



Association of Orange County Deputy Sheriffs

# COURIER

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## Orange County Sheriff's Museum & Education Center *A Virtual Peek Inside*



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# Stay Healthy During COVID-19: Work and Family

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



Recently, The Counseling Team International (TCTI) has been told that many of you in public safety have been negatively impacted from the ongoing

violence, critical incidents, and disasters that occurred in 2020 and now 2021. Most agencies call for help when these incidents take place. There are defusings, debriefings, and crisis management briefings (CMBs) offered. Departments may ask for psychological first aid to be available, along with one-on-one counseling services, peer support and, of course, a chaplain. These have historically been around for more than 35 years. Most leaders in departments know when to call, and how to get the immediate help they need for their personnel. This

article is about the troubling impact COVID-19 has had on our public safety personnel, and how TCTI can explain it as a critical incident on its own. It is still hard to imagine that we are living with a pandemic. In my wildest imagination, I never would have thought we would have to protect ourselves from a virus that has proven to be fatal.

The greatest concern for most public safety personnel is their families. They talk about their fears of contracting COVID-19 on the job and then exposing their loved ones i.e., spouses, children, significant others, parents, grandparents, etc. They have expressed that the guilt they would feel, if they had exposed a loved one, would be worse than getting the virus.

The impact this pandemic has had on our public safety personnel and their

families IS a “critical incident” and should be treated as such. The reactions are very similar to those experienced by those involved in other critical incidents. Here is a list of some of the reactions experienced because of the pandemic:



- **Loneliness:** Being prevented from going out and visiting friends and family. If your social life was an outlet for the normal stress you experience, unfortunately that outlet has been taken away. You also have been

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**Robert Rockwell**  
Deputy Sheriff, OCSD

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prevented from visiting or having physical contact with your elderly family members or friends. The power of touch is gone. The increase of oxytocin from hugs, handshakes and pats on the back are not available (and most of us miss those).

- **Anger:** Anger towards this pandemic. It's awful. It has changed our way of life, and none of us like it. Wearing masks is a pain, keeping our distance from each other terrible, and the isolation disturbing.
- **Boredom:** If you are inclined to enjoying sports, working out and maybe coaching your kids' sport teams, you are being prevented from these activities. Sitting at home usually does not settle well with public safety personnel. You are active at work and you like being active at home.
- **Isolation:** "It feels like prison," a quote from a deputy stuck at home. Vacations and traveling have been cancelled, going to church to practice your faith and to be around the people you have a lot in common with is gone. The conferences you enjoy attending, so you can learn and network, are no longer happening.
- **Symptoms of depression:** You may feel sadness. Your way of life has changed. The information regarding COVID-19 changes weekly. This can cause you to feel that you have no control. You like having control over your own destiny and, right now, it seems like you don't have control over things. This is not a good feeling and can lead to depression, a pervasive sadness throughout your daily life. It is even worse if you have lost a loved one or a co-worker to COVID-19. **The grief can be overwhelming.** Being prevented from going to the hospital to visit them in their final days or being able to go to their funeral can be devastating. Mourning and grief have rituals, which help us get through the heartbreak and those rituals have been taken away.
- **A desire to increase the use of alcohol:** Let's face it, the increase in alcohol consumption is on the rise. Turning to alcohol during the pandemic to ease the stress is the number one coping skill right now for many who are in public safety. It is easily accessible, can now be bought online, and can be delivered to your home. The stores have curbside pickup, and, in many cases, the outdoor dining allows you to get your drink to go. I was told by an officer, "I drink at home more now because there is no tab at the end of the night, and I can pour as heavy as I want because there are no ABC liquor license suspensions coming my way." All I can say is be careful of your alcohol intake; you do not want to go down the ugly road of addiction.



Since one of the major stressors is handling your own children during the pandemic, Dr. Debbie Silveria from TCTI suggests the following:

• **Recommendations for Helping Children Cope**

- Children need more adults' love and attention
- Listen to them, and speak softly, slowly, and kindly to reassure them
- Show them your mask and gear and let them know you are taking precautions to stay safe



• **Children Look to Parents for Predictability**

- Keep to regular routines and schedules as much as possible
- Consistency and structure are calming during times of crisis
- Set a timer to help kids know when activities are about to begin or end
- Help head off meltdowns when transitioning from one thing to the next
- Have a family meeting and create new rituals in a new environment/ home school, which includes playing safely and relaxing
- Connect with friends via Zoom, Facetime, Snapchat, Skype
- Pick up a hobby start a project
- Learn a new skill (language, guitar, etc.)
- Set personal goals
- Provide age-appropriate facts about hand washing/social distancing
- Provide information about what could happen in a reassuring way (e.g., a family member may not feel well and how the family will separate from them and care for them so others will not get sick)
- Eat healthily and avoid sugars
- Exercise (workout videos, YouTube apps, gym memberships)
- If age appropriate, have them color, listen to music, dance, read a good book
- Encourage them to play games and/or play with a pet



- Get your children to laugh!

Here are some self-care tips you can enjoy in your own home during our own lockdowns:

- Get a massage from your loved one
- Exercise in your house or go for a walk



- Ask for help from TCTI, Peer Support or a chaplain
- Pray
- Talk with someone you trust



- Limit news; it is confusing information regarding COVID-19
- Get enough sleep
- Learn deep breathing techniques
- Practice mindfulness and meditation
- Have a sense of humor, laugh!
- Hydrate
- Avoid sugars
- Take vitamin A, D and Zinc
- Drink green tea
- *Practice gratitude*

Remember, family members are experiencing a lot of fear and distress over you going to work and getting exposed. Make sure all the safety protocols are being explained to your family members. Many agencies have created support groups via Zoom for families. It helps them feel like they are a part of the department.

COVID-19 is a traumatic event. Agencies need to look at it no differently than all the other critical incidents in the workplace. Providing the right support during this pandemic will make a world of difference to the well-being of public safety personnel.

These are tough times for us all. Attitude matters. If you can keep your resilient selves focusing on the future and realize “this too will pass,” we will all get through this together.



*Be safe!*  
Doc Nancy



AOCDS, in partnership with The Counseling Team International (TCTI), offers the below listed professional licensed and confidential services to members of the AOCDS Medical Trust, at no additional cost. Please visit TCTI’s website at <http://thecounselingteam.com> for details.

**Counseling services can be obtained 24 hours a day, 365 days a year by calling 1-844-655-1035.**

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