

UNDERSTANDING STRESS RESPONSES

What high stress service can do to the mind, body and relationships.



Steel Armor
Mindset
Your mind is the first
line of defense

STRESS RESPONSES ARE PROTECTIVE

Your nervous system is built to protect you. In high stress environments it learns to scan, react quickly, stay alert and push through discomfort. Those responses can be useful on duty. The problem is that the nervous system does not always switch modes the moment the shift ends.

A stress response is not a character flaw.

It is information. Recognizing the response earlier can create more choice in what happens next.

COMMON HIGH ACTIVATION RESPONSES

- Hypervigilance: constantly scanning, checking surroundings or having difficulty relaxing.
- Irritability: a shorter fuse, lower frustration tolerance or feeling easily provoked.
- Racing thoughts: mentally replaying events, anticipating problems or struggling to shut the mind off.
- Sleep disruption: difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep or fully settling after work.
- Body tension: tight jaw, clenched hands, headaches, elevated heart rate or feeling physically keyed up.

COMMON LOW ACTIVATION RESPONSES

- Emotional numbness: feeling flat, detached or disconnected from emotion.
- Withdrawal: avoiding conversation, social contact or activities that usually matter.
- Shutdown: difficulty thinking, responding or making decisions under stress.
- Exhaustion: feeling mentally or physically depleted even after rest.
- Loss of interest: less motivation, less enjoyment or feeling disconnected from purpose.

UNDERSTANDING STRESS RESPONSES

Catch the change earlier. Respond with intention.



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HOW STRESS CAN SHOW UP AT HOME

- Difficulty transitioning out of duty mode.
- Feeling physically present but emotionally unavailable.
- Interpreting ordinary conflict as a threat or challenge.
- Needing more space while loved ones are asking for more connection.
- Bringing scanning, control or urgency into situations that do not require it.
- Feeling guilty, misunderstood or frustrated about reactions you cannot easily explain.

USE THE THREE STEP CHECK

NOTICE

What changed in my body, thoughts, mood or behavior?

NAME

Am I activated, shutting down, exhausted or stuck in duty mode?

RESPOND

What would help me return to a more usable range right now?

HELPFUL RESPONSES

- Use grounding or paced movement before trying to solve the entire problem.
- Create a short transition routine between work and home.
- Tell someone what state you are in instead of expecting them to guess.
- Protect sleep, recovery time and basic physical needs when possible.
- Use support early rather than waiting until stress becomes crisis.

WHEN MORE SUPPORT IS NEEDED

Consider additional support when stress responses are persistent, worsening or interfering with sleep, work, relationships, daily functioning or your ability to feel like yourself.

ACCESS SUPPORT

Confidential counseling is available through LifeWise Counseling.

Serving Texas virtually and in person in select locations.

817 602 8520

lifewise@lifewisetx.com

Immediate support: Call or text 988. Veterans: call 988, then press 1. COPLINE: 1 800 267 5463.