



# Junior Officer Advisory Group

## Readiness & Deployment Committee

### Behavioral Health Team

# Practicing Wellness

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## MENTAL HEALTH TOOLKIT

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As the summer season rolls in and the thoughts of warm weather, outdoor destinations, and fun-filled activities are upon us, it is essential to recognize that this time of year for USPHS officers can be challenging. The looming anticipation of promotion results, coupled with the joys and disappointments of their release, can be extremely taxing on one's mental health. It is necessary to acknowledge work and life-related stressors and connect them with coping strategies that are both practical and effective. In the 2018 article "Coping with stress at work," The American Psychological Association (APA) notes that "Working hard should not be confused with overworking at the expense of relationships and physical health." (*Yes, feel free to read that again*).

As we balance competing priorities of work, family, finances, and health (physiological and mental), consider adopting a *Mental Health Toolkit* of strategies to cope with stressors while promoting and optimizing a healthy life-work balance. Some strategies include:

- **Tracking your stressors:** Utilizing a journal or your phone to record the situations that have caused you stress and your response to them, including your feelings, the circumstances around the situation, and your reaction. Documenting this information helps recognize patterns with your stressors and reactions to them. Use the knowledge of these patterns to create positive responses to stressful situations while also building healthy daily habits.
- **Establishing Boundaries:** Create clear life-work boundaries and stick to them intentionally. In the current digital age that we live in, the feeling of always being connected and available can create unnecessary pressure and stress. Consider utilizing the "Quiet Hours" or "Do Not Disturb" settings on your devices to dedicate and optimize downtime away from the screens. Additionally, communicate and set clear expectations with those around you (supervisors, colleagues, family members) regarding your life-work boundaries.
- **Taking Time to Recharge:** Burn-out is REAL and is a direct result of chronic stress. Establish a time to reset and disconnect from both work and personal stressors. Set aside time to relax and focus your energy on hobbies or your favorite activities. Take your vacation days- you have earned them! It may help to identify an accountability partner that holds you responsible for taking the time to reset and recharge.
- **Relaxation Techniques:** Yoga, mindfulness, meditation, and deep breathing are all exercises that can be done to help reduce overall levels of stress. Additionally, create a playlist that makes you feel good and sing (singing allows for an emotional release); read a book and pick out your favorite quote; or call your funny friend (laughter relaxes your body, boosts your immune system, and releases endorphins). These relaxation techniques can help create balance in our daily life.

### References:

- American Psychological Association. (2018, October 14). Coping with stress at work. <https://www.apa.org/topics/healthy-workplaces/work-stress>
- National Alliance on Mental Illness. [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)