

# Stronger Together:

A proactive approach to resiliency, peer support, and suicide prevention

By Silouan Green

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## Sobering

THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE	16.45%
FAMILY/RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS	52.36%
SUBSTANCE ABUSE	14.93%
SLEEP PROBLEMS	65.23%
CHANGE IN VIEW OF JOB/FUTURE	58.83%
INCREASED JUMPINESS/WATCHFULNESS	49.85%
EASILY ANGERED/WITHDRAWN	62.35%
RECURRING/UNWANTED MEMORIES	60.99%

Percentage of Affected Respondents

This same 2018 FOP National Survey found that over 90% felt that there was a stigma in law enforcement that creates a barrier to getting mental health help.

2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024 more police officers die by their own hands than by the hands of another.

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## Sobering

- **46.5 Percent** of surveyed fire fighters had considered suicide, according to a Florida State University study.
- **19.2 Percent** of surveyed fire fighters had suicide plans, according to that study.
- **15.5 Percent** of surveyed fire fighters had attempted suicide, according to this study.

A Florida State University national study of 1,027 firefighters

New Study by Duke University and University of Alabama shows veteran suicide is at least double what is reported.

According to the CDC: for every suicide death there are 4 hospitalizations for suicide attempts, 8 ER visits related to suicide, 27 self-reported suicide attempts, and 275 people who seriously consider suicide.

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### Sobering Story: from a TLE

- Providing you the story I shared with you at the COPS training in Tampa:
- There is a south Florida agency of about 200 total, 160 sworn. As part of a mental health/wellness training all employees were required to participate in, an anonymous survey was provided which everyone was required to take and submit. Two of the questions consisted of have you thought about or contemplated suicide in the last 5 years and that same question for the last year. The responses were that 20% thought about or contemplated suicide within the last 5 years and 10% the last year. To me that is staggering because I am sure many did not respond honestly due to fear of the age old "anonymous" survey.

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### Sobering Data

- 2024 had the highest suicide rate in US history!
- More of the same isn't likely to work.
- Why? We all need a tribe.

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### FIGHTING THE STIGMA

- The firecracker in the hand
- Working out our **"Mental Fitness"**
- Going to the range or the gym
- Easier to lose 10lbs than a 100lbs
- Sometimes we need a spot
- You can help your fellow LEOs come forward for help

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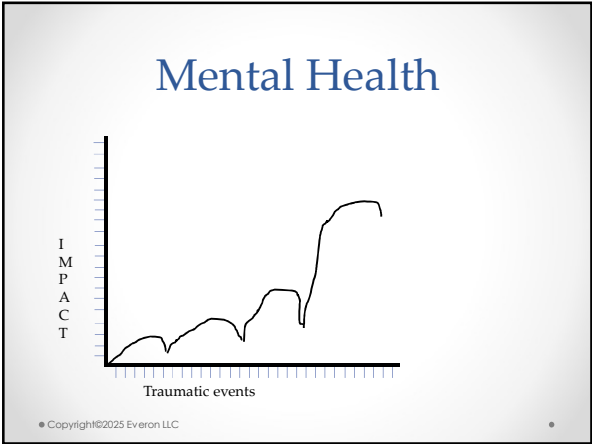
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# General Impact of Trauma

- Survivors' immediate reactions in the aftermath of trauma are quite complicated and are affected by:
  - their own experiences,
  - the accessibility of natural supports and healers,
  - their coping and life skills and those of immediate family, and
  - the responses of the larger community in which they live.

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# Cumulative PTSD

- Repeated exposure to disaster, accidents, deaths or violent acts
- Frequent need to deliver traumatic news to others
- Living under severe threat for an extended period of time
- Regular exposure to the abuse of children
- Regular and repeated exposure to verbal abuse, emotional abuse or threats
- Regular, long-term feelings of captivity or powerlessness
- **Cumulative PTSD can be more dangerous than PTSD from a single traumatic event, largely because cumulative PTSD is more likely to go unnoticed and untreated.**

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# Cumulative PTSD

- But there are many less traumatic situations that can still be extremely stressful for a police officer. Other stressful situations include, but are not limited to:
  - long hours;
  - handling people's attitudes;
  - waiting for the next call and not knowing what the situation will be;
  - and even politics within the department.

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# My story

- From Marine to Broken
  - Tough
  - Broken
  - The descent
- Someone like you
  - I'm not a label
  - We all get broken



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# Free

## Skinny Dippin'

Took a storm  
To crack the mortar  
The stone, the aged clay  
The walls I'd built to shield myself  
From rains I feared to face

Took a storm  
To clear the rubble  
The remnants of my home  
To find the lost foundation  
Poured before I dwelt alone

And the waters flow  
So today  
I think I'll swim

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A new journey



The Tetons

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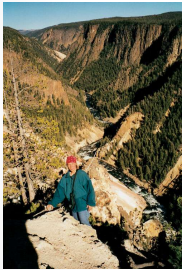
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A new journey



Grand Canyon of Yellowstone

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A new journey



Grand Canyon

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A new journey



On the way to Devils Tower,  
Wyoming

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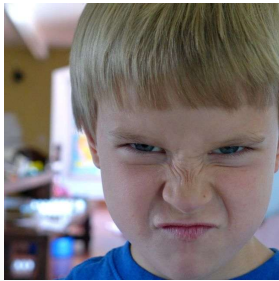
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A new journey



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A new journey



France Park, Logansport, IN

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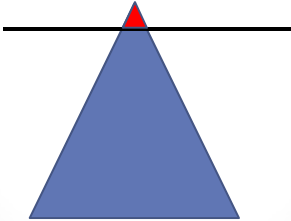
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# Suicide Pyramid



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## 3 Theories of Suicide Development

- Dr. Roy Baumeister
- Dr. Thomas Joiner/VA
- Dr. Viktor Frankl

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## “Escaping the Self” theory

- Dr. Roy Baumeister/Scientific American
- 6 steps
  - Falling short of standards
  - Attributions to self
  - High self-awareness
  - Negative affect
  - Cognitive Deconstruction
  - Disinhibition

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### Falling Short of Standards

- Most people who kill themselves actually lived better-than-average lives.
- Higher among college students that have better grades and parents with higher expectations.
- Idealistic conditions heighten suicide risk because they often create unreasonable standards for personal happiness, thereby rendering people more emotionally fragile in response to unexpected setbacks.

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### Falling Short of Standards

- Suicide is usually preceded by events that fall short of high standards and expectations, whether produced by past achievements, chronically favorable circumstances, or external demands.
- The size of the discrepancy between standards and perceived reality is crucial for initiating the suicidal process.

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### “Attributions to Self”

- It is necessary to loathe oneself for facing the trouble you find yourself in.
- Across cultures, “self blame” or “condemnation of the self” has held constant as a common denominator in suicides.
- Biggest risk factor isn’t chronically low self-esteem, per se, but rather a relatively recent demonization of the self in response to the negative turn of events occurring in the previous step.

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### “Attributions to Self”

- Suicidal individuals who engage in negative appraisals of the self seem to suffer the erroneous impression that other people are mostly good, while they themselves are bad.
- The self is seen as being enduringly undesirable; there is no hope for change and the core self is perceived as being rotten.

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### High self-awareness

- It is ceaseless and unforgiving comparison with a preferred self—perhaps an irrecoverable self from a happier past or a goal self that is now seen as impossible to achieve in light of recent events—that fuels suicidal ideation.

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### Negative Affect

- Negative emotions: acute vs. prolonged
- In Baumeister’s model, the appeal of suicide is loss of consciousness, and thus the end of psychological pain being experienced.
- Since cognitive therapy isn’t easily available—or seen as achievable—by most suicidal people, that leaves only three ways to escape this painful self-awareness: drugs, sleep and death. And of these, only death, nature’s great anesthesia, offers a permanent fix.

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### Cognitive Deconstruction

- Things are cognitively broken down into increasingly low-level and basic elements.
- Baumeister surmises, "Suicidal people resemble acutely bored people: The present seems endless and vaguely unpleasant, and whenever one checks the clock, one is surprised at how little time has actually elapsed."
- Evidence also suggests that suicidal individuals have a difficult time thinking about the future—which for those who'd use the threat of hell as a deterrent, shows just why this strategy isn't likely to be very effective.

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### Cognitive Deconstruction

- Another central aspect of the suicidal person's cognitive deconstruction is a dramatic increase in concrete thought.
- Genuine suicide notes are usually suspiciously void of contemplative or metaphysical thoughts, whereas fake suicide notes, written by study participants, tend to include more abstract or high-level terms
- Even the grim, tedious details of organizing one's own suicide can offer a welcome reprieve.
- When preparing for suicide, one can finally cease to worry about the future, for one has effectively decided that there will be no future.

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### Disinhibition

- Behavioral disinhibition, which is required to overcome the intrinsic fear of causing oneself pain through death, not to mention the anticipated suffering of loved ones left behind to grieve, is another consequence of cognitive deconstruction.
- It disallows the high-level abstractions (reflecting on the inherent "wrongness" of suicide, how others will feel, even concerns about self-preservation) that, under normal conditions, keep us alive.

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### Disinhibition

- The individual needs the “acquired capability for suicide,” which involves both a lowered fear of death and increased physical pain tolerance. Suicide hurts.
- One acquires this capability by being exposed to related conditions that systematically habituate the individual to physical pain.

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### Dr. Thomas Joiner/VA Suicide Prevention Coordinator

- From discussion on Dr. Joiner's book, "Why People Die By Suicide"
- Conditions for the development of suicide
  - Acute or prolonged physical and/or emotional pain
  - Perceived Burdensomeness - Feels ineffective and a burden on others and isolates
  - Thwarted Belongingness – Feel disconnection from others
  - Capability - Familiar with the suicide method

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### Dr. Viktor Frankl

- A life without meaning leads to despair which leads to suicide at its most hopeless.

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Signs of Suicide

- Talking about suicide — making statements such as "I'm going to kill myself," "I wish I were dead" or "I wish I hadn't been born"
- Acquiring the means to take your own life
- Withdrawing from social contact
- Mood swings, such as being emotionally high one day and deeply discouraged the next
- Preoccupation with death, dying or violence
- Feeling trapped or hopeless about a situation
- Increasing use of alcohol or drugs

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Signs of Suicide

- Changing normal routine, including eating or sleeping patterns
- Risky or self-destructive behavior
- Giving away belongings or getting affairs in order when there's no other logical explanation for doing this
- Saying goodbye to people as if they won't be seen again
- Developing personality changes or being severely anxious or agitated, particularly when experiencing some of the warning signs listed above.
- **Warning signs aren't always obvious, and they may vary from person to person.** Some people make their intentions clear, while others keep suicidal thoughts and feelings secret.

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QPR

- **Q**uestion
- **P**ersuade
- **R**efers

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Question

- Q = Question
- If you believe someone is considering suicide, ask them directly "Are you thinking about suicide or wanting to kill yourself?" Don't say "Do you want to hurt yourself?" as self-harm can be non-lethal and it's not the same as wanting to die. Also remember that if you ask someone if they want to kill themselves, this does NOT drive them toward that action. That's a myth that's not accurate. Don't be afraid to ask the question.

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Persuade

- P = Persuade
- Listen Carefully. Then Persuade the person to allow you to assist them in getting help right now. Say "Will you go with me to get help?" or "Will you let me assist you to get help?" Another option can be to enlist their promise not to kill themselves until you've arranged help for them. If persuasion doesn't work, call a local mental health center, crisis hotline or emergency services.

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Refer

- R = Refer
- Refer the person to an appropriate resource for assistance. It's ideal if you can personally escort them to see a health care professional. Next best would be to assist in making arrangements for help and getting their agreement to follow through on this plan. Less preferable is to provide referral resources and have them seek one of the options on their own.

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### Don't Do It!!!

- You will leave others in despair.
- You will increase risk that others do it.
- If you are breathing, you have choices.
- Golden Gate Bridge jumpers: "I wish I hadn't jumped."



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### Viktor Frankl

- Holocaust survivor – Pregnant wife, mother, and brother died in holocaust.
- Based career on studying the existential crisis, the search for meaning in even the darkest places
- Creator of **Logotherapy**: belief that it is the striving to find a meaning in one's life that is the primary, most powerful motivating and driving force in humans.

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### Viktor Frankl

- "If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death, human life cannot be complete."
- "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."
- "When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves."

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# Equation for Resiliency

Despair = Suffering without Meaning

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## Best Practices

- Peer "Blue Line" teams
- Mentors - peer support experts, but also seen as career/life mentors
- Social Bonding
- Leadership as Resiliency Leaders - know your people, set the example
- Yearly "check-ups"
- Flip the script – Peer Resiliency

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## "Blue Line" Teams

- Pair up officers ideally older to younger, but compatibility is most important
- Meet once a month out of uniform, off work
- Go over
  - Family
  - Faith
  - Finances
  - Health
  - Work
  - Hobbies

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Mentors

- Utilize already motivated officers – FTOs, retired officers
- Focus on career development and life balance
- Make career long

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Intentional Social Connection

- Family Gatherings
- Cookouts
- Outdoors
- Physical Fitness
- Breakfasts
- Get creative

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Leadership as Resiliency

- Make mental health training part of leadership training
- Make leadership development a career long cycle from your first day to your last
- Acknowledge that quality of leadership is biggest professional factor for quality of officer wellness and mental health.

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# Yearly Check-up

- Once a year mandatory mental-health check-up
- Follow standard privacy guidelines, i.e. confidential unless imminent threat to harm themselves or others
- Ideally, local mental health professional with first responder experience

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# More of the same isn't a solution

- In 1986, we spent about \$31 billion on mental health services in the United States.
- In 1996, we spent about \$62 billion.
- In 2000, we spent about \$79 billion.
- In 2020, we spent about \$238 billion.
- And in 2023, we spent about \$280 billion!

Despite this staggering increase—3.5 times the amount spent in 2000, and 9 times more than in 1986— 2023 data shows that we now have the most depressed population and the highest number of suicides in recorded U.S. history.

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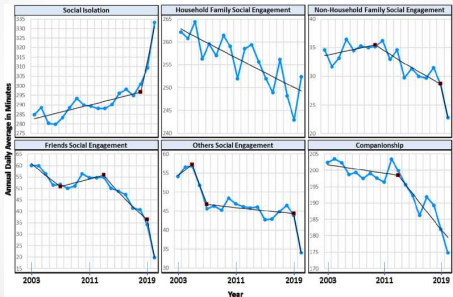
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# Stanford Study on Connectedness



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## Flip the Script

- A 2023 study published in the British Medical Journal analyzed 14,170 people with major depressive disorder from 218 trials and they showed that regular exercise was twice as effective as antidepressants. **Taking just antidepressants improved a person's symptoms by 26 per cent**, the study found, while **just walking or jogging improved symptoms by 63 per cent**.
- A 2020 study by Massachusetts General Hospital showed that **social connection is the strongest protective factor for depression** using a database of 100,000 studied individuals.
- A 2023 Meta-analyses showed that purpose in life was significantly associated with lower levels of depression and anxiety. Another study showed that **purpose was the most important factor to recovering after a negative life incident**.

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## Flip the Script

- Everyone is a Peer
  - Every officer should be trained in peer support
  - Sometimes officers are reluctant to go to peer teams, but will go to true peers
  - On the other hand, sometimes they want to go to "anonymous" peers
  - Should be proactive
  - Build your team
- Resiliency Teams and Peer Connection Teams
  - Critical Incident
  - Financial
  - Family
  - Transitions
  - Retirement
  - Training
  - Life and Purpose

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## The Ladder UPP

- The Ladder UPP is a data-driven life skills program that helps individuals create a foundation for life success, renewal, and is a tool to reach out to others
- Complements the Cycle of Change, Motivational Interviewing and aspects of CBT
- Three steps:
  - Reveal - we are not a label
  - Rebuild - we can take control of our lives
  - Start the Journey - we only need one step forward and accountability to begin the journey of change

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Reveal

- We tend to identify by narrow circumstances and get tunnel vision that isolates us
- We must look through the fog to see that our identity is much greater than this
- Use a variety of life examining questions to dig deep
- Change starts with a purpose, a goal, and a passion to live

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Reveal Yourself

- What is your favorite memory from childhood?
- If you could fly, where would you go?
- What was a bad day at work?
- What is your primary life mission?

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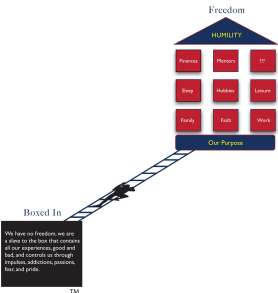
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Ladder UPP



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# A home of recovery

## HOME TO FREEDOM

### HUMILITY

Without it, no recovery. Without it, you can't get the help you need.

#### PRIORITIES


#### PURPOSE


## HOME TO FREEDOM

### HUMILITY

Without it, no recovery. Without it, you can't get the help you need.

#### PRIORITIES


#### PURPOSE


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# Contact

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