

Firefighter Stress Management

Wildland firefighting is often stressful and sometimes traumatic. It can take a toll on mental health. It is normal to feel overwhelmed sometimes and it is vital to address these thoughts before they become a mental health issue. Mental fitness for duty is just as essential as physical fitness for duty.

AWARENESS – Stress Injuries can be caused by:

- *A Life Threat*: Due to an experience of death-provoking terror, horror, or helplessness.
- *A Loss Injury*: A grief injury due to the loss of cherished people, things, or parts of oneself.
- *A Moral Injury*: Due to behaviors or the witnessing of behaviors that violate moral values.
- *Cumulative Stress*: Due to the accumulation of stress from all sources over time without sufficient rest and recovery.

RECOGNITION – Stress Sizeup:

Monitor yourself and others for:

- Hazardous attitudes and stress reactions (see page xi).
- Behavior changes (not talking, isolating, outbursts, increased use of substances, making mistakes).
- Troubling feelings (fear, anger, anxiety, sadness, guilt, shame).
- Thoughts or mention of self-harm or suicide.

MITIGATION – Stress First Aid:

- Shrink the stigma – talk about it!
- Provide opportunities to calm:
 - Take a tactical stress pause.
 - Refocus; identify what really matters.
 - Try tactical breathing or similar techniques.
 - Get additional time off if needed.
- Get help: just like in a medical incident, a higher level of care may be necessary.
- Reach out to friends, peers, loved ones, etc., for support.