



Association of Orange County Deputy Sheriffs

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Sergeant Matt Davis: Guardian Angel



PLUS *New Year, New Members: How AOCDS Is Expanding*

Built Upon a Foundation of Unity, Integrity and Leadership



The Impact of Traumatic Events

By Nancy K. Bohl-Penrod, Ph.D., Director, The Counseling Team International (TCTI)



I would first like to address that a lot of what I will be talking about stems from the Las Vegas shooting, which obviously impacted many people. This event had affected many of those who attended

the concert, and many of those who knew someone that was there. It is true you do not have to be at an event like this to experience stress reactions.

The Counseling Team International (TCTI) had an opportunity to spend a lot of time with those who attended the AOCDS meetings that were provided to members and to all law enforcement in Orange County and surrounding areas, as well as their families and friends. The turnout was impressive, which is the reason why I am writing this article. Those meetings showed that there is a thirst for more information on the subject of traumatic events and their impact on law enforcement.

One of the most common questions that is asked after a traumatic event is “Why do people react differently?” That question stems from the incorrect assumption that there is a “cookie cutter” reaction to traumatic events. The fact is, there are many explanations out there attempting to explain why one reacts negatively to a traumatic event.

- An individual’s unresolved past traumatic experience surfaces when there is a new traumatic event
- Coping skills are not present
- Living with professional and personal stress
- Preexisting psychological conditions
- Unresolved abuse
- The individual’s proximity to the dangerousness of the event
- How the event is perceived by the individual
- Lack of social support
- Substance abuse
- Health problems

After a traumatic event, people may go through a wide range of responses. An individual may feel overwhelmed by the physical, emotional and behavioral symptoms

Foreword by Lynda Halligan, Courier Editor

After the violence and chaos of the Las Vegas massacre came to an end, it became immediately clear that the healing process would be long and traumatic – for victims, their families and the country, as they try to understand why something like this would happen and begin to question their own safety. AOCDS and its members were personally affected by this tragedy, as many of our members attended the concert off duty, along with their friends and significant others. Immediately after the shooting, we received late night calls from members requesting assistance. AOCDS President Tom Dominguez and Executive Director Paul Bartlett flew to Las Vegas the following morning. They went to the hospital and spoke with members about their horrifying experience. Heroic stories emerged of Orange County deputy sheriffs getting injured, even shot, while trying to protect concert-goers, while others tried desperately to save the lives of strangers who had been struck by gunfire. Whether these people were caught in the middle of the melee or were relatives back home not knowing whether their loved ones were alive or dead, an ordeal of this magnitude will not soon be forgotten.



To help people cope with this unthinkable incident, AOCDS and The Counseling Team International worked together to develop a trauma forum. After hearing from law enforcement agencies across Orange County and neighboring areas, we ended up opening it up to include, not only AOCDS members and their families, but other agencies, friends, relatives, co-workers, neighbors... anyone who needed help dealing with the mass shooting was invited.

On Saturday, October 7th, six days after the tragedy, AOCDS staff and TCTI psychologists welcomed about 80 attendees to the debrief. No RSVP was needed. We welcomed anyone who felt they could use some counseling in the Las Vegas aftermath. The event began with a group counseling session and was later broken into individual groups. Because there were so many in attendance, we decided to hold a follow-up forum a couple weeks later on Saturday, October 21st.

We’d like to thank peer counselors from OCSO who volunteered their time to help on both days. It made a big difference in the lives of the people who were hurting and experiencing countless emotions. And a huge thank you goes out to the professionals at The Counseling Team International. Their assistance, explanations and guidance made an immeasurable impact on dozens dealing with levels of grief and fear that are unknown to most.

that develop as part of a stress response. This is considered normal, as the symptoms develop in most people who have gone through a traumatic event.

- Lack of appetite or increase in appetite
- Easily startled by noises or unexpected touch

Here is a list of common physical, psychological/emotional, and behavioral reactions to trauma, as well as a list of coping strategies for those who have gone through an event.

Physical Stress Response Syndromes

- Headaches
- Weakness
- Gastrointestinal problems
- Soreness
- Hot or cold spells
- Lower back pain
- Faintness or dizziness/Feeling a “lump in the throat”
- Chest pains
- Tremors
- Fatigue
- Increase in allergies, colds and flu

Psychological and Emotional Stress Response Syndromes

- Grief
- Irritability
- Isolation
- Intrusive thoughts
- Triggers and flashbacks
- Mood swings
- Fear and phobias
- Anger
- Depression
- Guilt
- Denial
- Quest for answers
- Acceptance

Behavioral Stress Response Syndromes

- Hyperactivity
- Outbursts of anger or frequent arguments