



PEER INTERVENTION FOR
OFFICER SAFETY AND WELLNESS



A line of police officers in uniform standing in front of a modern building with a slatted facade. The officers are wearing light blue shirts, dark ties, and dark trousers with a blue stripe down the side. They are wearing black caps and have patches on their shoulders. The text "EPIC OVERVIEW" is overlaid in white on a dark blue semi-transparent background.

EPIC OVERVIEW

What Is EPIC?

- Peer intervention program
- Based in social science
- Teaches officers how to intervene successfully – regardless of rank
- Establishes protections for officers who intervene





History of EPIC

- 2015: Initial meetings, foundational documents, labor input
- 2016: Instructors identified, training begins
- 2017: Introductory training completed, materials shared nationwide, presented to other departments
- 2018-2019: Peer intervention conferences, in-service curriculum, community engagement

EPIC Is About:

- Officer wellness
 - Safety and tactics
 - Preventing misconduct and complaints
 - Implementing best practices
-

EPIC Is Not:

- Internal Affairs
- Discipline
- Mediation
- Rattling



Why Do We Need EPIC?

- Wellness
- Suicide prevention
- Avoid mistakes
- Avoid misconduct and cover-ups



“The world is in greater peril from those who tolerate or encourage evil than from those who actually commit it.”

- Albert Einstein

How Does EPIC Work?

- Commitment from leadership
- Principles infused throughout the department
- Initial and ongoing training
- Aligns with comprehensive wellness program



Peer Intervention

- Colleges and universities – preventing sexual assaults
- Hospitals – discussing and fixing mistakes
- Airlines – avoiding dangerous situations



EPIC and Wellness

- Aligns with existing mental and physical wellness programs
- Teaches officers to recognize at-risk behavior
- Gives officers the skill set to intervene effectively



A photograph of several police officers in light blue uniforms and dark blue caps, saluting with their right hands. The officer in the foreground has a name tag that reads "B. WILLIAMS" and a patch on his sleeve that reads "EJTB". The background is slightly blurred, showing other officers and a building interior.

ACTIVE BYSTANDERSHIP

Passive vs. Active Bystandership

- Passive bystanders assume someone else will act, especially when there are many potential actors
- Active bystanders step forward, speak up, and take action
- Active bystandership can be taught





Basis in Social Science

- Real world examples
 - Catherine Genovese's murder – bystander effect and diffusion of responsibility
 - Numerous international atrocities – passive bystanders empowering wrongdoers
- Studies and research
 - Dr. Stanley Milgram – obedience to authority
 - Dr. Ervin Staub – inhibitors to active bystandership

Inhibitors

- Pluralistic ignorance
- Diffusion of responsibility
- Ambiguity or fear of being wrong about the need for help
- Hesitance to cross boundaries
- Fear of taking action in a public situation
- Absence of empathy, or devaluation of the “other”
- Danger or cost of helping
 - Retaliation
 - Isolation
- Lack of knowledge/skill





DANGER

The Risks of Non-Intervention

- Discipline, up to and including termination
- Stress/guilt over not doing the right thing
- Systemic damage to our profession
- Criminal and civil liability



Legal Risks

- O’Neill v. Krzeminski: “Police officers have an *affirmative duty to intercede* on behalf of a citizen whose constitutional rights are being violated in their presence by other officers.”
- DOJ guidance: “An officer who purposefully allows a fellow officer to violate a victim's Constitutional rights may be *prosecuted for failure to intervene* to stop the Constitutional violation.”

Key Points

- Active bystandership is contagious
- Retaining empathy is challenging but critically important
- Bystanders have enormous potential influence





How Can EPIC Help?

- Teaches us to recognize and respond to the need for intervention
- Gives us the skills to intervene quickly and effectively – stopping problematic behavior before it causes a scandal, or worse



What Do We Get Out of It?

- Improve officer safety *and* community safety
- Protect officers' health and well-being
- Increase job satisfaction
- Demonstrate commitment to positive community relationships
- Avoid legal risks of non-intervention

A group of New Orleans Police officers are shown from behind, standing in a line outdoors. They are wearing high-visibility yellow-green vests with reflective stripes and dark blue uniforms. The vests feature a circular badge with a star and the words "NEW ORLEANS POLICE". The background shows a clear blue sky, bare trees, and a light-colored building with windows. The overall scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

POLICING IS RISKY

Physical Risks

What physical risks are we exposed to on the job?



Physical Wellbeing

How are we trained and equipped to protect ourselves from the physical dangers of the job?



Mental Risks

What emotional or psychological risks are we exposed to on the job?



Mental Wellbeing

How are we trained and equipped to protect ourselves from the emotional and psychological dangers of the job?



Real Problems Facing Us

- What are some recent examples of issues we've had as a department with misconduct or costly officer mistakes?
- How did officers' health and wellness play a role in these incidents?



Officer Survival

- More officers lose their jobs due to misconduct than due to injury.
- More officers die by suicide than by fatal shooting.
- All officers are confronted with significant ethical, emotional, and procedural dilemmas.

EPIC helps us train for all the risks we face.





FOCUS ON WELLNESS



Unmanaged Stress

The daily stresses and acute traumas of police work can lead to:

- Chronic health problems
- Mental health issues, e.g. depression, anxiety, PTSD
- Alcohol and substance abuse
- Mistakes and misconduct, including excessive use of force



Alcohol Dependency

- 4x as likely among police as the general population
- Long-term health effects: loss of coordination, weakened immune system, high blood pressure, stroke, heart disease, liver disease, pancreatitis, cancer



Driving While Intoxicated

- More than 10,000 deaths per year
- 2013 study – nearly 800 officers arrested for DWI in one year
- DWI = BAC over .08, which can be as little as 2-3 drinks
- Alternatives: cab, uber, lyft, friend, colleague...



Criminal Charges/Job Loss

- NOPD Policy: No alcohol or drug consumption on duty; no impairment, intoxication, obnoxious or offensive behavior off duty
- Criminal and civil liability

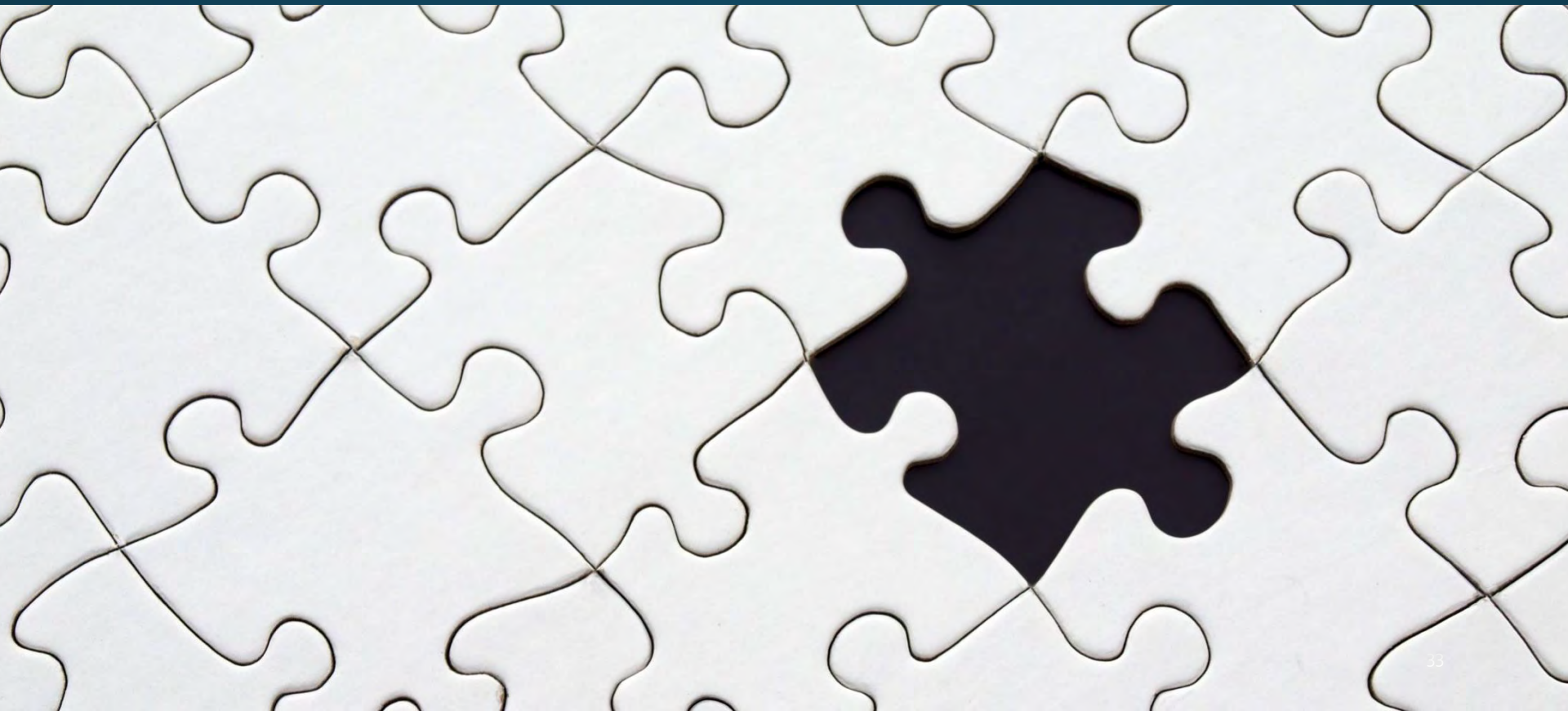


How Do We Avoid All This?

- Comprehensive wellness program
- Accessible resources
- Culture of openness and transparency
- Consistent peer intervention

What's Next in Wellness

- “Missing piece” in many departments’ wellness programs has been mental health and suicide prevention
- Job stresses → greater likelihood of PTSD, anxiety, depression, alcohol and substance abuse
- Need for increased focus on wellness, including mental health
- Improved coordination between EPIC, OAP, and Peer Support



What Is OAP?

- Officer Assistance Program
- Led by Cecile Tebo, licensed social worker
- Available to officers and your families
- Private and confidential
- Free of charge
- May be accessed through self-referral or by referral of a supervisor or peer counselor



What Is Peer Support?

- Goal: Enhance officer mental wellness
- Provide peer support for officers confronting challenging stressors of everyday life
- Serve as an essential component of NOPD's response to officer-involved critical incidents





Wellness Benefits

- Fewer disciplinary issues
- Fewer citizen complaints
- Fewer officer grievances
- Fewer lawsuits
- Reduced healthcare costs
- Less substance abuse
- Better retention
- Better recruitment
- Higher morale
- Happier and more stable officers

Barriers to Building Wellness

- Culture of physical and mental toughness
- Stigma of reaching out regarding mental health wellness
- Perceived threat of repercussions
- Lack of training in identifying and responding to mental health issues





Breaking the Culture of Silence

- Talk to each other
- This is the first step
- We can do this – together

Successful Intervention

- Practice performance recovery strategies
- Implement adaptive coping mechanisms
- Identify physiological and behavioral indicators of acute stress
- Recognize at-risk behavior for suicide or mental illness



Key Concepts

In small groups, respond to the assigned prompt.

You will have 5 minutes to discuss.

One member of your group will present your ideas to the class.





Recognizing Triggers

- What on-duty triggers set you off?
- What on-duty triggers have you noticed in partners or co-workers?
- What triggers have you seen in community members?

Performance Recovery

Manage stress response through:

- Controlled breathing
- Muscle control
- Attention management
- Performance self-talk
- Developing a winning mindset



Adaptive Coping

Calming or health-promoting strategies such as:

- Exercise
- Meditation
- Deep breathing
- Journaling
- Consulting with spouse, family, and/or friends
- Seeking professional help



A photograph of a person sitting on a wooden bench outdoors. The person is wearing a dark red hoodie and a black beanie. Their right hand is raised, palm facing forward, in a gesture that could be interpreted as frustration, rejection, or a plea for help. The background is slightly blurred, showing a paved area and some greenery.

Maladaptive Coping

Strategies that avoid or even worsen existing stress:

- Passive avoidance
 - Excessive sleeping
 - Constant television-watching
- Emotional response
 - Aggression
 - Authoritarianism
 - Heightened emotions or blunted affect/numbness
- Self-destructive behavior
 - Gambling
 - Excessive alcohol consumption
 - Drug use
 - Unsafe sex

An ECG tracing is shown on a grid background, occupying the left side of the slide. The tracing consists of several horizontal lines, each representing a different lead. The top line shows a regular rhythm with distinct P waves, QRS complexes, and T waves. The middle line shows a similar rhythm but with a slightly different morphology. The bottom line shows a more irregular rhythm with varying waveforms. The grid is composed of small squares and larger squares, providing a scale for the tracing.

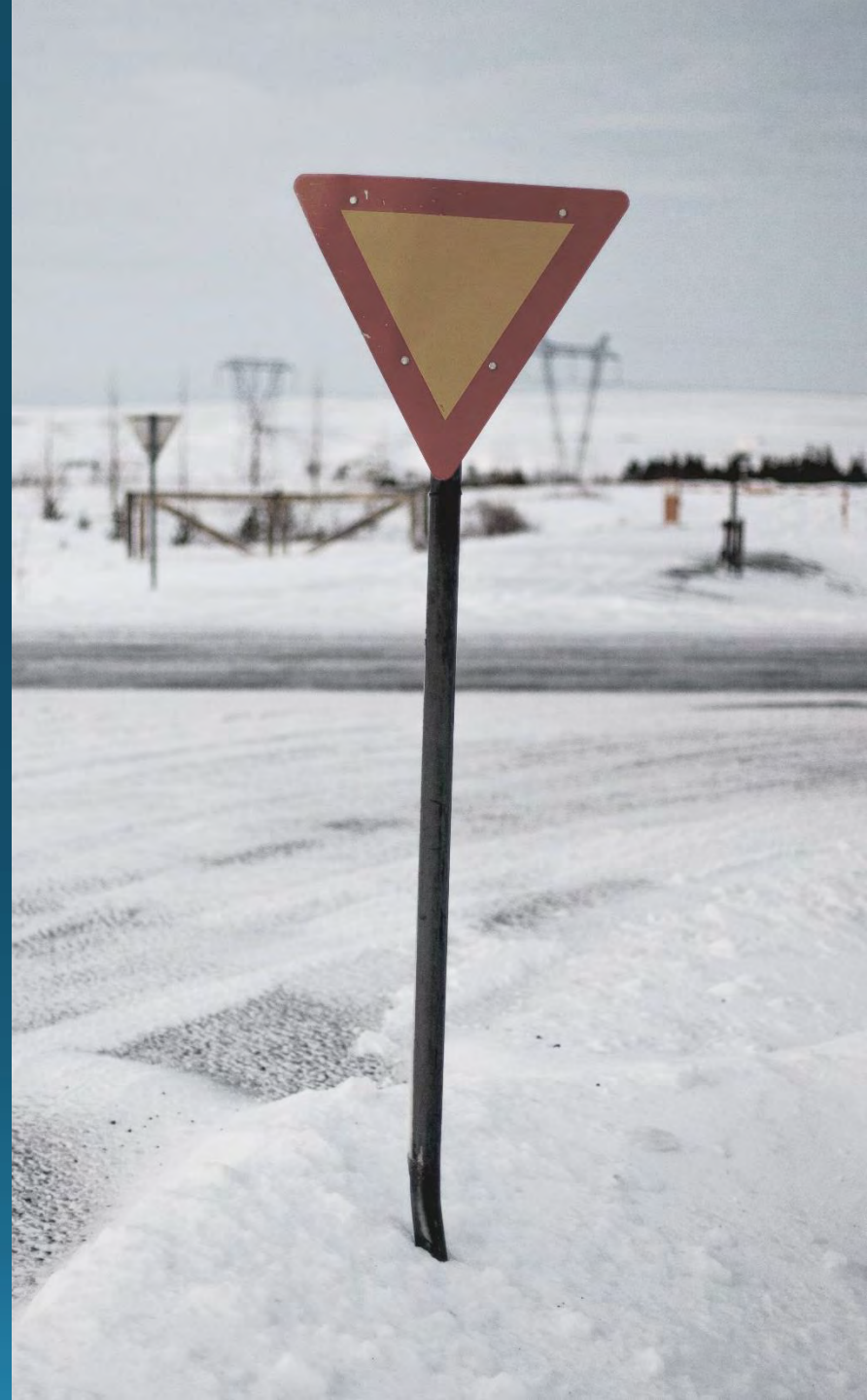
Indicators of Acute Stress

- Physiological
 - Dry mouth
 - Excessive sweating
 - Headaches
 - Hyperventilation
 - Increased heart rate
 - Upset stomach
 - Muscle pain
- Behavioral
 - Aggression
 - Irritability
 - Propensity for violence/excessive force

At-Risk Behavior

Warning signs of mental illness or suicide risk include:

- Significant changes in mood or behavior
- General apathy or extreme cynicism
- Self-enforced social isolation
- Increased risk taking behavior
- Over-reliance on drugs and/or alcohol



A conceptual image showing a glass of wine with several white and red pills floating around it, set against a warm orange background. The pills are scattered in the air, some appearing to be falling into or rising from the glass, symbolizing the integration of substances and alcohol in a person's life.

Warning Signs of Alcohol and Substance Abuse

- Loss of control
- Neglecting other activities
- Risk taking
- Relationship issues
- Secrecy
- Changing appearance
- Family history
- Tolerance
- Withdrawal
- Continued use despite negative consequences

A line of police officers in uniform saluting in a hallway. The officers are wearing light blue shirts, dark pants, and black hats with gold accents. They are standing in a line, facing right, with their right hands raised to their foreheads in a salute. The background shows a hallway with recessed ceiling lights and wood-paneled walls.

PEER INTERVENTION

TAKE THE KEYS.
CALL A CAB.
TAKE A STAND.



FRIENDS DON'T LET FRIENDS DRIVE DRUNK



U.S. Department of Transportation

Collective Responsibility

- EPIC involves each of us giving permission for any other police officer to intervene when we are about to do something that could harm others or ourselves.
- We are all responsible for the reputation of, and public trust in, NOPD.



“It is curious that physical courage should be so common in the world and moral courage so rare.”

- Mark Twain



When to Intervene

We intervene when we see:

- Policy or law violations
- Actions that would discredit the Department
- Encounters that are likely to end badly
- Unsafe behavior and/or bad tactics
- Cutting corners
- Signs of stress and/or mental health issues

How to Intervene

We intervene by:

- Recognizing the need for an intervention and assessing the urgency
- Acting rather than watching (being an active bystander)
 - Do not wait for misconduct to occur or get worse
 - Do not ignore signs and symptoms of a problem
 - Be vigilant and proactive





Keys to Effective Intervention

- Let the person know you care
- Stress that they are not alone
- Practice active listening in a calm, nonjudgmental way
- Offer help developing coping strategies
- Escalate when needed
 - Involve others if appropriate
 - Know when to contact a professional

Reporting

- EPIC does not change reporting policies – **you must still report misconduct.**
- EPIC was designed to help **prevent** incidents that would require reporting and discipline.
- When an officer who has committed misconduct accepts an intervention (and stops the offending behavior), the intervention will be a **formal mitigating factor** in any discipline.





Retaliation Is Prohibited

- NOPD policy prohibits retaliation against an officer for a good faith intervention. This includes:
 - No termination
 - No discipline
 - No transfer/reassignment
 - No harassment
 - No ostracizing, disparaging comments, impugning reputation
- Supervisors are held accountable for providing a working atmosphere free from retaliation.

Levels of Peer Intervention

Level 1

- Everyday interactions of friends, co-workers, and others providing support
- Friends/peers talking, giving advice
- Can consist of a one-time contact or ongoing interactions
- Can effectively resolve situations, but Level 2 intervention may be needed
- Can be destructive without proper training and approach

Level 2

- Formal team
- Trained in peer support
- No advice-giving
- Guided by ethical and conceptual parameters
- Clinically advised or supervised by a licensed mental health professional
- Includes a safety assessment – has an evaluative component
- **Interactions are protected by Confidentiality**

Peer Assistance Specialists

- Chaplains, mental health professionals, police psychologists, other officers and civilians
- Trained in Critical Incident Stress Management
 - Defusing
 - Debriefing
 - Confidentiality law
 - Recognizing signs and symptoms
 - Understanding stress
 - Identifying signs of suicide risk





SUPPORTING EPIC AS A SUPERVISOR

Department-Wide Implementation



Being an EPIC Mentor

- Use roll calls and staff meetings as opportunities to improve communication among co-workers.
- Explicitly express disapproval of unethical behavior and misconduct.
- Leave no room for misunderstandings about behaviors that will/will not be tolerated.
- Promote a proactive attitude and discourage passivity.





Use Your Experience

- Take advantage of “teachable moments.”
- Encourage rookies to learn from veterans.
- Demonstrate professionalism, safety, and de-escalation to new officers.
- Embody policing as a profession, not just a job.

Acknowledge the Difficulties

- Recognize consequences of police stress on attitudes and behavior, on relationships, job performance, and health.
- Discuss pitfalls of ignoring/minimizing stress.
- Encourage officers to seek help and to provide help to one another.
- Emphasize that EPIC is about all aspects of officers' well-being.



Role Plays

Let's practice intervening in some practical scenarios.



What's Next?

- Call the EPIC hotline if you need assistance or advice.
- Contact OAP whenever you need to talk.
- Build your own plan for stress management – OAP can help with this.
- Be on the lookout for signs of stress; intervene when necessary to protect officers and/or the community.
- Involve Peer Support when needed.
- Pursue a life outside of the job – having friends and hobbies or interests that are separate from work can help shift your mindset.

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