifying familiar objects or people
- + or – awareness of surroundings
- Poor abstract thinking
- Loss of time, place, things
- Nightmares
- Disturbed thinking
- Intrusive images
- Pre-occupation/ obsession w/the event
- Questioning being a cop
- Inability to think of anything else
- Constant fear of losing family/loved ones
- Constant fear of losing job/identity
- Quest to clear yourself/ rush the investigation

## **Emotional reactions**

- Feeling of Failure
- 2<sup>nd</sup> guessing yourself
- Fear , and fear of retaliation
- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Grief
- Denial
- Self blame
- Emotional shock
- Depression
- Inappropriate emotional responses
- Apprehension
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Anger at bosses/public
- Anger at bad guy /his family
- Mark of Cain
- Intense anger\*
- Irritability\*
- Agitation\*
- Temper tantrums
- \*peer accepted police emotions

## **Behavioral Reactions**

- Never relaxed
- Change in speech patterns
- Eating changes
- Alcohol consumption change
- Risk taking
- Crying spells
- Inability to rest
- Hyper alert to environment
- Startle reflex intensified
- Pacing
- Erratic movements (twitches, tics)
- Change in sexual interest or functioning
- Just wanting to go away/ hide

## **Social Reactions**

- Withdrawal
- Isolation
- Anti-social acts
- Change in social activity
- Anger at everyone
- Arrogance

## **Spiritual Reactions**

- Anger at God
- Questioning God
- Questioning God's authority
- Questioning your own religious status
- + or - change in religious activity

## **Your Reactions to Family**

- Irritability (snappy)
- Agitated
- Easily angered
- Over/under reaction to discipline needs
- Arrogance
- Withdrawal/isolation
- Lack of desire to engage in family activity
- Questioning career choice

## **Other's Reactions to You**

- 2<sup>nd</sup> guessing your actions/reactions
- Judgmental statements
- Questioning your career choice
- Wrong expectations from TV/background
- News media reactions
- Mark of Cain

## Warning: Dangerous Evidence Errors may occur!!!

Remember these terms when being interviewed by investigators, bosses, or anyone :

- **High Stress Amnesia:** a disturbance of memory caused by physical, emotional and cognitive reactions in high stress events. In worst cases, there can be a total loss.
- **Confabulation** : a disturbance of memory, defined as the production of fabricated, distorted, or misinterpreted memories of the incident, with no intention to deceive. This occurs especially when pushed for an answer too soon after the incident.
- **Closure:** a psychological phenomenon in which the brain attempts to fill in gaps of memory. "I remember A and C; therefore, B must have happened."

To avoid these phenomena, practice the **10 -3 Rule** for interviews:

- **10 seconds** : on scene: make 'public safety statements' and identify evidence and witnesses
- **3 -hour break:** do not discuss the incident. Get Gatorade/snack. Get a 'Defusing' done.
- **10 -minute interview:** by investigators/bosses after this 3 -hour break.
- **On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day** : there is little danger of amnesia, closure or confabulation. Write reports, do in -depth interviews.

## What to do about it:

- Strenuous exercise within 48 hours
- Structure your time and be active
- Talk to others you trust
- Don't use drugs/alcohol
- Reach out, true friends care, but be careful
- Maintain as normal schedule as possible
- Spend time with others, don't isolate yourself
- Understand that co-workers may have your feelings
- Give yourself permission to feel
- Make NO life changes for 6 months
- Make as many daily decisions as possible
- Get plenty of rest yet remain active
- Eat regular well-balanced meals
- Know that recurring thoughts get better over time
- Talk to your chaplain
- Stay in daily contact with your peer support team member
- Keep a notepad (or use smart phone) to log down events as the memory recurs.
- Get to the range and shoot before going back to work.

What **NOT** to do:

- Do not watch news events/read papers about the event
- Do not talk on the phone about the event
- Do not feel rushed to do interviews or write reports
- Never be unarmed.

### **For Family members/significant others**

- Listen carefully
- Spend time with the involved person
- Offer your listening ear, even if not asked
- Help with everyday household tasks
- Give them some private time
- Don't take their anger personally
- Tell them you're sorry this event had to occur and that you want to understand and help
- The best way to help is to encourage communication, exercise, proper eating and ample rest.
- Talk to other spouses who have been through this. Listen to their methods of coping

### **How to cope:**

- Return to a balance of life for support: Talk to your wife, your lawyer, your pastor, and your police friends.
- Remember, you now have permission to feel. You don't have to keep those floating balls pushed underwater.
- Long term peer support is available for free!
- Exercise. This helps chemically. This IS THE most important thing you can do!
- Just like shooting, baseball, and most everything else, there are the basics you must return to. Use the incident to grow, to get better as a person, and to help other cops who are in need.

**Legal issues:** Read the Justifiable Homicide Statute in your state: (AL :13A - 3-23) .

Google these U.S. Supreme Court Decisions: Read them for yourself; show them to your attorney (if you have one). They are all favorable to law enforcement . Not a single U.S. Supreme Court use of force decision in the last 5 years ruled

**AGAINST** law enforcement!

- Tennessee v Garner (1985)
- Graham v Conner (1989) A Landmark!
- Scott v Harris (2007)
- Plumhoff v Rickard (2014)
- Tolan v Cotton (2014)
- San Francisco v Sheehan (2015)

- Mullenix v Luna (2015)
- White v Pauly (2017)
- LA County v Mendez (2017)

**What you can expect in the long -term:**

- Pre-occupation of the event
- Everybody's opinion
- Interviews/statements
- Lawsuits
- Bad press coverage
- Special interest groups meetings/rallies
- Meetings/shooting review boards
- Mark of Cain
- Stupid state ments mostly intended as jokes

---

***You may also visit our website : [www.alleaps.org](http://www.alleaps.org)***

***State Wide Emergency Toll free: (833) 219 -2461***

Contact Peer Support Member: (334) \_\_\_\_\_