Emergency responders understand the negative effect their job can have on their physical health; however, it can be challenging for responders to anticipate the behavioral health consequences that exist as a result of large scale disasters or repeated traumas. After all, the emotional effects may not be seen in the tangible ways physical injuries might be.

**Individual Resilience**

A large-scale disaster, as well as repeated traumas, can impair resilience, even for experienced responders, due to stress, traumatic exposure, distressing psychological reactions, and disrupted social networks. Feelings of grief, sadness, and a range of other emotions are common after traumatic events. Resilient individuals, however, can work through the emotions and effects of stress and painful events and rebuild their lives.

Individual resilience involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that promote personal wellbeing and mental health. It refers to a person’s ability to withstand, adapt to, and recover from adversity. People can learn coping skills to adapt to stress and maintain or return to a state of mental health wellbeing.

**Why Resilience Matters**

When responders have the tools and support that they need to take care of themselves and manage stress, the team will be more effective. Resilient responders are better able to fulfill the requirements of the response.

Unaddressed responder stress can have a negative effect on others. Stress can lead to poor decisions and increase mistakes that might jeopardize the success of the mission and the safety of others. Resilient responders are better able to:

- Care for themselves and others;
- Access needed resources more efficiently and effectively;
- Be physically and mentally healthier;
- Have lower recovery expenses and service needs overall;
- Miss fewer days of work;
- Get back to routines more quickly;
- Be a support to and have positive interactions with their family;
- Avoid relying on unhealthy coping strategies such as drinking heavily or smoking;
- Have greater job satisfaction and career longevity.
Building Resilience

Resilience develops as individuals learn better strategies to manage stress and life’s challenges. It’s not difficult, but it does require making your own well-being a priority. There are many things you can do to build your resilience, including:

**Get support from people you love and trust.** Talking with people you feel safe with can help you process and feel more in control. If you have a supervisor, mentor, or trusted colleague, they will be able to remind you of what typical responses are under these circumstances.

**Try not to compare yourself with others.** Everyone reacts differently to exposure to others’ suffering or traumatic experiences. There is no right or wrong way to deal with these events.

**Set more boundaries during this stressful time.** Setting limits in your personal and professional life can help you conserve your energy and allow you time to regroup. It is also important to be able to balance your time alone and the time you spend with supportive people.

**Avoid using alcohol or nonprescription drugs to handle your emotions or to relax.** Alcohol is a depressant and can make you feel more lethargic. Sugar, caffeine, and smoking can have an over-stimulating effect.

**Take care of yourself.** Eat well-balanced meals and make a point of getting enough sleep. Daily exercise can have tremendous benefits for both the body and mind.

**Give yourself time.** Be patient with yourself and ask others to be patient with you. Telling people how they can help you will enable them to feel useful and will help you get what you need.

**Know and honor your own limitations.** There are moments when everyone needs a break. Take one before you need to. You won’t be able to help others if you’re too exhausted.

**Seek professional help.** It’s important to seek professional help right away if you are experiencing overwhelming feelings of sadness, anger, or despair; or if you find yourself arguing with people, or are feeling more aggressive, irritable, or frustrated than usual. If you are having trouble functioning at work or at home, or if your personal relationships are suffering; or if you are drinking more, abusing drugs, can’t sleep, or if you just don’t feel like yourself, seek help.

**The SupportLinc program can help.** Professional guidance, support, resources and referrals are available 24/7/365 by calling 1-888-881-LINC (5462).