



## **STEEL ARMOR MINDSET**

**THE MIND IS YOUR FIRST LINE  
OF DEFENSE**

# **FIELD GUIDE**

## **Practical tools for real life**

For first responders, military veterans

THE MIND IS YOUR FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE

Use these tools to notice stress earlier, regulate more effectively and protect connection at work and at home.

Educational resource: This guide is not a substitute for counseling, medical care or emergency services.

# QUICK RESET

**When your system is running hot, start with the body before trying to reason your way out of it.**

## 1. ORIENT

Look around and name five neutral things you can see. Let your eyes move slowly. Remind your brain where you are now.

## 2. LENGTHEN THE EXHALE

Breathe in normally. Let the exhale be slightly longer than the inhale. Repeat for 60 to 90 seconds without forcing a deep breath.

## 3. USE PRESSURE

Press your feet into the floor, hands into your thighs or back into the chair. Notice the support underneath you.

## 4. NAME WHAT IS HAPPENING

Try: "My system is activated. I can slow the next move." Naming the response can create space between the trigger and the reaction.

## A 30 second reset

- > Unclench your jaw.
- > Drop your shoulders.
- > Feel both feet.
- > Exhale longer than you inhale.
- > Choose the next action, not the whole outcome.

**TACTICAL REMINDER: Regulation is not "calming down." It is regaining enough control to choose your next move.**

# STRESS RESPONSE

High stress service can train the nervous system to stay ready long after the immediate threat is gone. The goal is not to eliminate that response. The goal is to recognize when it is helping and when it is costing you.

## **HYPERAROUSAL** Too much activation

Irritability, scanning, racing thoughts, tension, anger, panic, difficulty sleeping.

## **REGULATION RANGE** Enough activation

Alert but flexible, able to think, communicate, connect and choose a response.

## **HYPOAROUSAL** Too little activation

Numbness, shutdown, exhaustion, disconnection, going blank, withdrawing or feeling unreal.

## Notice your early signs

What usually tells you that you are moving out of your regulation range?

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# TRIGGER RESPONSE

A trigger is information, not an order. The goal is to recognize activation early enough to choose a response before the reaction chooses for you.

## Build your trigger plan

### 1. Trigger or situation

What tends to activate you? Keep it broad. You do not need to describe a traumatic event.

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### 2. Early warning signs

What happens first in your body, thoughts or behavior?

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### 3. Strategy A: regulate

What can help your nervous system come down one notch?

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### 4. Strategy B: create space

What can buy you time before you respond?

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### 5. Strategy C: reconnect

What helps you return to the person, task or value that matters?

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**Remember: A useful plan is simple enough to use when you are activated.**

# BOUNDARY REINFORCEMENT

A boundary is not a demand that controls another person. It is a clear decision about what you will do to protect your time, safety, values or relationships.

## Simple boundary formula

**WHEN this happens, I WILL do this, BECAUSE this is what I need to protect.**

## Examples

- > "When I get home, I need 20 minutes to transition before we talk about logistics."
- > "I am willing to talk about this, but not while we are yelling."
- > "I can support you, but I cannot be the only person you rely on."
- > "I am off duty. I will respond to nonurgent work messages tomorrow."

## Your boundary

What needs protection right now?

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What will you do when the boundary is crossed?

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# OFF SHIFT TRANSITION

The body may leave the shift before the nervous system does. A transition routine gives your brain a repeated signal that the environment has changed.

## 10 minute decompression sequence

### MINUTES 0-2 **Orient**

Notice where you are. Take in the environment. Let your eyes and body register that the shift is over.

### MINUTES 2-4 **Discharge**

Walk, stretch, shake out tension, shower or change clothes. Give the activation somewhere to go.

### MINUTES 4-7 **Downshift**

Use a longer exhale, music, silence or another predictable cue that tells your system to reduce intensity.

### MINUTES 7-10 **Reconnect**

Ask: "Who do I want to be when I walk through the door?" Choose one small action that matches that answer.

## Home arrival cue

Choose one repeatable signal that marks the transition home:

- > Change clothes.
- > Put the phone away for ten minutes.
- > Greet your family before talking logistics.
- > Take a short walk.
- > Sit quietly before entering the house.

# HOME FRONT

**The job comes home, even when the uniform does not.**

Long shifts, difficult calls, hypervigilance, exhaustion and emotional distance can affect the entire family. Support at home works best when everyone has language for what is happening and permission to have needs of their own.

## A simple connection check

- > What kind of support would feel helpful tonight?
- > Do you need space, connection or help with something practical?
- > Is this a problem we need to solve now, or something we can return to later?
- > What would help us feel like a team again?

## Support without carrying everything

Caring about someone does not require becoming responsible for their regulation, recovery or every consequence of the job.

- > Ask what support is wanted instead of guessing.
- > Name your own limits clearly and respectfully.
- > Make room for ordinary family life that is not centered on the job.
- > Use counseling when the same patterns keep repeating or connection continues to erode.

**HOME FRONT: Families deserve tools, understanding and support of their own.**

# WHEN TOOLS ARE NOT ENOUGH

Sometimes practical tools are enough. Sometimes the weight is telling you it is time for more support.

## Counseling through LifeWise Counseling

Confidential counseling is available for first responders, military veterans, spouses, partners and family members navigating trauma, stress, relationship strain and the cumulative impact of service.

Serving Texas virtually and in person in select locations.

COUNSELING INQUIRY

## Immediate support

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline  
Call or text 988

Veterans Crisis Line  
Call 988, then press 1  
Text 838255

COPLINE  
1 800 267 5463  
Confidential peer support for law enforcement.

Immediate life threatening emergency  
Call 911

## CONTACT STEEL ARMOR MINDSET

Questions about counseling, training, agency partnerships, Home Front or Field Guide resources?  
LifeWise Counseling | 817 602 8520 | [lifewise@lifewisetx.com](mailto:lifewise@lifewisetx.com)  
Serving Texas virtually and in person in select locations.

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**Use the Field Guide early. The best time to build a response plan is before you need it.**