



# Strength

## First responders coping with trauma Aetna Resources For Living<sup>SM</sup>

As a first responder, you don't run away from danger. You run toward it. And you're always there to act, respond and try to put life back together for others. But who puts you back together?

### The trauma of treating trauma

You're a professional. But you're also human. Dealing with crisis after crisis can create an enormous burden. It can lead to traumatic stress, similar to that of soldiers who've been in combat.

When you're suffering from traumatic stress you may:

- Have headaches, stomachaches, backaches and more
- Experience changes in your eating and sleeping patterns
- Feel extreme worry and anxiety
- Suffer from nightmares or flashbacks
- Act depressed or irritable
- Drink or use drugs to soothe yourself

People who know you may say they're concerned about you.

### Respect your stress signals

You're a pro. You have to assess situations and know when to intervene. But how about you? Do you know when your stress level is too high?

Recognize your stress symptoms and respect the need to help yourself. For starters, de-fuse with some of the following steps:

#### Take a break during the day

Your work comes with a lot of demands. Still, it's critical to set aside time for you every day. Robots and computers need re-booting — so do humans.

Even a few minutes can make a difference. Go outside, meditate, call a friend or do anything that soothes you. Taking time for yourself isn't selfish. It's self-sustaining. You can't help others if you're depleted.

#### Take care of your own needs

Keep your stress in check by maintaining worklife balance. That means taking care of your own needs and having a life outside of work.



For example, be sure to use your earned time off. Plan activities with family and friends to help burn off stress and enjoy life. And make sure to keep up with your own doctors' appointments, fitness routines and other self-care.

**Ask for help**

The pressure of your job can really catch up with you. It is often the less noticeable cumulative stress that goes untreated. If you're having trouble sleeping, eating or regulating your stress level, get support.

You can always call us for help. We're available 24/7, with clinical experts well-versed in trauma and stress ready to assist you.

Remember, first responders need to stay physically and emotionally well in order to help others. Take care of yourself as part of your dedication to your community, your loved ones and yourself.



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