

HOW FULL IS YOUR BOTTLE?

The Psychological Therapies team at PRRT have been working exclusively with police trauma for almost 15 years. During that time we have learned a lot about the horrific traumas experienced by police officers in Northern Ireland, the unique stressors associated with this role and how those experiences unavoidably impact on individual officers and their families. In sharing this learning with others we have developed this model. We would invite you to take a few moments to read about this model and then apply it to your own life and circumstances this very moment and then answer the question at the end of this article.

The Bottle

Let's imagine everyone is a big 2 litre plastic coca cola bottle! We all have a certain amount of negative 'stress' in our lives which is perfectly normal including past, present and future stresses. This 'normal' stress is represented by the bottle being about one third full of coke. As long as the level of the coke does not go above one third full it does not pose any significant problems. This coke bottle can be shaken as hard as you want and when you take the lid off the coke will fizz up and down inside the bottle without spilling out because it has space to do so.

However, when the level of coke in the bottle begins to rise we start to experience difficulties. When the bottle gets fuller we have two major problems. Firstly, we become much more sensitive to triggers and the smallest shake of the bottle from the outside can cause it to overflow. Secondly when the bottle is shaken and overflows it is not just the coke at the top that spills out – but often all of the coke that has been stored up underneath also comes rushing out. In real life this may look like an extreme emotional reaction to relatively minor triggers.



So how does the level of the coke in the bottle begin to rise? This can happen in one of two ways. Firstly big traumas in our lives can add large amounts of coke to the bottle over a very short period of time. These 'big' events can include service based traumas or distressing events in our personal lives. In addition 'small' more subtle stressors can raise the levels in our bottle by adding drip after drip over longer periods of time. These 'drips' may be long term stressors that wear us down or underlying emotional 'baggage' such as guilt, anger, grief or depression. However one thing is certain for all of us – we only have limited space in our bottles.

It is crucial therefore to ensure that the coke in your bottle is kept at a safe level. This can be achieved in a number of ways such as effectively dealing with issues as they arise, rather than storing them up and engaging in activities that

are positive and 'empty' our bottles regularly. In cases where the bottle is very full sometimes professional support is required to empty the bottle out in a safe and constructive way. PRRT's Psychological Therapies team of senior specialist clinicians exist for this sole purpose. Through paced and effective treatment we work with officers and their families to empty their bottles to achieve a better quality of life.

After taking some time to reflect on your current circumstances – how full is your bottle? If it is fuller that it should be and you or your family members are seeing the signs we would encourage you to make an appointment with our team to discuss how we can work together to 'empty it'.

For an appointment please contact Clinical Administration on 028 9042 7788.

PRRT is based at Maryfield, Holywood and provides psychology, physiotherapy, personal development and training to the retired police population. PSNI employees can access our healthcare services via referrals from PSNI occupational health. Serving officers can access personal development and training directly. For further information or to make an appointment please call 028 9042 7788.



For further information on all PRRT services please visit www.prrt.org.