CASAT Podcast Network

So today we're here talking with Trudy about coping with your fears safety and first responders in the news.

Such a timely topic that we're here talking about today.

Uh first responders.

Safety is you know, first and foremost for most families.

So how can a spouse and or family work together through their fears about their family member?

So just the first important part is to recognize that fears created by thinking styles that focus too much on the future.

So for example, a person can think what if he gets in a shooting or what if she gets hurt on the job.

And it's it's that that what if thinking once the first, what if starts we generally keep going unfortunately to more and more what ifs and there are an infinite number of what ifs.

Um, and then it gets worse and worse and it will sometimes lead to just that really excessive worry catastrophizing and even to panic attacks for some folks.

Um obviously first responders have difficult jobs, it's really wise for families to think through and the most likely difficulties that our first responders might go through and then really to come up with some practical plans, how to deal with each one.

So it's truly, it's just a practical uh, process.

It's, it's to me, I don't see any difference in this from a really practical standpoint instead of getting really emotional about it sort of like why we all have automobile insurance or why we have homeowner's insurance.

We really don't have any intention of ever using them.

We hope we never ever have to use those insurances, but we have those in place just in case.

Well, some of these conversations are also some of those just in case conversations and because when it comes right down to it, confronting your fears, always the smartest intervention and the more you avoid your fears, the worst they become, the more powerful they become.

So when we confront them instead though they are going to end up diminishing in their capacity to bother us.

Another really good skill here is what we call fact lists.

And so so let's say your fear is that your loved one is going to get hurt on the job.

And so what you can do instead is right a fact list about all of the ways that family member is very skilled at their job.

How safe their department is, how much support they have amongst either in their squad or in their crew.

Um, all of their past successes when it came to difficulties at work etcetera.

So you just keep building this fact list about the actual truth about that person's skill set and their way of approaching their job.

And that will end up very often.

Um, can be the balance between the what if list and all of the fears that come up.

And I usually suggest that people write out your fact list with actual a pen on the paper and put it up on your wind mirror, in your bathroom or someplace that you have to actually see it every day, read it every day and get as emotionally attached to the facts as you are to the things you made up so very often, why the anxiety gets so intense is we're emotionally attached to our anxiety list.

So we want to get emotionally attached to the facts and get like really like really happy about them, pleased about them like, oh, I feel so good about this as opposed to only being attached to the stuff we make up.

I, I love that kind of skill set of shifting your mindset and then attaching your emotions to a healthy mindset.

I think that's so important.

Another thing we talked about a lot, especially with first responders and their family members is the way they can be vilified and be viewed in a negative fashion.

So how can family members and responders first responders avoid becoming overly focused on news stories um, and others that have made mistakes on their job?

Well, I think first in this for this question, the important thing is that you really want to determine ahead of time, a boundary around news exposure.

And I think this is just an important thing for all of us, whether you're a first responder or not.

The news is excessively negative and it doesn't matter who you are or what, what news you're watching or listening to a reading.

It's very, very negative, anytime we are overexposed by negative things, it just primes our brain for more negative things.

And so for all of us, whenever you're taking, I always call the news and social media like it's it's it's poison I said, so you sort of have to decide how big of a dose of poison are you willing to take today and you and certainly hopefully most of us are not going to be taking spoonful after spoonful all day long that we decide perhaps just a dose and that we're going to get in and get out.

We're gonna get the headlines or whatever we're gonna do and that's going to be the end of it.

And I see this as being true of any really overly negative impactful thing.

It's just, if we can limit our dose, I would say it's just a healthy thing to do.

Um also you're gonna want to decide on the sources of your news lean, I would say lean towards information.

That's a whole lot more fact based rather than the opinions and the reason for it is this opinion pieces in general are loaded with emotion.

So you're gonna have that emotion triggered in you.

So if it was negative before, it's negative in an entirely different way and or its its angry or it's or it's full of lots and lots of reasons to be worried.

And so it's difficult for us to get ourselves talked back down as easily when someone primes your emotional states for that, that effectively.

So I'd say stick with the really just bland fact based kinds of things this happened and this happened then this happened rather than the opinion pieces because those games, especially if you're not doing really well or you've noticed you've been kind of in a cycle of more negativity yourself.

Another thing is if you're noticing more anxiety around news exposure, it's, it could be a good and interesting experiment to take a news vacation.

Um, maybe for a while you only read written news and that you don't watch any news other people like for me very frequently, I will take a news vacation monday through friday.

I won't look at any news, any social media whatsoever.

Sometimes I'll even get a call to see somebody unless they did you see it in the news and I'm going to properly tell, you know, because I don't usually have any exposure during my workweek because I'm trying to be so present for my patients that I don't need that kind of other negative exposure because that's just gonna drain me.

And that's not really going to be effective anyway.

And also you want to check in regularly.

Like how frequently do you really need to catch up with news?

Does it have to be a multiple times a day.

Will, um, will the news changed so fundamentally between the an hour ago that you really feel like you need to constantly be checking it.

Um, it's, I think it would be better to side like one time a day and uh, and then even on your days off to decide like do I catch up or do I just do an initial exposure, that kind of thing.

So you do want to take the occasional breaks?

I think that's super, super important.

It's easy to get, It's, it's sort of like that accident on the side of the road where, you know, people are driving by and then they can't help but look at it.

And then of course, now another accident happens because people aren't really paying attention to their driving.

I feel that way about that over exposure to negativity.

I think it just sets us up for noticing more negative things in all around us.

And so I don't know that psychologically it's really in our best interest to begin with.

This makes so much sense to me.

You know, I have practiced a lot of these strategies in my own life over the last year and I only will take in pretty much written news because I find the images really impact me, especially before bed.

I can't watch the news before bed or I end up having wild dreams about it.

And so I find reading the written news and only taking it in on certain times and this past fall, I actually had to take myself off of social media to take a vacation from social media just to support my own well being.

And so they really made a huge difference in my life as I said, You know, there's a reason Jim Gaffigan calls it, we should change the news to the worst things that are happening and then the local news are the worst things that are happening closest to you.

So I feel like we could, we could start a petition and make it more realistic.

Well I love, you know, really thinking about your news source and a fact based versus opinion really in priming all those emotions.

It's so critical.

So with all of the information in the news about retirement and suicide and health issues for first responders is what we see in the news.

That's at all true.

I would say some of the information is certainly anecdotal, some of it might be accurate right now, but some of those outcomes are probably not written in cement because those might be, that might be information that is affecting people who Retired and because the data tends to come out somewhere between seven and let's say 5-7 years after the data is gathered.

So this might be a group of people that actually retired, let's say 15 years ago, Let's say and that sort of thing.

Um, while first responders do have some additional risk factors, there's no doubt about that.

Many of these can be improved and even reversed with some attention and I think that's part of what we, we sometimes we will look at it like, oh, this is fate, like this is just what's going to happen to me and this is just awful.

Most of these issues.

Obviously our lifestyle choices and so many of them has to do with that.

So for example, getting help for any psychological psychological condition throughout a career would make the first responder healthier going into retirement.

So if you didn't wait until either the last minute, right before retirement or that you were really having just on an ongoing basis, making sure you're saying okay, I really want to attend to this because I don't want to have a whole bunch of stuff that I have to take care of right before I retire and things other lifestyle things like like sleep.

Um many first responders have very poor sleep, having inadequate nutrition, lack of exercise and even obesity.

Sometimes those are things that could be fixed now and then you're, you're gonna end up with an entirely different outcome potentially.

Um and also I think families really need to overall look deeply at their wellness and address those issues when they're easily managed.

I think it's interesting about first responders as they are some of the most amazing problem solvers of other people's problems and sometimes it's hard and I think that's probably true of all of us to a certain degree.

It's like, man, I can look into somebody else's life and instantly see what needs to get fixed and it's not always easy to look at ourselves.

And so sometimes finding those mechanisms within a family to really look at what's going on and finding ways to start reversing those things are improving those things right now right now in our life rather than waiting until they're completely out of control, it's a lot easier to lose, you know, all of our covid 20 before it becomes the covid 40.

So for sure, that's good.

What what about when family members have first responders that are in some critical situations.

So what are some useful techniques for family members to utilize if their first responder isn't a critical incident, like a fire with injuries or officer involved shooting or anything else like that.

Okay, this is one of those ones.

I think we, you would want to have this as part of that conversation we were talking about earlier, that you want to plan these things ahead of time.

One thing is you're gonna want to in the immediate aftermath, really limit social media and news exposure and I'm even a big fan of get off of it or have someone else monitor it just so that you don't end up having that.

That because that can be so dis regulating at the very, very beginning after an event and or you only allow yourself to receive information directly from your department, any updates from them.

So they'll give you this the sort of the bullet points of what's going on rather than a bunch of different people's opinions and all of the comments after a news article, which I think so really already deciding if I get into some kind of critical incident that's going to make the news, I'm going to stay off the news for two weeks, something like that.

Um, also you want to decide ahead of time who your social support network is going to be.

I usually tell people limited to maybe two people.

So these are the only two people on some level I'm going to actually be interacting with during this first phase.

This very first time period you may even want to assign one of those two people to be their sort of your, your go to person that if anybody else reaches out that you'll have them contact them.

So you'll have one of your support person so that you don't end up having to retell the story To, you know, 57 different people as opposed to.

I mean they have these two people I talked to and then they are the ones who are fielding the calls or the texts from all of these other people so that I'm I'm just being allowed the space I need to get through this to really, really get some really good rest to make sure that I'm concentrating on myself, care to make sure I have time for for just really, really taking care of myself in the aftermath of something and the for the family to take care of themselves in the aftermath of something like that.

Um also should Children um shield Children from the initial few weeks of the incident, um as it's hitting, especially really young Children, if they really don't have an understanding, if you're the type of person that unfortunately have the news on, and then all of a sudden, let's say, your family members face flashes on the screen.

That's gonna be really, and if it's it's gonna be difficult for this.

So you're gonna want to sort of have that in mind as well with older Children, you may have to have this discussion ahead of time that this might be what would happen.

This is what we're going to do as a family.

We're going to, you know, we're gonna have this person and this person and we're going to be our the people who are going to be taking phone calls and is going to respond to texts, we are going to be doing this this and this in the aftermath.

And so that way that they're at least understand why the family is uh having a little bit of a shift in maybe how they normally would be acting because there you're in the midst of this crisis, and so that you're going to want to have that set up ahead of time, so that you're, you're not scrambling at the last minute.

Yeah, I'm really struck by the importance of planning ahead for um the, you know, the unlikely event that happens and how do we plan and prepare to support ourselves in these times?

And it's just as critical.

So if the family fears have taken over um what are some ways that these fears can be deconstructed?

So first it's important for them to pay attention to their thoughts and their actions that relate to avoidance.

Usually those are sort of your best indicators is like when you're looking at your life, like let's say six months ago or a year ago to notice, I mean other than because of Covid but a year ago, like saying like, oh I am not doing this as much or I've I've I've almost completely stopped that or I have all these rules now around X, Y Z.

So you're going to really want to take a look at those types of things and and particularly related to your thinking.

Some avoidance can be healthy at times.

Obviously avoiding phone calls or avoiding the news right after critical incidents.

That's healthy avoidance.

But a lot of our avoidance is that over utilization of a coping mechanism and now it's actually become problematic.

So we which will generally create smaller and smaller worlds for us.

So our world gets tinier and tinier, which means then I'm actually also have less access to support.

So it just becomes increasingly difficult problem.

Um So we want to be able to make sure that we're aware of our thinking and aware of our avoidance, any avoidance strategies we've gotten in place because that's going to give you a clue of where you need to intervene because you're going to reconstruct those areas that you've avoided.

Whether it's that you're not seeing anyone socially, that you're going to begin to build that back up again, you're going to reconstruct that back up again.

Um Also any of the other pieces of it too, which is like we were even talking about having a fact list.

So I may need a fact list on several different things that I just get every day.

I'm reading it, I'm getting emotionally attached to it.

I may be adding to it, but I've known some people I've worked with that have four or five fact lists um on their bathroom mirror because they needed to be reminded of the truth of some things and that that will, instead of having all of our brain go into those rabbit holes where there is stuff that we've made up, we get very emotionally attached to, but we made it up.

It's not it's not actually actively real right now.

Um And also there's going to be a certain subset of people who when their life gets really, really impacted by fear that they may need to attend therapy and because they're going to need to be sometimes helped with some specific skills and especially if you have become overly attached to the fear, like you believe it's going to happen um and it's and certainly if it's affecting you to the point it's decreasing your overall quality of life and if you feel like you're anxious all the time and anxiety is a thinking disorder and so it is very possible to become aware of your thinking and then to learn to intervene in your thinking in some really effective ways that can really just just change the direction of that whole process for you.

Trudy I'm curious, you know, you mentioned Covid a little bit earlier and have you seen an increase in people's fear over the last year?

I mean we've had Covid plus so many things happening in our world, what does that impact Ben?

Yeah, they're actually for in my own practice there has been a very, I would say a pretty steep increase in people dealing with anxiety, even people who didn't really have any before.

I think some people are just more at risk for that because they were already uh generally they were a worrier to begin with.

They worried about things that were somewhat sensible to be worried about, like I got to make sure that I get my paycheck in the bank so that I have enough to cover my bills, that kind of thing or that they're worried about, like I hope my boss thinks I'm doing a good job, those kinds of things, those are just natural worries that all of us have.

But I think the covid and you know, from multiple levels one it is a big thing to fear, especially if you have like older parents or if you had somebody that you knew actually have gotten really, really ill, that's going to make your own worries about your own health get become increased.

But in addition to that being cut off from our support systems because a lot of times our support system, which is so vitally important for all of us in our mental health, just general mental health is they help normalize our behavior.

So like sometimes, you know, you run something by a friend and they go, whoa, that's a little off Trudy and then you're going like, okay, so that's sort of like, so okay, I get myself back on track, like, nope, that's not true.

Um but when we're not really talking to people very much or we're not really, they're not really seeing us and saying like, oh you you don't seem like you're doing as well as normal and we actually can get into that face to face kind of conversation, we're gonna notice more that if that something is off with a friend, if we see them versus even if we're just talking with them over the phone or if we're obviously for so many of us just texting back and forth, we can hide out, you know via via our texts, you know, life, but we really want to make sure that we're seen by somebody so that they can help us catch these, this anxiety while it's small and easier to tackle versus when it becomes gigantic, there's a great Children's book that I love called Captain snout and the amazing superpowers by Dr Daniel Ayman.

And so one of the questions in this book is you ask yourself with any thoughts, He looks at different automatic negative thoughts and ask, is this true?

Are you sure it's true?

Is it 100% true?

And so I find I do that with my son when he has these automatic negative thoughts and it's super helpful one.

I think too.

I mean as much as, as most of us dealt with that exact same thing you're talking about how much more first responders to.

I mean just remember the first couple of weeks I made a mistake of watching some zombie movies when we were on lockdown and realized we were in the beginning of every zombie movie created and my family was out of town for spring break already.

And about like almost as soon as the last one finished, there's a helicopter that kept flying over my house and it really started to freak me out a little bit and I realized I need some people to talk to because I'm getting too in my head and it's just crazy how things can just shift like that.

I'm like, what if you know, but nothing compared to folks who were, you know, seeing the worst that Covid had to offer and and seeing the families that were devastated by it.

And so I think these things are so important, you know, and I think resources, it always comes out.

But what are some good resources for folks that are trying to deal with their fears and navigating, you know, the safety and the stigma and kind of the vilifying, we've talked about a lot in these these jobs.

Okay, so there's some uh there's some some resources out there, for example, Blue Health dot org uh is honors officers, retired or active who died by suicide.

So it gives you a lot of information about suicide.

Another one is the wounded Blue um organization and it is just disabled and injured law enforcement officers by providing education two departments and individuals to build resiliency and increase their overall wellness.

And another one is the Ruderman Foundation.

They actually usually will come out with, they have a white paper that just gives you some of the statistics about in this case Fire and police and their levels of suicide and trauma pTSD, that sort of thing.

So it gives you some really good facts there.

And there's also the National Suicide prevention line.

There's some really great episodes out there to just generally about anxiety of people are interested in them.

The Huberman lab, which is a it's some Andrew Huberman from the university stanford University, he has a really great episode about emotions.

That's just really interesting the neuroscience of emotions just to kind of give you a sense of how that operates.

That's, it's a pretty dense episode.

But but well worth the listen.

Rich Roll also has a really good podcast that he had jed brewer on and he's an expert in anxiety and that's a great, that's a great um a really, really good one.

And and one I know this is gonna sound like a strange recommendation, but it was a great listen, which is an episode in Charles do Higgs podcast, which is um uh it's how to like, so basically how to do anything.

He has a bunch of different ones but how to overcome your fear of dying.

And he actually had a woman on who's an expert in this and who's Australian And it was a great listen, just to sort of break down because she, there was a woman who called in and her fear was of dying herself.

And so just some of the steps which were some of the ones we actually went over today.

Mm hmm.

I always love all your resources.

Thank you.

We'll make sure those get in the show notes and what action steps do you recommend that we take in order to cope with our fears.

So I think first and foremost spend some time analyzing the amount of time you spend on news and social media, so any of that over exposure to, to negativity to anxiety provoking things and I would even maybe, and give people challenge and let's set a goal to decrease it by half for a couple of weeks and then pay attention to how you feel and especially how you feel around the areas of anxiety and around the areas of anger, if you don't have a significant decrease, then consider having it again, you know, going down even another half, most of us on our smartphones, we can track how many hours we've been on different platforms, which is sometimes depressing and sometimes good news I suppose, but I think to understand that and then just really get very disciplined and then check in with yourself, do I feel less anxiety do I feel?

And I also would would encourage people that if you do have a very, very, very anxious friend or to that has a tendency to trigger your anxiety, you may end up having to either have a real serious talk with them about like, listen, I notice we've gotten in this rut in our friendship and I really think we need to work on it so that maybe you aren't spending so much time in these anxiety provoking conversations and then secondly, I'd say, take a look at your family's overall wellness, the family's overall wellness because we tend to get in these habits as a group um and are you addressing all your physical and emotional needs that and and look at some of those health metrics to see how you're doing.

And then look at some ways you can set goals as a family to fix that or to get that a little bit better.

Just even improve, even improved just a little bit.

Um, and and actually interesting enough getting into action is a much more important focus than worry about an unknown future.

So if I have something I can do that just feels amazing.

Rather than only thinking about something that might happen 25 years from now.

These are so also important and useful action steps.

And I think too, it's, I think the thing that keeps coming up over and over is that being aware, but also to remind ourselves that we don't have to be stuck in these mindsets.

And so finding these tools are, are this this storage shed or the closet like you said of the self care techniques and all these other techniques are really important.

Um, and I just got to say this to every time we do a new, a new show.

I mean I've already had so much respect for for first responders, but I feel like my respect and honor for first responders and their family just keeps increasing.

I can't imagine some of the things they have to walk through and the resilience and all that it takes.

And so just so much respect for folks who who do this and who love people that do and so thank you Trudy for this episode and I can't wait to get on to more.

Yeah, thank you Trudy and thanks for all the support that you give to the first responder families too.

It's so important.

It's always my pleasure CASAT Podcast Network.

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