

**SACRAMENTO POLICE DEPARTMENT**  
**Academy Preparatory Course**  
**Resiliency, Emotional Regulation, and Performance Under Stress**  
**Professional Development / Officer Wellness / Behavioral Science/ 16 hours**  
**EXPANDED COURSE OUTLINE**

**Course Description:**

This 16-hour course provides California peace officers with evidence-based tools to strengthen psychological resiliency, emotional regulation, and performance under stress. Content is drawn directly from neuroscience, mindfulness research, cognitive-behavioral psychology, and law enforcement-specific resiliency models. The course addresses stigma around help-seeking, stress physiology, coping strategies, emotional intelligence, growth mindset, and long-term officer wellness. Emphasis is placed on practical application for academy, patrol, and supervisory contexts.

**Target Audience:**

Law enforcement recruits and academy trainees

**Learning Objectives:** Upon completion, participants will be able to:

1. Explain the psychological and physiological effects of stress on the brain and behavior.
2. Identify signs of psychological tunnel vision and learned helplessness.
3. Demonstrate multiple breathing, grounding, and mindfulness techniques.
4. Apply cognitive restructuring to negative or distorted thoughts.
5. Distinguish between fixed and growth mindsets and their impact on performance.
6. Utilize emotional labeling and STOPP techniques for regulation.
7. Identify internal and external resiliency resources.
8. Develop a personalized resiliency and coping plan.

**Course Outline**

- A. Block 1 – Foundations of Resiliency
  1. Definition of resiliency
  2. No 'magic pill' concept
  3. Self-assessment of physical, mental, and emotional health
  4. Rigid personality traits in first responders
  5. Psychological needs: belonging and purpose

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- B. Block 2 – Stress, the Brain, and Performance**
  - 1. Stress physiology and cortisol
  - 2. Working memory and cognitive overload
  - 3. Psychological tunnel vision
  - 4. Research on mindfulness and military/law enforcement performance
  - 5. Video review and discussion
- C. Block 3 – Mindfulness and Physiological Regulation**
  - 1. Definition of mindfulness
  - 2. Tactical breathing techniques (multiple methods)
  - 3. Body scan and grounding techniques
  - 4. Visualization exercises
  - 5. Development of personal de-escalation plans
- D. Block 4 – Thoughts, Emotions, and Cognitive Control**
  - 1. Thoughts vs. facts
  - 2. Negative thought identification and restructuring / STOOPP model
  - 3. Emotion labeling and prefrontal cortex engagement
  - 4. Practical exercises and worksheets
- E. Block 5 – Growth Mindset and Emotional Intelligence**
  - 1. Fixed vs. growth mindset
  - 2. Growth mindset under stress
  - 3. Failure, anxiety, and action
  - 4. Emotional intelligence in law enforcement
- F. Block 6 – Coping, Control, and Resiliency Resources**
  - 1. Coping definitions
  - 2. Learned helplessness
  - 3. Circle of control and influence
  - 4. Peer support, EAP, chaplaincy
- G. Block 7 – Purpose, Optimism, and Long-Term Wellness**
  - 1. Purpose and meaning
  - 2. Optimism vs. pessimism
  - 3. Gratitude, forgiveness, savoring
  - 4. Relationships and health research

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**Class Details/Topics**

**I. First Responder Support Network**

- A. WWW.FRSN.Org
  - 1. West Coast Post-Trauma Retreat
  - 2. Significant Others and Spouses

**II. Why do resiliency training**

- A. No magic pill

- B. Questions to ask yourself:

- 1. As you sit in this class:
  - 2. How happy are you with your life overall?
  - 3. How is your physical health?
  - 4. How is your mental health?
  - 5. Where were you 6, 12, 18 months ago?
  - 6. How much effort are you willing to put into improving your life?

- C. Rigid Personality

- 1. Helps others
  - 2. Valued member of the team
  - 3. Does not believe in seeking help for themselves.
  - 4. Sees asking for help as a moral failing

- D. Psychological Tunnel Vison

- 1. When in a psychological crisis, they see few options for getting better or receiving help.

- E. Physical Needs:

- 1. Shelter
  - 2. Food
  - 3. Water

- F. Psychological Needs:

- 1. Need to belong
  - 2. Have a purpose

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**III. Exercise:**

A. Meet someone you don't know

1. Find out who they are, age, where they are from, relationships, kids, etc.
2. Why do they want to be in law enforcement?
3. One thing about them that you wouldn't know if you only knew them informally.

B. Video – How to Make Stress your Friend. List 3 main points

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

C. Exercise:

1. Why do you want to do this job?
2. What personality qualities do you think are needed to be a police officer?
3. What are the characteristics of a resilient police officer?
4. Why do you think there is a stigma against asking for help?
5. What makes a team, a team?
6. List five things that concern you the most about the academy.
7. List five things that excite you the most about the academy.

D. Negative Thought Exercise

1. Negative Thought: \_\_\_\_\_
2. % that thought is true: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Evidence supporting:  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Evidence Opposing:  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Modified %: \_\_\_\_\_

E. Comments on Thoughts:

1. Thoughts can have a powerful impact on how you feel
2. A thought is not a factual statement about the state of the world. Thoughts are a suggestion about one way to look at things.
3. It is a prediction your brain makes that is influenced by your emotional state, your memories, your surroundings.
4. How much you believe that thought to be true may have a powerful effect on your behavior and the outcome.

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5. If you believe you will fail, you likely will fail.

**F. Progress in Brain Research reported:**

- A. Troops who went through a monthlong training regimen that included daily practice in mindful breathing and focus techniques were better able to discern key information under chaotic circumstances and experienced increases in working memory function.
  - a. The soldiers also reported making fewer cognitive errors than service members who did not use mindfulness.
- B. The neuroscience of mindfulness involves, in part, strengthening a part of mental capacity known as **“working memory”** — a short-term, moment-to-moment catalog of tasks understood by scientists to effectively hold only a few pieces of information at one time.
- C. As working memory clouds through overload, decisions become jumbled and reactions more impulsive. Breathing-induced focus lets people home in on the task at hand. But it does take practice.
- D. Dr. Amishi Jha (Psychologist who designed the training) has spoken to the United States Army War College and the British Parliament, and she has been a consultant to New Zealand’s Defense Force and military officials in the Netherlands.

“When the special forces do something,” she said, “not only does the rest of the U.S. military pay attention, but the rest of the world’s militaries pay attention.”

**G. Have a personal de-escalation plan**

- A. If X happens, I will do Y.

**IV. Mindfulness:**

- 1. Mindfulness is paying attention in the moment to what you are experiencing in an open and accepting way.
- 2. Apps and practice

**A. Breathing Exercise I**

- 1. Head and shoulders back
- 2. In through nose – 4 count
- 3. Hold for 4

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4. Out through lips – 6 count

5. Hold for 4 count

6. Repeat 4 times

**B. Breathing Exercise II**

1. Think of a shape, breathe and count.

**C. Breathing Exercise III**

A. Breath out is longer than breath in

1. When breathing in say something like:

- a. "I can breathe."
- b. "I am under control."
- c. Etc.

2. When breathing out, say something positive

- a. "Nothing has changed."
- b. "My life is good."
- c. "I can do this." (Etc.)

**D. Grounding Technique I**

A. Body Scan:

1. Sit comfortably, Take a breath, Open or close eyes

2. Feel your feet on the ground (toes/shoes), Inhale

3. Relax your feet, Exhale

4. Move up and notice other areas (Calf, knee, thighs (contact points w/ chair), Stomach, Chest, Shoulders, Neck, Mouth (clenching?), Eyes, Forehead,

5. Inhale and exhale and look for tension and see if you can relax that area

**E. Ground Technique II:**

1. Tell me something you see

2. Something you hear

3. Something you feel (tactile)

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**F. Visualization Exercise:**

1. Sights:

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2. Sounds:

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3. Smells:

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4. Tactile:

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5. Other:

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**V. Managing Emotions**

1. Emotions are not inherently bad. What can be problematic is how we deal with our emotions
2. Negative emotions can be described as any feeling which causes you to be miserable and sad.
3. These emotions make you dislike yourself and others, and reduce your confidence and self-esteem, and general life satisfaction.
4. Emotions that can become negative are hate, anger, jealousy and sadness.

**A. Protecting Your Brain from Stress Video:**

1. Key points of video

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**VI. Growth vs Fixed Mindset**

**A. Part I**

1. We all feel bad after a failure.
2. But with a growth mindset you don't stay helpless.
3. You believe you can change the situation, and you do something about it

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**B. Part II**

1. If you have a fixed mindset, you believe you are who you are and you don't change.
2. This creates problems when you're challenged by something that appears to be more than you can handle.
3. You could become hopeless and overwhelmed.
4. A growth mindset person feels the intense stress and anxiety, but they use anxiety as a fuel for passion and growth.

**C. Part III**

1. Growth mindset is one of the hallmarks of emotional intelligence.
2. We all have moments when we feel helpless or powerless.
3. People with a growth mindset, understand the anxiety and fear as paralyzing emotions.
4. The best way to overcome this is to act.
5. In order to take action, you need faith in your ability to make a change.

**D. Core Elements of a Growth Mindset**

- A. People with a growth mindset believe that intelligence, emotional skills, and performance are not fixed traits.
- B. With practice, feedback, and time, improvement is possible.
- C. *"I'm not good at this yet."*
- D. Effort is seen as a necessary part of growth—not a sign of weakness or failure.
- E. Challenges are opportunities and mistakes are part of learning
- F. Setbacks are expected. A growth mindset emphasizes resilience, adapting strategies rather than giving up.

**E. Exercise:**

- A. Five minutes to provide a definition of resiliency
- B. Types of Resiliencies:
  1. Mental – How we see and interpret the world and how we create opportunities for growth
  2. Emotional – How we feel about things that happen to us and how we create positivity in our lives.
  3. Physical – The impact of our bodies on how we feel (exercise, meditation, sleep)

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4. Social – About our communities and relationships w people

**F. Resiliency**

1. Whether you have it or not largely depends not on any particular psychological test but on the way your life unfolds.
2. If you are lucky enough to never experience any sort of adversity, we won't know how resilient you are.
3. It's only when you're faced with obstacles, stress, and other environmental threats that resilience, or the lack of it, emerges: Do you succumb, or do you surmount?
4. Our resiliency can be tested by...

**G. Resiliency is about hope**

1. Resiliency is about more than you
  - a. Family
  - b. Friends
2. In research at Columbia, the neuroscientist Kevin Ochsner has shown that you can help train yourself in resilience by learning to better regulate your emotions. The training seems to have lasting effects.

**H. STOPP**

1. Stop
2. Take a Breath
3. Observe Thoughts
  - a. What are the thoughts going through your mind right now as you feel this emotion?
  - b. What are you reacting to?
  - c. What sensations do you notice in your body?
  - d. Is this thought a fact or opinion?
4. Pull Back
  - a. What's the bigger picture?
  - b. What would a trusted friend say to me right now?
  - c. How important will this be in 6 months' time?
5. Proceed
  - a. What is the best thing to do right now?
  - b. What can I do that fits with my values?
  - c. What is the moment asking of me?

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- d. Can I just show up and do the next right thing?
- I. Labeling an Emotion:
  - 1. Why does labeling emotion work.
  - 2. When you label an emotion, it triggers a response in the PFC and negative or unhelpful emotions are calmed down.
  - 3. The FBI teaches this technique to its negotiators
- J. Resilient People (FBI Resiliency):
  - 1. Have stronger performance and better health.
  - 2. Perform better in a variety of areas to include creativity, academic achievements and decision-making.
  - 3. Have lower blood pressure, get better sleep, have healthier immune functioning, and a longer life span.
- K. Exercise:
  - A. Interview someone:
    - 1. Can you tell me about a time when you believed you demonstrated resiliency? (It doesn't have to be something BIG).
    - 2. What happened?
    - 3. What went wrong or off the plan?
    - 4. What did you do about it?
    - 5. How did it turn out?
    - 6. What did you learn about yourself and life?
- L. Bad things will happen to you.
  - A. Key points of video?  

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- VII. What is coping:
  - 1. Coping are the thoughts you have about a situation and the behaviors you use to deal with experiences that tax or exceed your resources."
  - 2. Coping describes the way that we think about and deal with stressful events.
  - 3. It is partly what you bring to the table.
  - 4. It's what YOU think about it, not what the event entails.

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5. Simply put coping and resilience are the ability to rapidly return to normal, both physically and emotionally, after a stressful event.
6. Resiliency is the process of struggling with hardships, stacking small successes next to each other and overcoming failures, setbacks and disappointments.

“When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.” [\*\*Viktor E. Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning\*\*](#)

**A. Key points of video?**

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1. You are not responsible for everything that happens to you. You are responsible for how you deal with what happens to you. Eric Greitens, Navy Seal
2. When you are resilient you use what hits you to change your course. It may not be where you thought you were going but you can be in control of where you are going now.

**B. Stimulus and response**

1. It is the space between the two that provides us with our opportunity to grow.
2. Donut Theory
  - a. Circle of Control
  - b. Sphere of Influence
  - c. Not about me.

**C. Learned Helplessness:**

1. Experiment with dogs
2. Failure to move forward after adversity.

**D. Being resilient simply means that you won't give up.**

1. You won't give up when working at the academy
2. When fighting a suspect on the street
3. When your kid needs help
4. It doesn't mean you won't get knocked down. It means you will get back up.

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## E. Pre-Load your resources:

1. EAP
2. Peer support
3. Chaplains

## F. Resilient People Examples:

1. Audie Murphy
  - a. Decorated soldier
2. Barbie
  - b. Woman with MS

## VIII. Charlie Plumb Video:

### A. Key points of video?

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## B. Happiness:

- A. Genes don't matter as much as you think
  - 1. 50% born with
  - 2. 10% is what's happening
  - 3. 40% is your attitude

### C. Savoring

A. Savoring is the process of noting the positive experience and letting it sink in.

1. Talk to someone else about how good it felt
2. Share your experience with other people (do it with other people).
3. Take the time to notice it, as it is happening, and afterwards remember it.

## B. Behaviors that impair savoring

1. Saying, "It isn't as good as you would have hoped."
2. "Nothing (good) last forever."
3. "I thought about how it would never be this good again."

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4. "I told myself I didn't deserve this good thing."
5. Not staying in the moment

**C. To increase happiness:**

1. Think about something you remember and cherish and run the memory through as if you were watching a video of it (8 minutes)
2. Or do it backwards:

What if you never met your spouse, had your child, was able to get this job...

**D. Harvard Study:**

1. 1938 - 268 Harvard sophomores
2. 1970 - 456 Boston inner-city residents were enlisted
3. "The surprising finding is that our relationships and how happy we are in our relationships has a powerful influence on our health."
4. Close relationships, more than money or fame, are what keep people happy throughout their lives, the study revealed.
5. Those ties protect people from life's discontent, help to delay mental and physical decline, and are better predictors of long and happy lives than social class, IQ, or even genes.
6. That finding proved true across the board among both the Harvard men and the inner-city participants.
7. Just being around other people makes us happier than all the things we do to manage and worry about our problems.

**E. Forgiveness:**

1. Forgiveness is for you.
2. Refusing to forgive is drinking poison and hoping the other person dies.
3. Unenforceable rule
4. The opposite of love is not hate. The opposite of love is indifference

**F. Gratitude:**

1. "Gratitude Principle" says, "The more thankful you are, the less negative you can be."

**G. When you practice gratitude:**

1. You exercise more often – research shows it to be about an hour more a week

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2. When you share your gratitude with someone else - "I am really grateful you are in my life / something you did."
3. A gratitude visit -The effect can last for month
4. Researchers looked at people who were happy or unhappy. The kinder behaviors you engaged in, the happier they were.
5. More acts of kindness on a single day make you happier

**H. Name five things you are grateful for**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

**I. Why you should develop a purpose (a why) in your life...**

- A. Having a Purpose in Life is related to less anxiety, depression, functional disability, and more positive effects after surgery
- B. What is a Purpose in Life?
  1. Purpose in life is a central, self-organizing life aim
  2. A life aim is the main theme for your life
  3. This is central to your life
  4. Who are you?
  5. What is the theme for your life?
  6. Friedrich Nietzsche
  7. A theme that starts directing your life's direction. It helps you focus on what matters most in your life.

**J. Having a Purpose or Why in Your Life:**

1. What do you value?
2. What or Who is on the wallpaper of your smartphone?
3. What matters most in your life?
4. Who relies on you?
5. Who inspires you?
6. What causes do you care about?
7. Who are the people and situations that you are grateful for?
8. What gets you out of bed in the morning?

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9. How do you want to be remembered?

K. What is your Why?

1. Why are you here?
2. What draws you to LE
3. Who inspires you?
4. Who / What have been the biggest influences in your life?
5. "Pain of regret is worse than the pain of defeat."

L. Optimism vs Pessimism

- 1. Stable vs. Unstable:** Can time change things, or do things stay the same regardless of time?
- 2. Global vs. Local:** Is a situation a reflection of just one part of your life, or your life as a whole?
- 3. Internal vs. External:** Do you feel events are caused by you or by an outside force?

A. Optimistic people believe:

1. Bad events are about isolated issues in their lives.
  - a. "That bad thing happened to me, my life isn't full of bad things."
2. Good events make up most of their life.
  - a. "I have always worked hard and in general good things happen to me."

B. Pessimistic people believe:

1. Bad events are what their life is about.
2. "Bad things always happen to me."
3. Bad events make up most of their life.
4. "No matter how hard I try I never succeed."

C. Optimistic people:

1. Blame bad events on causes outside of themselves.
  - a. "While that bad thing affected me, I didn't cause it."
  - b. Or, "While I may have contributed to that event, I can change that."

D. Pessimistic people:

1. Blame bad events on causes inside of themselves

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- a. "It is so like me to have that bad thing happen in my life."
- b. Or, "There is nothing I can do to change this."
2. Anticipating a better future, an optimist takes the steps necessary to create it.
3. Pessimists are skeptical that their own actions can lead to good results and tend to overlook positive outcomes when they do occur.

"Life inflicts the same setbacks and tragedies on the optimist as on the pessimist, but the optimist weathers them better." Martin Seligman, PhD - Learned Optimis