

Pastor Frank Waterstraat
Hannover
Germany

Police Spiritual Welfare Info-Journal:

Psychological First Aid for Colleagues

Certain stress reactions (see the appropriate information sheet) may indicate that police officers have been charged mentally and psychically high within an operation.

It is important to recognize these reactions at oneself and others and to know about possibilities of qualified support. Executives have a special responsibility within the bounds of care.

First principle of psychological care is mutual acceptance. There are no "right" or "wrong" feelings, but only existing. The subjective perception of the individual is decisive. What for one person is an inspiring challenge can be regarded by another one as a hopeless or overtaxing experience.

Proposals to helpful actions and behaviors:

- Establishing and maintaining a culture of dialogue and a culture of togetherness, in which listening and honest desire to understand are normal, i.e. one can say how he really feels without being afraid of devaluation or sanctions. Cynicism, breach of confidence and "wise" advice from an arrogant position destroy or avoid communication.
- Considering the private situation: seriously ill family members, divorce, unemployment of the partners or close family members or health problems can lead to a psychologically stressful overall constellation in combination with high requirements of duty.
- As far as possible take care of each other in operations. This is again particularly true for executives and their perceptions of colleagues.
- Being attentive to stress responses and abnormal behaviors of oneself and others, which may indicate extreme stress.
- Already during operation breaks or on the way back, an open and fair exchange of experienced stress should be possible, if desired; be open to views of others, avoid judgements.
- Physical contact might be used carefully if somebody is overwhelmed by his experiences.
- Overtaxed colleagues should be released without being stigmatized. A support service should be available consisting of experienced, qualified internal or external forces. A special room of retreat should be available.
- Information about possible stress reactions and related aid measures should be given close to the operation in form of a short and clearly structured meeting. If necessary make sure that other existing monitoring or supervision requirements are available. If possible, prepare non-alcoholic refreshments and seating.
- In the time directly after the operation it is necessary to find an individual way between withdrawal and communication needs.