

# CORRECTIONAL OASIS

**A PUBLICATION OF DESERT WATERS CORRECTIONAL OUTREACH  
A NON-PROFIT FOR THE WELL-BEING OF CORRECTIONAL STAFF AND THEIR FAMILIES**

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## Hazmat Suit for the Soul

© By Caterina Spinaris Tudor

The other day I heard someone say that as firefighters expect to see charred bodies on the job, correctional workers should expect to encounter violence at work, and consequently, should be prepared to deal with it and not be bothered by it.

The speaker made two points here: (1) that staff should be prepared to deal with workplace violence, and (2) that they should not be bothered by it. These are two separate issues.

I venture to say that corrections agencies train their staff well to deal with violence—to prevent it, quell it as safely as possible, and minimize harm to co-workers and offenders.

However, whether the staff is psychologically affected or not is usually not addressed at great depth. The traditional perspective has been that corrections staff “should” not be affected because they are “tough.” But how realistic is that expectation?

To expect people, even highly trained law enforcement officers, to be unaffected by life-threatening situations, serious injuries or death, is naïve at best. To expect them to be unaffected even after continued, repeated exposure to such events betrays lack of understanding of how the human nervous system and soul are impacted by exposure to violence and death.

Those trained to clean up toxic materials expect to deal with such spills, but they are not sent to a toxic dump in a pair of jeans and a t-shirt! Quite the contrary, when dispatched to a spill they are expected to put on a hazmat suit. Correctional workers are at times thrust in situations that make war zone scenes pale by comparison in gruesomeness and mayhem. What kind of hazmat suit are they given to wear while exposed to such incidents? Unfortunately, oftentimes the staff’s only defense is a *machismo* attitude that nothing can get to them, that nothing disturbs them.

The correctional workplace culture reinforces the misconception that you are “weak” if you are disturbed by violence. This strips staff of the freedom to admit to themselves and others when they have been wounded emotionally at work. Consequently they end up trying to cope with not even a thought for a psychological “hazmat suit,” and if one were provided for them, they might leave it lying on the ground, unused.

So what happens to those exposed to traumatic incidents on the job? My experience treating correctional workers for 10 plus years suggests that usually the toxic impact of such events accumulates over time,

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### IN MEMORIAM

**David O’Dell**

November 21, 2010

FCC Butner

**Justin Scott Andrews**

November 24, 2010

FCC Butner

Information Technology  
Specialist

**Jason Alan Thomas**

December 4, 2010

FCI McDowell

Mat. Handler Supervisor,

U.S. Marine Corps

Iraq War Veteran

**CO Kevin Stigen**

December 15, 2010

Montana State Prison

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## Hazmat Suit for the Soul

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with some staff exhibiting what has been labeled “negative resilience.”<sup>1</sup>

Resilience can be defined as the ability to cope with adversity. Resilience enables people to “bounce back” to a previous state of normal functioning after experiencing stress, or even to grow from it, functioning better in some areas than they did prior to their exposure to adversity.

Negative resilience is defined as the *semblance*, the *appearance*, of resilience following traumatic exposure, when in fact those exposed are coping poorly. Therefore, individuals, such as military personnel or police officers, may say that they are used to traumatic events, that they are not bothered by them, when in reality they are becoming increasingly more fragile psychologically.

Negative resilience is the result of “disenfranchised distress,” distress that is experienced but not allowed to be expressed because it is rejected or ridiculed by the unwritten “rules” of the organizational culture.<sup>1</sup>

Negative resilience helps staff “keep it together” for a season with the “spit, gum and rubber bands” of denial and psychological numbing/dissociation.<sup>1</sup> (Dissociation is, for example, a disconnection between memories of events and emotional reactions to them). The defenses of denial and psychological numbing/dissociation usually recruit the help of substance abuse or other addictive behaviors as means to block awareness of distressing emotions or thoughts.

Due to these defenses, some members of the military or law enforcement may appear unaffected for a time period following a traumatic incident.<sup>2</sup> However, at some point they may no longer be able to maintain the facade of “I’m just fine,” and they “crash.” This is called the “twin peaks effect,” with one peak in traumatic symptoms occurring when exposed to a traumatic stressor, and the other at a later time. Military personnel exposed to a traumatic event might “crash” about 60 days later, even though they have been conducting combat operations during those 60 days. For police officers the negative resilience phase may be as long as 16 years (the average number of elapsed years from hiring on to the force to completed suicides for French police officers).<sup>1</sup>

Corrections workers deal with situations very much like those of other law enforcement officers, and at times even like military personnel in combat. What can we do to help correctional staff cope effectively with multiple traumatic exposures, thus very likely also helping reduce sick leave rates, sagging morale, work-related disability claims and turnover, among other consequences of continual extreme stress?

One thing is clear: denial and numbing/dissociation do not help put together an enduring hazmat suit. If these defenses do not work in the long run, then what does?

Effective hazmat suits for the soul can be provided through a variety of psychological prevention and intervention methods.

Through research several protective factors have been identified that help counter post-traumatic symptoms of police officers and increase positive resilience.<sup>2</sup> Some of these factors are social support, and ways to make sense of traumatic circumstances by rendering them more meaningful, manageable and comprehensible. Of course, to be open to social support, officers have to resist the urge to isolate, which is one of the symptoms of post-traumatic stress.

Prevention can therefore be offered through cognitive resilience trainings that implement findings such as those cited above as well as other methods found to bolster positive resilience.<sup>3</sup> Intervention can be offered as suggested in the prior issue of the *Correctional Oasis*, through the provision of various types of prolonged exposure treatment soon after traumatic incidents. For others, psycho-spiritual interventions help process traumatic memories and release their emotional impact.

These methods are akin to the proverbial stitch in time that saves nine.

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However, the first step in providing hazmat suits for the soul consists of legitimizing and validating the distress staff may experience on the job due to exposure to violence. Correctional workers must give each other permission to take the hazmat suit provided to them and put it on. Through trainings and ongoing practice the message must go out that staff exposed to workplace violence and death may experience fear, helplessness and horror. Staff needs to accept that there is no shame in acknowledging that. (By the way, the emotional reactions of fear, helplessness and horror are likely to be stronger the first few times when exposed to gore or danger. After a while these reactions might be blunted, due to the staff becoming desensitized and emotionally numb, which in itself is a symptom of psychological trauma.)

Providing anything less than "best-practices" prevention and intervention measures for corrections staff exposed to violence and death amounts to sending hazardous material removal teams to a spill site without hazmat suits.

I realize that preventative measures and interventions of the type I am suggesting do not get implemented overnight, as they need to be explored, studied and experimented with carefully. Additionally, organizational culture change is a tall order. However, ANY steps in that direction will be beneficial. These are challenging yet worthy goals which need to be pursued by everyone who works in corrections.

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<sup>2</sup>Friedman, M. (1996). *Emergent self management for security and emergency personnel in situations of continuous traumatic exposure*. Paper presented at the European Conference: Stress in Emergency Services, Peace-keeping Operations and Humanitarian Aid Organizations, UK.

<sup>3</sup>Ursano, R. J., Grieger, T.A., & McCarroll, J.E. (1996). *Prevention of Posttraumatic Stress: Consultation, Training, and Early Treatment*. In B.A. van der Kolk, A.C. McFarlane & L. Weisaeth, *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body and Society*. New York: The Guilford Press. DWCO

### Readers' Comments

I am a long time Oregon DOC employee (started in the '70's) now recently retired but back part-time facilitating an inmate parenting class at the Oregon State Pen. I have known and worked with Sgt. Van Patten in numerous roles for a very long time, but I have to say that this connection he has provided to Oregon DOC staff with your organization has been one of his most significant successes. The mission and message of Desert Waters is as important as it is unique. The service you provide to correctional facility staff about their own mental health and family stability is as important in our walk of life as the frequent hand washing signs one sees in hospitals these days. We don't want to bring emotional "germs" in from home to work, nor do we want to take them home from work with us at the end of the day. Very few people seem to understand that with the depth and sincerity that Desert Waters does. Your personal messages forwarded on to OSP staff as a result of the most recent unfortunate employee suicide event were perfectly on target for example. ... I would love to be added to your mailing list. Thanks very much.

Greg Morton , Coach, Parenting Inside-Out, Oregon State Penitentiary

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### Readers' Comments

I recently completed a level one certificate in Trauma counselling for front line workers put on by The Hinks Dell Crest Centre, Gail Appel Institute, in Toronto Ontario and thought I would comment on the PTSD article. The exposure therapy was discussed in the training as was CBT both mimicking your comments, as well there was a discussion on the utilization of Beta blockers to lower the risk of both Acute stress and PTSD, Propanolol was specifically mentioned however there is some research out that morphine and oxycontin (like we need more reason to use this!) are also effective. The idea is the drugs minimize the memory searing in the cortex which attributes to the hyperarousal of the amygdala. Some believe the process is more pertinent to those who have been exposed to trauma that involves intense horror and fear than in those that experience trauma that involves shame and guilt. CISM (Critical Incident Stress Management) was theorized and likened to, a drug free beta blocker as the goal is similar to that of the beta blockers. There is a DVD set entitled "The Secret Life of the Brain" from PBS in the US that has an excellent depiction of what happens neurologically to someone who has experienced a traumatic and stressful event, it is approx \$60.00 for the set in the US and \$85.00 here in Canada (probably cause they have to mail it through the snow).

We here in the Canadian prison enjoy your articles and they are distributed through our CISM Team here at Fenbrook and Beaver Creek Institutions.

With Appreciation

BCI/ FMI CISM/EAP Team (Federal Penitentiary Critical Incident Stress Team, Correctional Services Canada). DWCO

## ALLURE: Detecting Deception & Truth Head Cues—Part 5

By Rick Nielsen

*Rick Nielsen is a Community Corrections Officer (i.e., Probation and Parole Officer) in the Washington State Department of Corrections. For comments or questions, email him at [richard.nielsen@doc.wa.gov](mailto:richard.nielsen@doc.wa.gov). This is the final in a series of five articles on this subject. This article builds on the previous articles in his series. Parts 1 through 4 can be found in prior issues of the Correctional Oasis which are posted on the Desert Waters website [www.desertwaters.com](http://www.desertwaters.com) under the RESOURCES tab.*

Remember your ALLURE, (ALLURE is copyright ©2009-2010 Richard A. Nielsen):

1. ASK unexpected questions that bring out behavioral responses. (Vrij et al 2009)
2. LOOK for stress & controlling behaviors. Don't just focus on deception cues. (DePaulo et al 2003)
3. LISTEN to the voice & the words. (DePaulo et al 2003)
4. UNDERSTAND everything in context. (Porter 2009, Vrij et al 2001)
5. REPEAT the process often; keep scanning. (Porter 2009, Vrij et al 2001)
6. ERRORS: Beware of errors. One or two deception cues does not a liar make. (Herbert 2007)

If you look for it, you'll find ALLURE in the article below.

This article discusses the head cues of deception and truth. Training for these cues, especially for the facial

## ALLURE: Head Cues

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expressions of emotion discussed later in this article, is best done with a teacher or coach. But we'll make due with a mirror and the text descriptions below.

Head Cues come from:

- Live dialogue
- Live responses to what's said, heard, or seen
- Video recordings of dialogue
- Video recordings of responses to what's said, heard, or seen

Class 1 Head Cues (DePaulo 2003)

- Liars make a more negative impression.
  - Liars' faces are less pleasant.
  - Liars press their lips together more, a sign of stifling, squelching, or withholding information.
  - Liars bite their lips more, also a sign of withholding info.
  - Liars raise their chins more often, a slight expression of Anger, which will be discussed below.
  - Liars show mostly the negative, universal facial expressions: Anger, Contempt, Disgust, Fear, and Sadness, as described below.
- Liars are more tense, a sign of withholding info.
- Liars show more pupil dilation, a sign of emotional response.

Class 2 Head Cues (Ekman 1965, Ekman et al 1974, Frank et al 1997, Porter et al 2008)

- Liars shrug their lips, like a contemplative frown, signifying "I don't know" in opposition to their affirmative statement
- Liars shake their head in opposition to their own affirmative statement.
- Liars show any of the universal emotional expressions, contrary to their stated affect, feeling, or response.

The universal expressions are (Ekman 1992):

- Anger
- Contempt
- Disgust
- Fear
- Happiness
- Sadness
- Surprise

These are manifest as:

- Full expressions (as described below), or
- Subtle expressions, which can be further subdivided into
  - Slight expressions, which are only parts of the full expression, like the chin raise mentioned above, and

## ALLURE: Head Cues

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- Micro-expressions of the full expressions. Micro-expressions are full or mostly full and expressed within a fraction of a second. Most adults can be trained to see these micro-expressions.

Here are the descriptions of the full expressions of the universals. To be able to see them in others, practice seeing them in yourself. You can do this by making these full expressions in front of a hand-held or wall-mounted mirror.

- Anger—If you see prolonged Anger toward you, GET TO SAFETY! This response can save your life.
  - Lower & upper eyelids tighten
  - Upper eyelids raise
  - Brows lower & draw together
  - The jaw thrusts forward
  - Lips press together, & the lower lip may push up a little
- Contempt
  - Contempt is similar to disgust, but only on one side
  - One half of the upper lip tightens upward
- Disgust
  - The nose wrinkles
  - Upper lip rises
  - Lower lip protrudes
- Fear
  - The eyes widen
  - Upper lids rise, as in surprise
  - But the brows draw together
  - The lips stretch out horizontally toward the ears
- Happiness
  - The corners of the mouth lift
  - Eyelids tighten with wrinkling at the outside edges (Crow's feet)
  - Cheeks rise
- Sadness
  - Eyelids droop
  - Inner corners of the brows rise and, in extreme sadness, draw together
  - Corners of the lips pull down
  - Lower lip may push up in a pout
- Surprise
  - Upper eyelids rise

## ALLURE: Head Cues

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- Eyebrows rise
- The jaw drops open

Here's your final homework assignment. All of these should be done in front of a mirror, since seeing these expressions in yourself is a first step to seeing them in others.

- Practice making each of the universal expressions in front of a mirror: Anger, Contempt, Disgust, Fear, Happiness, Sadness, and Surprise.
- Practice looking tense in front of a mirror.
- Practice looking negative in a mirror, by practicing the negative emotional expressions: Anger, Contempt, Disgust, Fear, and Sadness. Also practice pressing your lips together, biting your lower lip, and raising your chin.
- Practice shrugging your lips.
- Practice shaking your head "No" while saying something positive about someone.
- Look for these cues in live news interviews.
- And one more for extra credit: email me for a way to make a slide presentation to practice seeing micro-expressions at one-tenth of a second.

Good luck and stay safe! And please remember your ALLURE; as one or two cues alone do not a liar make. Use ALL your observation skills, compared with their baseline behaviors, to make your best decisions.

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## **Institute for Corrections Research in Employee Wellness (ICREW)**

As DWCO aims to continue conducting research studies on factors affecting the well-being of corrections staff, a new branch of DWCO was set up, Doing Business As (DBA) the *Institute for Corrections Research in Employee Wellness (ICREW)*.

The mission of ICREW is to conduct psychological research in the field of corrections personnel wellness in order to identify areas of corrections staff need and means to promote the well-being of corrections staff on and off the job.

### **Funds Needed for 2011 ICREW Research Project**

Last spring DWCO conducted a pilot survey examining exposure to work-related violence and its impact on corrections workers. The results of this preliminary research made it clear that a series of studies needs to be undertaken to explore the subject of corrections worker wellness in relation to working conditions of the corrections environment.

We are now getting ready to replicate our pilot study and also expand its scope in several key areas. The purpose of the 2011 study is to examine various psychological and physical health and functioning issues of corrections workers in relation to conditions of the corrections workplace.

The study will be used to advance existing scientific knowledge regarding the impact of corrections work on the worker. An additional goal of this research is to advocate for psychological prevention and intervention measures for corrections personnel engaged in all facets of corrections work. Existing research indicates that appropriate prevention and intervention affect key performance measures, such as employee morale, attendance and retention, as well as staff's overall health. Results of the study will be submitted for publication in peer-reviewed and other journals, and presented at correctional conferences and trainings.

The budget for the study is \$28,400. DWCO/ICREW needs to raise these funds. If the topics described above matter to you, we invite you to contribute toward the cost of the research.

To make a tax-deductible donation toward this project, please send your check to ICREW, P.O. Box 355, Florence, CO 81226, or make a donation online at [www.desertwaters.com](http://www.desertwaters.com), indicating that your gift is for ICREW.

Funds received that exceed the cost of our next research study will be used toward the expenses of future projects on corrections worker wellness.      dwco

# Desert Waters

Correctional Outreach



*a non-profit organization  
for the well-being of correctional  
staff and their families*

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# New Year's Blessings

**May you be blessed with  
abundant provision, protection and direction!**

### Quote of the Month

You may have a fresh start at any moment you choose,  
for this thing that we call "failure" is not the falling down,  
but the staying down.

*Mary Pickford*

dreaming about a website or a solution to that tech situation you've been avoiding?



Josh MacDonald *Web & Tech Consultant*  
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