

Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement

Dr. Kevin Gilmartin is an expert on this topic. He is an international speaker and someone I encourage you to read his book.

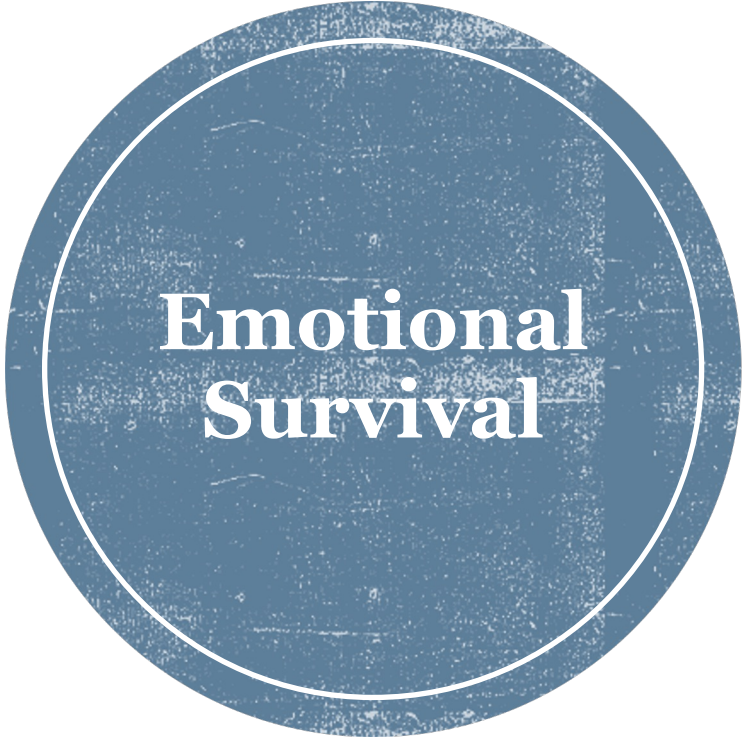




Emotional Survival

- Law enforcement officers have a significantly higher suicide rate than the general population.
- But suicide is not the only form of self-destruction public safety employees are at higher risk for. But it is the extreme tip of the iceberg of emotional damage.
- Other forms of self-destruction include depression, social distrust and isolation, cynicism, and chronic anger.
- Unfortunately, these can be rationalized away by the average officer and agency.



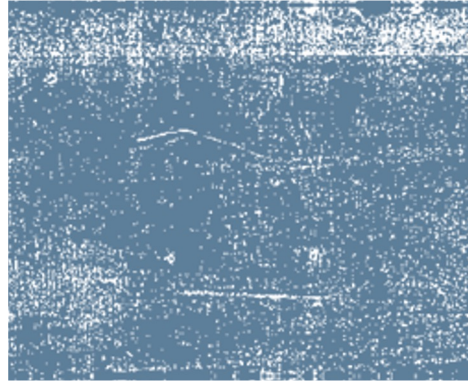


Emotional Survival

- “Too bad about Joe. He just let this job get to him.”
- “Not everybody is cut out to be a cop.”
- “What was wrong with him to do something like that to his kids?”
- “You got to know when to get out of here before you start thinking about eating your gun.”
- These are primitive attempts to ignore the emotional changes caused by a public safety career and to deny emotional vulnerability.

Emotional Survival

The suicide rate of police officers, although terribly tragic, is not nearly as numerically significant as the number of marriages that are lost and the number of children who grow up emotionally distant from their police parents and, unfortunately, grow up experiencing the secondhand effects of a police career.



Scout Leader





SCOUT LEADER



“An adult man or woman interested in helping youth primarily through outdoor activities.”

Cynical

Contemptuously distrustful of human nature and motive
(Webster's Collegiate Dictionary)



Does being distrustful of human nature and motive have a purpose?

YES!

It keeps cops alive!



Dr. Gilmartin poses a simple test in his book to determine if you have become cynical. The cynicism ration will show numerically to what degree cynicism has invaded your worldview. To take the cynicism test, he says take a mathematical calculation.



Take the square root of the number of times you say “bullshit” on an average day.

The Cynicism Ratio





The Cynicism Ratio



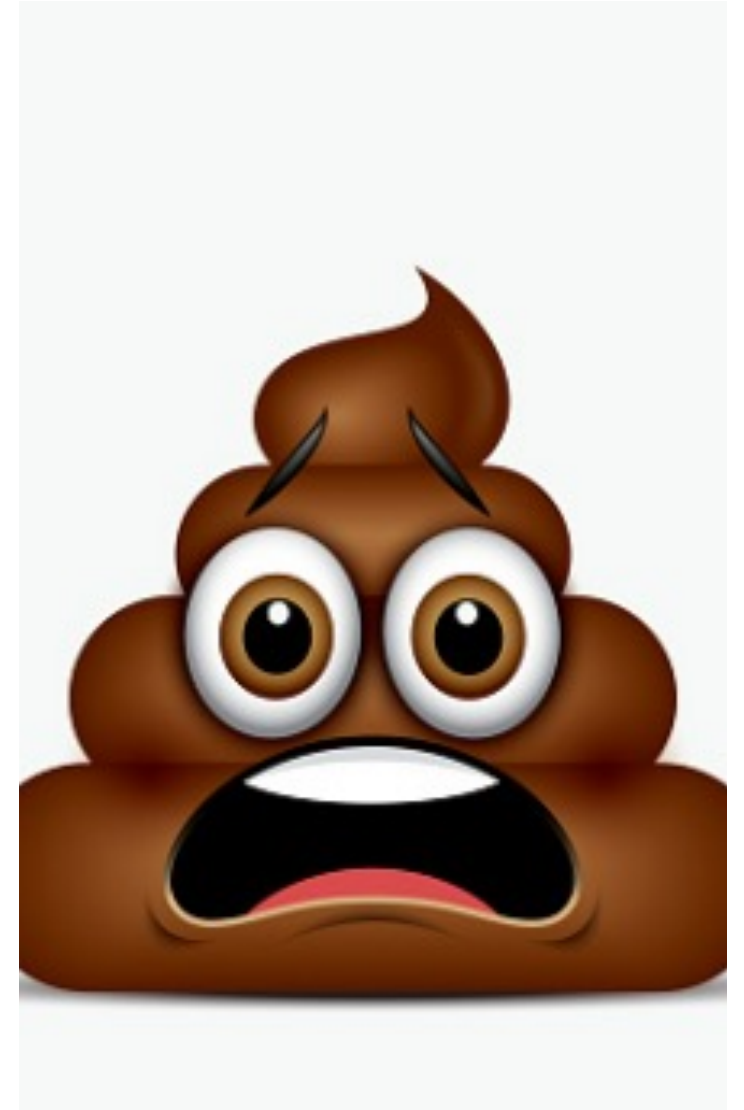
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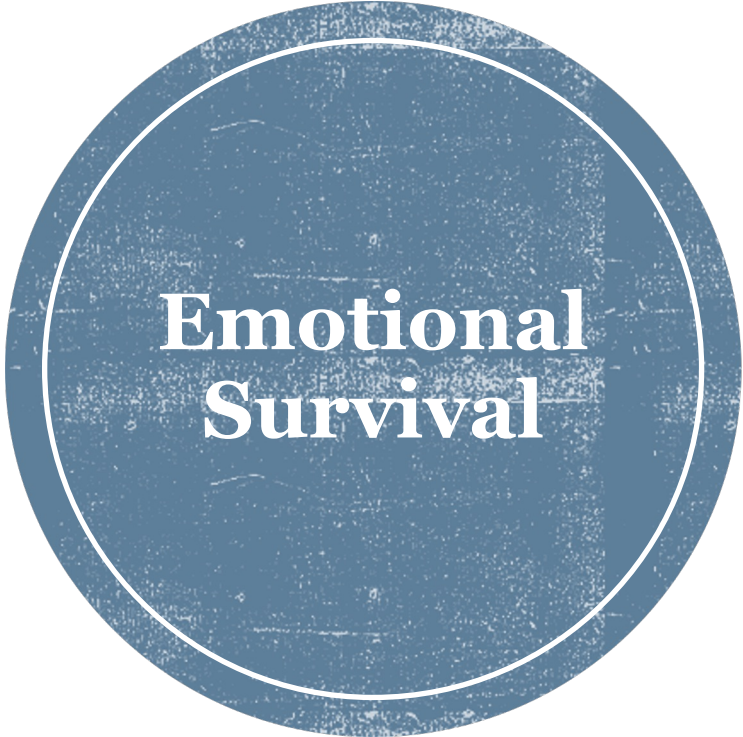
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Emotional Survival

As the years in a police career pass, anything and everything an officer disagrees with, doesn't like, or finds different is "bullshit." It comes in many varieties:

- Political bullshit
- Administrative bullshit
- Affirmative action bullshit
- Management bullshit
- Touchy-feely bullshit
- Total bullshit





Emotional Survival

- “Being a cop wouldn’t be so bad if it weren’t for all the bullshit.”
- When an officer labels things as BS, it’s a psychological shortcut. It allows her/him to shut down psychologically and create distance from events happening around them. They don’t have to think about things they disagree with, just label them BS and move on.
- This is NOT an effective tactic for learning the skills needed to survive and thrive in a public safety career. AND - the officer takes that approach to other areas of their life.

Emotional Survival – the source of all the bullshit

As cynicism develops and everything becomes bullshit, the officer has to be able to explain the source:

- Where does all this bullshit come from? Who causes all this bullshit?
- Soon an obvious answer appears. Every officer knows who causes all the bullshit:

~ The assholes ~

Emotional Survival

Now, the police officer, who is growing in both street experience and simultaneously, cynicism, can explain any social dilemma or problem that presents itself:

- “It’s just bullshit and this guy is an asshole.”
- That means anyone officers don’t like, don’t trust, are uncomfortable with, and don’t even know is an asshole. The longer someone is in law enforcement, the larger the number of assholes she or he knows. Fewer and fewer people in the officer’s life are spared the label.
- See the problem here?



Hypervigilance

- Officer survival requires an elevated alertness of one's surroundings, which we call Officer Safety. This is also referred to as hypervigilance.
- It is the necessary manner of viewing the world from a threat-perspective, having the mindset to see the events unfolding as a potential threat or potentially hazardous.
- Nothing “routine” about what police work is - we all know that.
- Rapid perception, quick interpretation of events, perceiving unknowns as potentially lethal until proven otherwise - all are part of a hypervigilant mindset.



Hypervigilance

- This state of high-alertness takes a toll on the human body.
- While on duty, she/he is alive, alert, engaged, and makes quick decisions.
- But hypervigilance is a biologically-based action, and every action has an equal and opposite reaction.
- SO, what happens at the end of your shift or tour of duty when you go home?



Hypervigilance

- Biological homeostasis - is a biological balancing phenomena that turns the officer who has been experiencing the hypervigilance reaction on duty into the person who experiences the direct opposite reaction off duty.
- The officer goes from a state of being alert and engaged to a state of being tired, isolated, and detached. And in some cases, angry.
- This pendulum swing occurs daily in the public safety employee's life.
- This biological roller coaster, highs at work and lows at home, can be disastrous if you don't take control of it.

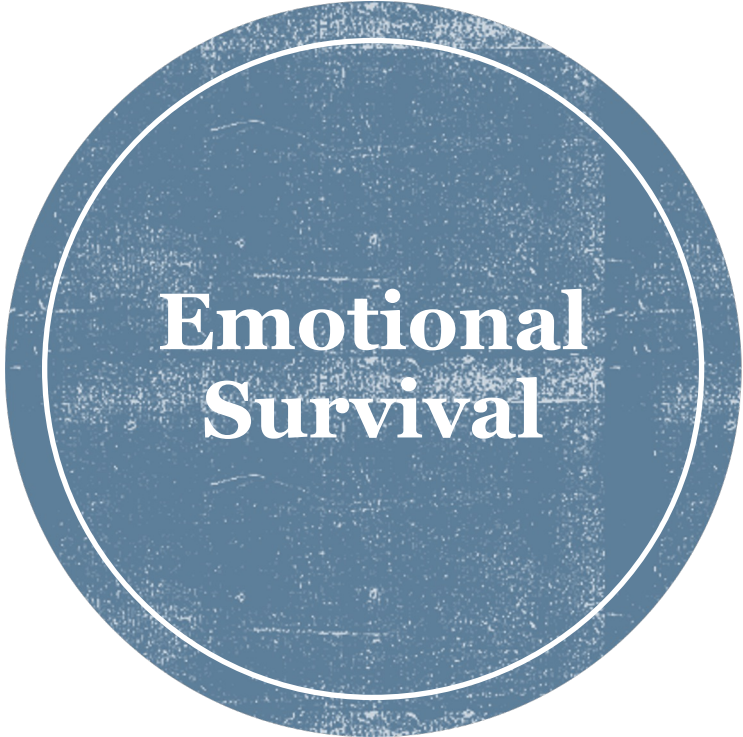


How to Become an Emotional Survivor

Dr. Gilmartin's research on hypervigilance and the long-term effects of a law enforcement career point out key things we need to know and practice to control the biological roller coaster.

- Emotional survivors focus on things they can control.
- Learn and practice letting go of what you cannot control, and turn off work at the end of the day.
- How do you do this? By turning ON something different.
- Gilmartin says PLAN in advance what you will do after work, on your days off, and use a calendar to track those events, and make them a priority.
- This will allow you to have control over your personal life, which is something, unlike your day at work, that you can control.





Emotional Survival

- Survivors practice aggressive personal time management and goal setting.
- Our profession is largely reactive, and it is easy to carry a reactive mindset into our personal lives.
- Gilmartin's research tells us that Survivors understand that, and are more proactive in their personal lives, taking control over their time and their schedules.
- Survivors recognize that the last thing they want to do when they return home from work is make a decision, so they develop a strategy to make that decision at an earlier point in time. They PLAN.



Control your time off

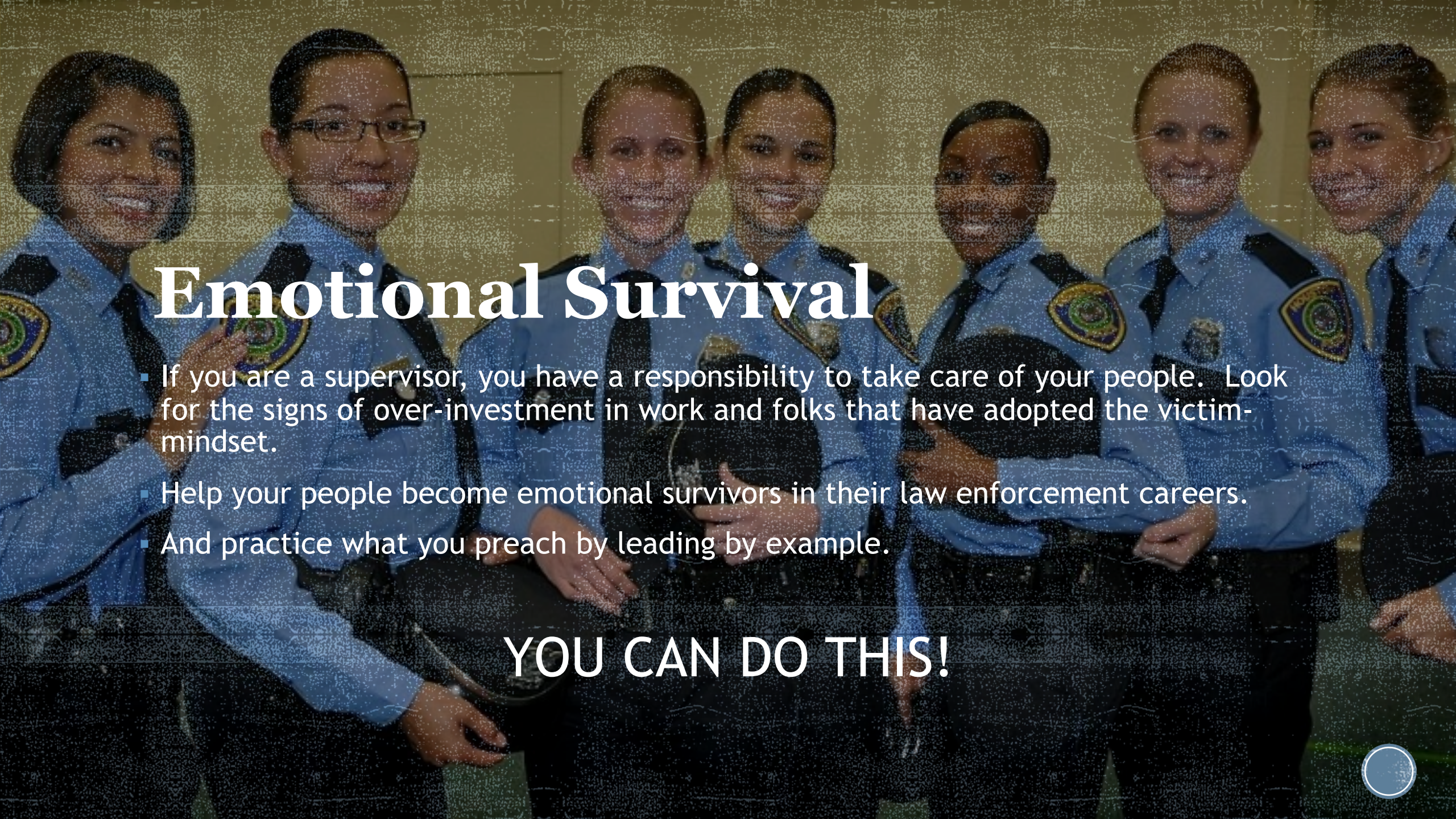
Give yourself something to look forward to specific things at specific times.
Gets you off the couch, engaged with others, and living a long life!



Emotional Survival

- This is YOUR life - take control of it.
- If you have hobbies - keep them!
- If you find yourself saying, “I usta play golf” or “I usta take nice vacations” or “I usta go to the gym” - take control of your time off, get off the couch, and make it happen.
- Bucket List items - YOU are in control of when you make those things happen. PLAN. COMMIT.





Emotional Survival

- If you are a supervisor, you have a responsibility to take care of your people. Look for the signs of over-investment in work and folks that have adopted the victim-mindset.
- Help your people become emotional survivors in their law enforcement careers.
- And practice what you preach by leading by example.

YOU CAN DO THIS!

