**Police Resilience Podcast**

**Episode 5: Finding the Silver Lining**

00;00;00;11 - 00;00;25;04

You are listening to the Police Resilience Podcast, a podcast from the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and the Department of Psychiatry at Columbia University, where you'll hear from law enforcement leaders sharing wisdom, insight, and perspective. This episode is funded by the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) through the Valor Officers Safety and Wellness Initiative. The department's full disclaimer notice is available at the end of this podcast, and in the episode show notes.

00;00;25;16 - 00;00;35;20

The views, information or opinions expressed in this presentation are solely those of the individuals involved and did not necessarily represent those of the IACP, Columbia University or BJA.

00;00;36;14 - 00;01;02;12

Jeff Thompson: All right. Hello, everybody. This is the Police Resilience Podcast. It's been created specifically for law enforcement across the country, across the world. This isn't about fluffy conversations. It's about understanding the science behind real resilience and how we as police need to make sure we're taking care of ourselves. That's not selfish, it's smart. This podcast is a partnership between the IACP in the psychiatry department at Columbia University Medical Center.

00;01;02;20 - 00;01;30;28

JT: We're leaders in policing and we’re leaders in mental health research and services. Let's be clear about one thing. Everybody that's listening to this you already have resilience in you. Let's work on enhancing it. And that's the whole idea and purpose of this podcast. I'm Dr. Jeff Thompson, and I'm your host. I'm a research scientist at Columbia University Medical Center and their Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Depression, as well as the Molecular Imaging and Neuropathology Division. I'm recently retired from the NYPD (New York Police Department).

00;01;31;11 - 00;01;52;07

JT: I was a detective there. I served for just over 20 years. I've had multiple roles there in the NYPD, including being a trainer, hostage negotiator, and their first ever mental health and wellness coordinator. I often try to remind myself to wear a t-shirt. It's not advertising, but I like to promote different organizations that I think are doing wonderful work, especially in policing.

00;01;52;14 - 00;02;18;07

JT: So, the t-shirt that I'm wearing today is my AFSP, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, their hope t-shirt. And that truly ties into the topic that we're going to discuss today with our incredible guest, retired Chief Michael Kehoe. And it's the whole idea of Silver Linings and what I describe as the psychology researcher term behind Silver Linings is cognitive reappraisal.

00;02;18;14 - 00;02;30;27

JT: I hope nobody turned this off after I said that because that is the topic. Stick around. Hear us out and what we have to say about it. And I think before I bring you in Chief, I think… Well, I don't know if you want to say hi to everybody first.

00;02;31;20 - 00;02;42;00

Michael Kehoe: Yes, hello, everybody. And it's great to be on this podcast about police resiliency. I'm looking forward to having a strong conversation with Jeff about many, many topics today.

00;02;42;22 - 00;03;06;13

JT: Yeah, excellent. It really… it means a lot having you here and before we dig a bit into how this is. That whole concept of silver linings in cognitive reappraisal, how it's impacted you in the work that you've done. I think maybe first and again, we try to make this interactive. I don't know if anybody follows along with this, but we tried to give you at the very least as the listener to contemplate some of these things.

00;03;06;13 - 00;03;29;07

JT: We try to share exercises and practices. And the first thing I guess, that I just like everybody to stop and take a moment is think about what comes to your mind when you think of that term silver linings or if you were familiar already with that term cognitive reappraisal and what comes to mind, especially in relation to the police work that you do, or if we have even other first responders listening in as well.

00;03;29;16 - 00;03;51;26

JT: So, I guess… here's a definition that I used before with some of the research that I've been involved in police resilience, in cognitive reappraisal or that concept, that mindset of silver linings. And I use the two interchangeably. Generally, it refers to re-interpreting a situation in a manner that kind of alters the meaning and the emotions related to the situation.

00;03;52;02 - 00;04;21;00

JT: Quite often it's a negative adverse, stressful life event, but when we look at it with respect to resilience, engaging in this silver linings mindset, it's a critical practice and it's one of many, but it can be highly effective because it can impact us cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally. And again, let me just say that again, when we practice silver linings, cognitive reappraisal, it can impact us with our thoughts, our feelings, and our actions.

00;04;21;19 - 00;04;39;11

JT: And just really short, because I like to throw all the research out there not just for the heck of it, but really how it directly connects, I think, to our work in policing. When we practice this in the right way, it can increase our social connectedness. What does that mean? Like our connection to people, especially those close to us.

00;04;39;18 - 00;04;57;26

JT: It can increase our gratitude and our sense of gratitude, finding meaning and purpose in life, which is so important it's a note to myself. I want to make sure our future episode we do on just that concept of meaning and purpose in life, but also it helps us improve our coping strategies and recovery from those tough, negative events.

00;04;58;03 - 00;05;29;10

JT: Also, very importantly when I mentioned gratitude, that's looking backwards. Also, it's about forward thinking and forward actions in when we practice and engage in this, it helps increase hope and optimism and just our overall well-being and life's satisfaction too. So, oh. The other thing too is so those are all the positives. But also, research has shown that engaging in these silver linings type of practices can help reduce stress, as well as depression and anxiety symptoms.

00;05;29;18 - 00;05;47;19

JT: Now, something that I truly want to point out, too, is sometimes I know people can misinterpret the things we're talking about here, and especially when it comes to this. And if you listen to this while you're driving, I want you to concentrate on driving. Thank you for letting us be a guest in your car. But let me be clear.

00;05;47;19 - 00;06;09;27

JT: And I'm not going to speak for the chief because he can speak for himself. This isn't soft, fluffy stuff, a key component to resilience, but also cognitive reappraisal. Silver Linings is the very first important step is acknowledging and in some researchers on resilience, like Dr. Rick Hanson, he calls this acceptance. Acknowledge the bad, awful, stressful, negative event. We don't sugarcoat it.

00;06;09;27 - 00;06;28;17

JT: We don't minimize it; we don't ignore it. Step one is actually acknowledging something awful happened and you were a part of it in one way or another. We don't ignore it because that's not healthy at all. So, I want to be very clear with that. We acknowledge the stressful moments and maybe what, maybe the negative aspects of what it's doing to us.

00;06;28;23 - 00;06;52;11

JT: Right? And again, this whole Police Resilience podcast, we're human beings. As police we're human beings engaged in incredibly noble work. We're public servants to others, but we're not machines, we're not robots. We're allowed to have feelings. We're allowed to be impacted by this stuff. So, moving along. So that's that idea of acceptance and acknowledging it. But then what do we connect it to this sense of agency.

00;06;52;13 - 00;07;10;14

JT: And I'm not, when I say agency, I don't mean you police organization. Agency means doing something, doing something about it. And then quite a [few] people will be like, well, what can I do about it? Especially if something already happened. That's not what we mean. When we say do something about is what are you doing to take care of yourself? What are your positive coping strategies?

00;07;10;22 - 00;07;30;25

JT: And I always stress and I'm glad I memorize this, it's not written in on any of my notes, positive coping strategies. I'm emphasizing that first word because I think in policing and whether you have a little bit or a lot of time on the job or anywhere in between, we know there's a heck of a lot of negative coping strategies, especially alcohol, and that's not healthy.

00;07;31;06 - 00;07;54;24

JT: So how do we find these realistic positive coping strategies? And then one last thing, I'll add some more, maybe the science behind this stuff, but I really want to bring the chief in. It's this idea of really the interesting, some of the interesting stuff on the science behind this is when you practice this cognitive reappraisal in, it's not just negative adverse life events, it can be daily stuff too.

00;07;54;24 - 00;08;16;01

JT: We're going to dig deeper into that, too. But it's also when we talk about this idea of control, control what you can. Cognitive reappraisal, silver linings, the research has shown, and I know from my own personal experience is it works really well when you have no control over what had happened. And that's where you practice it. And it seems to have really good benefits.

00;08;16;06 - 00;08;32;07

JT: And I try to come up with an example of it. And the one that came to my mind right before we came on here, like, what's the most practical way where it doesn't work very well and where you do have control of something and you just trying to find the positive aspects to it. It's a look, I'll just speak for myself.

00;08;32;12 - 00;08;48;05

JT: I can afford to lose a few pounds, right? So, this is where Silver Linings doesn't work, and I think I have a really good mental physical workout routine, but imagine if I started to become overweight. This is where it doesn't work. And I said, oh, well, plenty of people are overweight, so it's not that big of a deal.

00;08;48;10 - 00;09;06;07

JT: That's not practicing silver linings, the cognitive reappraisal, pulling something good at it. No, because that's where you're making excuses. And real resilience isn't excuse making either. It's doing something that you can wear, for example. Right before we came on, I told the chief and I'm sure he's going to hold me to it. It's currently while we're recording this.

00;09;06;07 - 00;09;21;24

JT: It's a nice day here in New York City, so I might go for a run. And now I got to hold myself to it because he's a serious guy and he's going to make sure I did it. This is how I'm going to get you in, Chief, again, I'll just introduce you really briefly. And as I made that stupid joke thank you for chuckling.

00;09;22;25 - 00;09;55;18

JT: Humor's very important to resilience, appropriate humor, because if we had it's built in the heavy stuff, we got to make time to maybe enjoy people's company, especially people that understand what we've been through in one way or another. Chief Michael Kehoe is retired a, over 30 years, I think close to four years he was the chief of Newtown and on a much, much more serious issue he was the chief for the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting that killed over 20 people. I believe it's 26 people, 20 young children, seven-year-olds and six-year-olds.

00;09;55;18 - 00;10;21;17

JT: One of the most horrific things that I think, and look there's been awful things that have happened since then and I know I'll never forget when I first heard of that and thinking of my brothers and sisters and not knowing you then, but now getting to know you it was truly. What better way to show the seriousness of how silver linings in cognitive reappraisal really can help in one of the most awful incidents in policing?

00;10;21;17 - 00;10;26;22

JT: So, Chief, if you don't mind, maybe just, can you just tell people a bit more about yourself?

00;10;26;27 - 00;11;19;17

MK: Sure. Absolutely. Lifelong resident candidate of Connecticut and certainly was thrilled to be hired by the Newtown Police Department, again in 1978. I served with them for 37 and a half years from 1978 to 2016 and it was a very rewarding time. It was again you have to look at our community. Our community was small in comparison to other communities we only had about 27,000 people. Small agency, typically 45,000, I'm sorry 45 officers. You know I got hired in 78 and just kind of rose through the ranks you know gradually as many people do and was you know, certainly chosen and tapped for the top job. Was chief of police in 2000 and I was

00;11;19;17 - 00;11;42;07

MK: Chief of police you know from 2000 to 2016, and during that time I got to learn a lot about being a chief that's number one. But I think also I started really making an effort to think about, you know mental health and mental health not only for myself, but you know, the men and women who serve with me and serve in this profession.

00;11;42;07 - 00;12;07;02

MK: So, and certainly came to fruition when all of a sudden, you know, the event of Sandy Hook Elementary School happened and you know, again under my watch and that really heightened my awareness of it. And certainly, heightened my efforts to, you know, to make some changes because we all know that the police profession is not really in a conducive to change and especially when it comes to mental health.

00;12;08;01 - 00;12;32;09

MK: We know that was a very, very difficult push. So, if I thought I could do any help at all with not only our not only our agency, but other agencies, I tried to engage and enhance. I know that the IACP started, you know, it started well before that to look at mental health, but it was easy. It was an easy connection and partnership.

00;12;32;29 - 00;12;59;25

MK: So certainly, you know, Jeff, you're right that Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting happened in December of 2012. And let's not forget that 26 individuals within the school died. In addition, the shooter died, and his mother died at home before he came to the school to do the shooting. So, we can't forget that it was actually 28 deaths that day, a significant amount for a small agency in a small community like ours.

00;13;01;04 - 00;13;25;21

JT: Yeah, I guess with all the different thoughts and questions that I have is, well, we look at it twofold, right? And I said this earlier, we're human beings first and we happen to be serving in an incredibly noble profession. And we also we've signed up to become police and we know that there's horrors and awfulness, but something like this is just was and continues to be unimaginable.

00;13;25;26 - 00;13;40;17

JT: And it's now over ten years later, I guess, if you don't mind walk us through in your role as a chief. How, how did you try to or how do you look after the men and women when it happened and then in the follow up?

00;13;40;25 - 00;14;05;19

MK: You know, for me personally, you have to understand, I didn't get into my, you know, the types of roles I played within the agency. But I was the very first school resource officer for our community. You know, I worked in these schools. As I say, I worked the schools, including Sandy Hook Elementary, and I knew the players within the school system within that school district and certainly within the school.

00;14;05;19 - 00;14;37;06

MK: So, some of these people I knew and because I was a school resource, resource officer, I thought it was imperative upon me to improve the security and improve the readiness of any school district and schools that within, you know, within the town. And that's what I really worked on. So, during my time, I think I spent about seven years as a school resource officer so, you know, just after just at that time, I became a school resource officer.

00;14;38;08 - 00;15;02;11

MK: There were some shooting school shootings. So that became, you know, clear to me that, you know, I would have to start to think about that. You know, Columbine, I think it already occurred, and that certainly awakened law enforcement to what we should be doing. But on the day of the shooting, you know, I considered myself the chief public safety official within the community you know, it's on my watch.

00;15;02;11 - 00;15;24;20

MK: You know, everybody said it’s not on my watch. I felt that was on my watch. And then, of course, doubly and deeply you know, I felt that not only that, I had a lot to say with the safety and security of that school. So when that occurred, you know, that was a shock to me that, first of all, it could happen under my watch and within a school setting that I thought was very, very safe.

00;15;24;20 - 00;15;44;26

MK: And I was always make the comment when I when I'm speaking to say that, you know, when I looked at all the schools within in the town, I thought, you know, what Sandy Hook had was well in advance and well ahead of the curve with safety. So, the fact that somebody could, you know, enter into that school forcibly and kill that many people was very shocking to me.

00;15;46;06 - 00;16;34;15

MK: But I would also say that, you know, when you talk about the silver linings, it's very difficult to find silver linings there.

JT: Right. Exactly.

MK: and again and I won’t talk about my personal experiences before that, but I will tell you that one of the first things that I had almost self-talk was saying that although yes we did tragically lose you know, 20 first graders and six staff, school staff, the, our appearance, our readiness to appear and respond to that in a very short period of time saved over one hundred… 450 students and staff and if we don't show up more people die because this gunman was, could go through the rest of the school

00;16;34;15 - 00;16;51;16

MK: with the weapons he had. So, I mean that was one of the first self-talks I had to have with myself on that. And so, you know, it is tragic it is no doubt about it. It's on your watch. You know it's almost like you think it's about a stain on your watch. Is that going to define my career?

00;16;51;26 - 00;17;02;22

MK: And that's you know, you worry about that. You know, everybody wants to leave their career, especially in law enforcement. You know, on their terms and certainly with no stains.

00;17;03;13 - 00;17;21;06

JT: Yeah. So just to jump in for a moment, I want to pull out what you had said there. Right. And this truly is we I use the term and it's not just that term, real resilience in what you just said there is. And sometimes I wonder what people expecting or what do they think when they listen to this, or when they hear about resilience, especially in policing.

00;17;21;12 - 00;17;43;20

JT: But what you just said there is. Yes, you made time to acknowledge the awfulness of what happened. Lives were lost. But also importantly, though, you also make time to acknowledge because of your actions and the men and women that worked for you over 400… or you said 450 lives were saved. And that's important to point out now. Now it doesn't make the awfulness disappear.

00;17;43;20 - 00;17;50;08

JT: It's just what I call it's finding that balance in life and I just wanted to jump in and stress that. So ahhh… back to you.

00;17;50;26 - 00;18;11;06

MK: Yeah. And certainly you talk about, you know, resiliency and you got you know, that was a that became a, you know, almost a an immediate thought in my mind is saying, how are we going to get through this? Not only myself, because I was also a first responder because in our agency is so small that we everybody gets trained for every job.

00;18;11;18 - 00;18;32;02

MK: Right. You can't take the back seat when you even when you're chief of police, because if you're on your on site, you're one of the first ones there. You got to respond, OK? Because you're just you're police officer first and foremost. You happen to occupy the rank of chief. So, you know, one of the first ones in the building with the other officers, you know, made me a first responder.

00;18;32;02 - 00;18;56;20

MK: But then I needed to change hats really quickly to become more of a commander and leader. And certainly afterwards I started thinking about how are we going to get through this as an agency, as individuals, as a community, you know, those became, you know, very, very clear thoughts in my mind that we need to get past this, you know, and certainly understand what we needed to do.

00;18;57;03 - 00;19;19;06

MK: So, resiliency for my own personal resilience, I had already at that time, almost 30, 32 years on the job, you know, almost 34 years on the job. You know, had seen a lot, you know, along that line. And so…

JT: Do you think that helped you?

MK: I think it did you know, I wouldn't say that it should have been the way it happened.

00;19;19;07 - 00;19;40;17

MK: I’ll give you a little anecdote here is that, you know, it seemed like when you were a rookie officer, they felt to build resiliency with, you know, it was to actually take you to traumatic events. So, you know, with you know, before you went to the academy that we had a fatal accident, which was a car burned up and somebody died inside tragically.

00;19;40;17 - 00;20;00;04

MK: Our supervisors felt as though, you know we bring the rookies and show them that, see how they're going to react. Well, you know, I didn't need to be there, but that's what they felt as though we can maybe build resiliency. You notice today, that's not the case anymore. You know, you don't build them by adding trauma to what you see…

JT: Right.

00;20;00;14 - 00;20;21;29

MK: That's not the way to build it. It's going to happen on its own. Naturally, right. So but I over the years, you know, had been and been through various, you know, various situations within as a police officer so that I felt as though I was I was probably handling a coping with things more often because I was always thinking about myself and concerned about the family.

00;20;22;11 - 00;20;49;09

MK: And I would always try to leave, you know, things that happened at work, leave me at work, you know, and I always appreciated the 15 minutes to a half hour drive to home because it gave me time to decompress and to just leave it home and don't bring it home. And that also just to clear your mind and it helps you now cope with the rest of the day not, you know, burden your family with things and certainly you take it out on your family. So…

00;20;49;09 - 00;21;02;11

MK: Over the years I think I had a lot more, you know, built up, you know, I wouldn't say built up resilience and so I just had a lot more experiences and opportunities to think about how we cope through these things. But…. Go ahead.

00;21;02;13 - 00;21;21;10

JT: But yeah so... You know, it made them as you're saying that. And I think in one of the previous episodes, what you shared there is the essence of not just silver linings in catastrophic events, but the daily silver linings. And I know with some of the trainings that I still do with police is we bring up that very thing that you said is the idea of going from work to home.

00;21;21;22 - 00;21;48;21

JT: And here in New York. And I know it's everywhere, but we have bad traffic. So, the bad is like you're sitting in traffic. I go that's… you have no control over that, right? You have control over what do you do with that time. And like you said, it's that proactiveness of building up, that reserve of resilience practices that then when something catastrophic, you were able to fall back on that and that's where I think it's truly stressing that importance of the proactive or what I call the upward spiral practices.

00;21;48;29 - 00;22;10;11

JT: And yet again, it's something that's so simple that you know, it's almost a cliche, hey, leave it at work or leave it in your locker. But then ask and again, for the listeners, how do you actually practice that even on those drive homes every day? How do you… what do you do during that, whether it's at five, ten, 20 minutes, hour, hour and a half, whatever that commute is, how are you doing or what practices are you doing? So thank you for pointing that out.

00;22;10;11 - 00;22;28;27

MK: I think what you do is you do what makes you happy. And it could be, you know, you listen to the music you like…

JT: Right yeah…

MK: Or you get on the phone with somebody, you know, maybe a loved one. Or somebody, a friend or whatever and don't talk about work. Talk about, you know, maybe what you're going to do this weekend and talk about other things.

00;22;28;27 - 00;22;52;23

MK: And because there's always positive things out there just yet, a lot of negative things going on in your world and in the world we live in. But there's so many positive things. So that's a way of doing that. And that that that can be just a couple of… you know… suggestions of that. You know, for again, that little right on that little 15 to 20 minute ride or whatever it is that you're taking on that helps you kind of almost decompress.

00;22;53;12 - 00;23;11;19

JT: Well, I wonder if we take a bit wider view too of it right now at the moment. So, in trying to understand it more for… so Sandy Hook happens and you're in the role of not just the first responder, but you're the chief and you're responsible for your agency in the community even as you said it as a whole.

00;23;12;02 - 00;23;22;28

JT: Were there specific things that you did to make sure that you looked after your workforce and again, maybe in the immediate, but then also longer term? What did that look like?

00;23;23;02 - 00;23;39;27

MK: Yeah. I mean, I've often said that, you know, we were well prepared as an agency to respond to an active shooter situation. I don't know if we were very well prepared to handle the aftermath of that and the aftermath being what are we going to do? What are we going to do as an agency? What do we do as individuals?

00;23;40;08 - 00;24;04;22

MK: So not only to recover and cope with a tragic event that, you know, can have acts of shooters typically are, you know, tragic events, but also how you navigate through the myriad of new responsibilities that you have as an agency, as individuals. And we really hadn't actually practiced that. You know, we did a lot of it practicing and training an active shooter.

00;24;05;00 - 00;24;26;06

MK: We certainly had, you know, had stood up, you know, some things that I think we're going to help from the mental health perspective. We certainly had you know, we had agencies that were going to come in to help us get through this, but what I would say that where I think we, you know, kind of almost fell a little bit was that we really didn't have a…

00;24;26;09 - 00;24;50;00

MK: We didn't have a solid mental health manager. And I think what, you know, again, because this was which is unimaginable thing and, in a trauma, you know, you know, the stress level was tremendously high. It wasn't just like we were we were going to walk through, you know, let's say a fatal accident or somebody committed suicide. You know, after the after event.

00;24;50;00 - 00;25;10;14

MK: This was bigger than that. This was you know, you can, you can almost times it by 26 if you want to say that. And now we had to deal with that. And again, it almost went agency wide. Went agency wide from the perspective of your dispatchers and your civilian staff and your and you're certainly a sworn staff on and encompassed everybody from chief on down.

00;25;11;04 - 00;25;34;12

MK: So, you know, you have to think about that. And again, having you know, what are you going to do for your people and into whether you're mandated or you offer it, you know, and those things, you know, became the difficult part for me and I really had to establish a relationship with at least one or two mental health, you know, say experts that would help me.

00;25;34;12 - 00;25;46;03

MK: And I also tapped out to a lot of different chiefs had been through these events and ask them a lot of questions. So that was, you know, the more or less the informal ways I tried to manage that part of it.

00;25;46;18 - 00;26;08;12

JT: Well, right. And I think some of the things you pointed out there, it's that idea of getting in how you embrace it. You didn't have to figure it out yourself. You reached out to other in law enforcement, but also beyond that, into the mental health experts, which I again, I picture the cynical version of me was like, oh, well, they don't understand policing or how do I know somebody that they're going to be able to click with them?

00;26;08;18 - 00;26;36;06

JT: And I think there again, it reminds me of that proactive or maybe perhaps a lesson learned for anyone listening, especially in leadership. Have those relationships proactively, much like how you're supposed to do in the community. Well, we do it with the mental health community, because the other thing, too, which I was thinking about when you said it earlier, too, with your experience. Right? Over 30 plus years when it happens in an important aspect of this cognitive reappraisal is you had seen horrible things over the course of your career.

00;26;36;13 - 00;26;58;18

JT: And from the world of cognitive reappraisal, the important aspect is realizing you made it through those incidents, you got through that. So it shows you in… a colleague of mine at Columbia, Dr. George Bonanno, reminds everybody in his research with regard to 9/11 [September 11] in reminding people we're all pretty resilient to begin with. Let's not forget that we're all highly resilient, but what does that look like?

00;26;58;23 - 00;27;25;04

JT: It can look… different ways and different things, but reminding ourselves we've been through bad, tough moments before. Nothing like what you experienced. But hey, I got through other tough moments. The other important thing I want to remind for everybody, too, is that I don't know if you had this experience with this silver lining aspect or the wrong way would be somebody would say to you, hey, think about all the people that you did save.

00;27;25;19 - 00;27;45;09

JT: And because sometimes it could be interpreted as minimizing someone's experience, I'm more of an advocate of helping you realize that or to come to that conclusion. And I don't know if I'm saying it clearly or not, is when people practice silver linings, cognitive reappraisal, it's for them to figure that out... I don’t know. How does that apply to you or what do you think?

00;27;45;017 - 00;28;05;15

MK: Right, one of the things I thought of was I said, you know, there's been enough tragedy in this particular event, you know, and my thoughts were if I'm going to be, you know, given a little boot in the butt. But then I said to myself that, you know jeez, let's not have any more victims. There were enough victims already. You had the victims that were in the school.

00;28;05;15 - 00;28;32;00

MK: You had their families. You had the school personnel that were not you know, not injured or, you know, and killed. You had it for all the first responders that that came. You know, we had enough victims there. Again, there are different levels of victimization, as we know. But again, not all traumatic events were equal and not all first responders and people are equal.

00;28;32;00 - 00;28;51;10

MK: Therefore, I kept thinking, well, how can you know, how can I and now address, you know, the variations that you would have with the people that you're in charge with, the people that you can help the most, OK? And if it was your only agency, that's fine. If you wanted to reach out and help others, whether it be the school district or the community, you could do that.

00;28;51;10 - 00;28;58;26

MK: So that's where I kind of emphasized my thinking, you know, there and after. I don't have to address your question exactly.

00;28;59;15 - 00;29;19;19

JT: Yeah, I know it does. And again, I hope other people are doing what I was doing. As you were saying that, too. I wrote a note, don't compare. Right. Because it's trauma. That incident clearly is traumatic, but people respond differently. And if you start comparing yourself to somebody else that looks like they, have it all together, well, why?

00;29;19;20 - 00;29;40;12

JT: Why am I not as good as them or that… that's not helpful and it's not healthy. It is an individual journey. But also importantly, reminding yourself you're not on that journey by yourself. Wait, so a question I have for you, I guess it's twofold in you're human, first you’re Mike, but in front of Mike, you have chief, retired now.

00;29;40;17 - 00;29;56;20

JT: But when you were in the role of chief, I guess were there best practices or maybe tips, lesson learned, whatever term you want to use in the role for other chiefs or leaders that are listening right now? But then also for individuals regardless of rank. Uniform or civilian.

00;29;57;05 - 00;30;18;01

MK: That's a great question, Jeff. And one of the things I came up with afterwards and you know, obviously the mental health manager or having somebody who has you know, who’re very knowledgeable or even a mental health provider, if you can get relationships built ahead of time, OK, it's going to be easier to bring them in when and if that ever happens.

00;30;18;08 - 00;30;18;01

MK: OK, so that's number one. Because cops don't like to open up. And certainly, there's you know, there's still some stigma about, you know, seeing a psychiatrist or psychologist or you know, getting some mental health treatment. You know, and again, I think we've come a long way as a profession since, you know, ten or 15 years ago. But we still got a little way to go.

00;30;18;08 - 00;30;36;00

MK: And if you have that kind of relationship in advance, it's easier to bring them in and to make some headway and certainly have some effective work done. The other thing I would think that you'd want to really do is make sure your support systems are well in place in your agency OK. Well, again, we were building a peer to peer at the time…

00;31;00;27 - 00;31;02;08

JT: That's what I was going to ask peer support?.

00;31;02;08 - 00;31;20;15

MK: Yeah, we're doing that. We were building up peer to peer. But I will tell you that, you know, initially when I threw it out there for the agency to consider, you know, I didn't get a lot of you know, you get a lot of feedback on, you know, I’m raising my hand to be a part of that. I think after the event, certainly we, we were able to stand it up a lot easier, quicker.

00;31;21;18 - 00;31;44;11

MK: But that was one of the pieces that we needed to, you know, needed to say we got to get this done and let's do it. And, and now I got to say, they probably have a very, very robust, you know, peer to peer program. Again, support systems are really, really important within the agency and any… within the community. If you know, you know, you're your experts in the field, it's always easier to get things done.

00;31;45;06 - 00;32;03;09

MK: So, I think those two and certainly talk through it all. I mean, it's not a I you know, sometimes you wouldn't want to speak about that at a let's say, a staff meeting or something like that. But you do kind of you can open up. You've got to show that, first of all, you're vulnerable as a chief and supervisors can be vulnerable.

00;32;03;20 - 00;32;20;19

MK: You know, getting believe it or not, I think that some of the leadership for getting things done from the mental health perspective within our agency came from the lower ranks. People who are really, really interested they became the true de facto leaders of getting things put in place after the event.

00;32;21;25 - 00;32;55;12

JT: Yeah, I know. We had on one of the early episodes the Chief Kristen Ziman and she had say a I remember specifically, she mentioned what you just said there. A leader doesn't have to be the chief. Of course, you want the chief to be a leader and clearly you are. But the point she was trying to make is leaders are in all ranks, in all positions, and it's in moments like these different people could be leaders in different ways. And sometimes they can have an impact that you can never do as a chief.

00;32;55;12 - 00;33;14;20

JT: Right. And you can't know every single person necessarily on a one-to-one level. And it's that idea of how do you empower then your leaders on the lower level or like the frontline supervisors. But then sometimes it's just the senior cop as well. Right? Yeah. I like how you mentioned with them again from this mindset of Silver Linings.

00;33;14;26 - 00;33;32;10

JT: A couple of things. You mentioned that we've come a long way. We certainly have. And there's still it's we the way I thought it was like sometimes it's good to pause or, you know, take a moment, stop while you're on this long journey that there is no finish line to it and realizing, yeah, there's a lot more to go,

00;33;32;15 - 00;34;07;06

JT: But also realizing there have been significant improvements in many, many agencies. And this is where I'd say for the officers, the people that are listen of all ranks, unless that aren't the very top person, realize the advancements that have been made, but also realize that more needs to be done in every agency but just try not to catch yourself, not let it become cynicism and just looking at only the bad because first, you never find a boss much like anybody in your life that you agree 100 percent with them, but trying to figure out what is being done. And the other thing, and I throw it back to you is how you mentioned I think

00;34;07;06 - 00;34;21;29

JT: you used the word peace. The idea of the peer-to-peer or peer support. It's an important piece of this puzzle. And I remind people, don't overplay peer support. It's not the only piece of the puzzle.

MK: That's right.

JT: Yeah. So, I don't know if we what else are you thinking?

00;34;23;01 - 00;34;21;29

MK: Well, I mean, obviously what you do individually is really, really important. You know, that, you know, your agency can throw a lot of things at you. And again, whether you're mandated or not or you know, you know, I always say that, you know, in my agency, we always got physicals every year. Well, what about a mental health physical, you know, or mental health checkup,

00;34;45;29 - 00;35;03;13

MK: as I would call it, a mental health check? What's the problem with that? You know, and, you know, that's maybe something that could be adopted by agencies where all of a sudden you send them to, you know, some mental health professional just for a half hour to say sit down a talk, OK? See what's on their mind.

00;35;03;28 - 00;35;21;00

MK: First of all, gives them the opportunity, number one, to if there is something there, they can and if they if it's done right and done in confidentiality, it should be done. Now, you're not going to have any, you know, any back, you know, negative back feed that's number two is you're also developing a relationship.

00;35;21;21 - 00;35;37;23

MK: And when I said I thought relationships are really, really important, especially when it comes to the police culture, we don't trust a lot of people. I don't think we're going to trust, you know, again, maybe the medical profession is not one of those trusting people either. But sometimes we don’t even trust other agencies and our colleagues in another agency.

00;35;37;23 - 00;36;00;19

MK: So, you know, I hope nobody takes offense by this. But again, it gives you not only so you can start develop a relationship. So, if something does happen, then maybe you just pick up the phone and then you speak to that person confidentially and that's the way it should be. So, you know, that's one of the things that I kind of said, you know, again, whether you mandate or not, maybe it's the opportunity to do that.

00;36;01;27 - 00;36;20;02

MK: And certainly, if you do mandate, it's a cover for everybody else because everybody's doing it and only if only a handful are doing it and everybody else is not. You kind of say, well, there's no cover there. You ought to cover that, especially when you consider that's against it's sometimes thinking of negatively within any agency.

00;36;20;24 - 00;36;45;16

JT: Yeah. And I'll tell you, I'm a big advocate of the proactive mental health annual checkups or whatever you want to call it and here's my challenge to any listeners that are leaders and chiefs or high-ranking people. How about don't wait for another agency to do it right? Much like how IACP is cutting edge on things, how about they might challenge all of you and I don't know who you are that's listening, but hopefully hearing Chief Kehoe say this as well, why don't you become the person?

00;36;45;22 - 00;37;06;17

JT: Why don't you institute it? And here's the thing. You don't have to figure it out by yourself. And there are groups like AFSP that have virtual ones, there's other agencies… there are some agencies out there already doing it and you could simply just Google it and you'll see news stories that come up and some are starting to do it. We're getting close to the end. So, I have one last question for you before we get to that.

00;37;06;22 - 00;37;22;22

JT: Here's my challenge takeaway practice for all our listeners maybe. And maybe, and again, you know what you can do what works and what's safe for you to do, but maybe try and practice this and think of a moment, a tough moment in your life. Work or even your personal life and try to pull something positive out of it.

00;37;23;00 - 00;37;49;00

JT: And it could be truly challenging for you. And this is where pushing yourself. Just the right amount outside your comfort zone. I'm not looking to cause harm or grief to anybody, but maybe try that. But then not just a tough event that you experienced in your life. Here's the other challenge and sometimes truly this is harder. Is pick out an ordinary day or your next day, your next shift, your next tour at the end of the day, regardless of what happened.

00;37;49;06 - 00;38;09;18

JT: And it's a type of also gratitude practice. And this is where resilience practices intertwine with each other. What's something good that happened that day? Regardless of how good or how bad it was? What was one good maybe interaction you had with a coworker or even a member of the public? And again, it's the idea. The idea of not minimizing or disregarding anything bad or negative that might have happened.

00;38;09;22 - 00;38;40;10

JT: It's trying to create a little bit of balance. So my last question for you, Chief, is maybe looking back on Sandy Hook, maybe just from you, more specifically as a human being, how… what did you do to help handle things and is there maybe something that you'd say and I know how you said with the drive home, maybe those disconnects, maybe a gun, something tangible that people can take, something that worked, but also maybe start with is there something that didn't work in telling people, hey, you tried this didn't work, and it just didn't work for you.

00;38;40;26 - 00;38;45;14

JT: If there is one, but then maybe end on the positive, note here's something that did work for you.

00;38;45;14 - 00;39;07;18

MK: I think there's a there's a bunch of points I can make that I think are going to maybe be helpful through the audience. And number one is review your self-talk. What do you… what are you saying to yourself? You know, I mean, are you really thinking along the lines? You're getting your negative comments. And if you can reveal your thoughts here and there, you may, maybe you may be a revelation to you that, oh, yeah, I'm not really thinking the right way.

00;39;07;29 - 00;39;29;04

MK: So that would be number one. Obviously, you want it. You want to exercise your body and mind, OK? And that's important. That's a personal decision, OK, that you have to make. And if you're exercising your body, mind, and body, you're on the right track. The other thing is that you can train your brain to do things and again, that self-talk and other things.

00;39;29;04 - 00;39;57;16

MK: But, you know, we all are resilient. You're right. And we all we want to do is improve upon that. We all are probably good police officers when we're hired. We can improve upon that. And we do that. We do that throughout our whole career, because we learn every day and finally, again, from the agency perspective, you know, I would think that, you know, again, you know, your people and many times issues with you know, subordinates do not reach the level where that somebody can do something positive.

00;39;58;06 - 00;40;32;02

MK: So, think about it this way and say unresolved trauma is an officer safety issue. And I know officers, when they and I've heard it enough times in my career, they think about their own safety OK? And if that if you really believe in it and you believe it and I believe in it, then think about that. If your fellow colleague, your fellow officer has unresolved trauma and you see the see the differences in that person, think about it. It's affecting your safety, not their safety, but your safety.

00;40;32;16 - 00;40;40;10

MK: And that may spur you to help, you know, and to help and certainly do other things that maybe help that person, but help the agency.

00;40;41;12 - 00;41;06;07

JT: Yeah, that's amazing. Fantastic. And they're all absolutely tangible stuff that people can A reflect on immediately. But then also no amount of positive thinking can replace positive action. Let the positive thinking lead to action, like you said. And I really like especially that self-talk and it's not soft, fluffy, or touchy-feely stuff. No, that's hardcore resilience.

00;41;06;07 - 00;41;29;15

JT: And I'm really glad you emphasized that a few times because the way I look at it be your number one advocate, not your number one enemy, and that starts you can control that and work on it. The last thing I'll add to that is just real resilience is also reaching out for help when you need it. If while you're on patrol, if you're in a tough situation, you call for backup, let that be the same thing.

00;41;29;26 - 00;41;46;06

JT: When it comes to your mental health, you don't need to fix it or work on it all by yourself. True resilience, true strength is saying, hey, yeah, maybe I need somebody to help me out here. And it might be a professional and that's what real resilience is. I'll give you the last word before I wrap it up. Anything else you want to add for our audience?

00;41;47;03 - 00;42;08;21

MK: Well, you know, take your mental health personally. It's your responsibility at the end of the day and make it a serious part of you know, your daily life. Not only do it for you, but you do it for your colleagues and certainly for your family and friends. And there can be no greater gift that you give to others than your mental health.

00;42;09;27 - 00;42;37;18

JT: Excellent. Thank you so much, everybody. We had an incredible guest today, retired Chief Michael Kehoe. And over 30 years of law enforcement experience and truly, I think today was a great example of connecting not just the research, but what the real-life experiences in how can we try to pull something meaningful out of something terrible that he personally experienced as a chief, but also as a person. Everybody, thank you for listening.

00;42;37;27 - 00;42;51;23

JT: We always accept feedback any way you want. Let us know. Thank you for listening to this podcast because it's all about us, the people doing great work out there. Check in with somebody today and make sure one of those people you're checking in with is yourself. Thank you, everybody. Be well.

00;43;25;25 - 00;43;48;19

This project was supported in whole or in part by cooperative agreement number 2017-VI-BX-KS-001 awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. And as always, the opinions contained herein are those of the speakers and do not represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice or the IACP.

00;43;49;10 - 00;44;14;13

References to specific individuals, agencies, companies, products, or services should not be considered an endorsement by the speakers. Rather, the references are illustrations to supplement discussion of the issues. Thanks for listening to today's episode. You can visit learn.theiacp.org/podcast to view show notes from today's episode and find additional ways you can learn from leaders in the field.