



**BOS**

**BEFORE OPERATIONAL STRESS**

**#INTHISTOGETHER**



For the first time in our history, governments and communities are coming together to acknowledge the psychological impacts of those we rely on every day to serve and protect us.

We are gaining important insights in how public service personnel -- our military, police, firefighters, paramedics and corrections officers -- suffer psychological effects merely by doing their jobs we ask of them. Through my clinical practice, I have seen first hand how psychological injuries can change the lives of our public service personnel in profoundly negative ways.

We are now better positioned to do more as a society to help these populations from suffering the effects of on-the-job psychological injuries.

Let me introduce the Wounded Warriors Canada BOS program (Before Operational Stress).

This program has been carefully designed to provide public service personnel with theoretical, practical and experiential learning to enhance their resilience and mental health as they continue to operate within their public service positions. It is a unique program bringing together cutting-edge clinical approaches with recognized scientific expertise to support psychological health and wellness of public service personnel over the course of their operational careers.

It is intended to empower public service personnel to take charge of their mental health by giving them specific knowledge and techniques to do so.

It is one way we are helping to serve and protect those who serve and protect us.



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## WHAT IS BOS?

Our evidence tells us of ways to mitigate the impact of operational stress in public service personnel without it resulting in tragic consequences. Will public service employees be exposed to operational stress? The answer is 'yes.' Will they need to take precautions and do some work to address operational stress when it occurs? The answer is also 'yes.' But public service employees are not destined to have their lives ruined by the effects of operational stress.

BOS empowers public service employees to be in charge of their mental health. We know there is information these employees need to protect themselves from the effects of operational stress. We know there are experiences these employees need to better protect themselves from operational stress. And we know they need practice and support to incorporate this knowledge and these experiences into their operational roles. BOS delivers on these three objectives.

## HOW BOS WORKS

BOS is a group-based intervention providing participants the opportunity to receive and offer support in a group context with issues related to operational stress. A key feature of BOS is developing the group dynamic because therapeutic change is enhanced when group members are supported together. We set rules of engagement to ensure the group is a safe place for issues to be processed. Once the group is established, specific information relevant to operational stress is provided and its relevance explored by participants.

BOS also uniquely combines theoretical and experiential learning procedures to enhance understanding of how to mitigate the effects of operational stress. Within each module, participants will receive education that will then be discussed and processed within the group.

Another important component of BOS is embedded peer support. A public service employee in the latter stages of recovering from an operational stress injury will provide peer leadership to the group. A vast research base has consistently highlighted over and over again the importance of peer support in terms of protection and recovery from the effects of operational stress.

# BOS PROGRAM STRUCTURE

BOS is a 16-hour program divided into eight modules, all delivered in a group setting of up to 10 participants.

## MODULE 1: OPERATIONAL SERVICE CULTURES

Public service organizations have been influenced by an historical approach to public protection that encourages stoicism as a fundamental attribute required as part of their work. BOS will begin with an exploration of operational service cultures and how valued attributes of stoicism, which continue to be important, must be understood in the context of public service protection.

A visual media tool will be used to enhance understanding of this concept and the dissemination of the knowledge within this module will then be discussed within the group to explore relevance of the information to group participants.

### Who Delivers BOS?

BOS is delivered by up to two PhD or Masters level Psychologists and one Peer Support individual who has been diagnosed with an OSI and has been in a process of recovery for some time.

What participants will take away from this module is an enhanced understanding of stoicism and how these cultural attributes can interfere with processing natural reactions to human suffering.

## MODULE 2: NEURAL EFFECTS

What we know about operational stress injuries, and particularly the

injury of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), is that pathological disruption of specific neural pathways occurs. In essence, exposure to chronic, unprocessed operational stress results in changes to the brain. This module serves to enhance participants' understanding of natural responses to stress and the importance of supporting the finishing of a limbic response to stress when it occurs. That is, participants will learn the importance of, and techniques, to facilitate the processing of natural responses to stress so as to mitigate pathological disruption to the neural circuitry implicated in PTSD.

## MODULE 3: MARKERS

We are normalizing the understanding that public service personnel are going to be exposed to operational stress. This module serves to help participants' understand and recognize the cognitive, emotional and behavioral markers of operational stress within themselves. The objective of this module is to enhance participants' ability to engage in self-monitoring to increase their ability to recognize when intervention is required.

## MODULE 4: COGNITIVE IMPACTS

This module will focus on understanding how operational stress can negatively impact cognition. For the purposes of this module, cognition implies thoughts about ourselves, others and about the world as a whole. It also incorporates understanding of operational stress and its impact on information processing. Participants will be supported to understand the relationship between operational stress and cognitive change, and they will be provided with specific techniques to intervene on patterns of cognition. Operational stress causes fiery thinking. This module gives participants techniques to calm their thinking.

## MODULE 5: EMOTIONS

Human beings all come into this world with a basic, universal set of emotions. One need only spend time with a small child to understand what those emotions are. In the context of stoic service cultures, public service personnel are often socialized to treat some emotions as more acceptable than others, leading to suppression of emotions deemed unacceptable. When certain emotional experiences are denied or avoided, the risks of intensifying operational stress effects are increased. This module will focus on the nature and purpose of the basic human emotions. Participants will be supported to understand the role of each emotional experience and will be encouraged to relate to all emotional experience differently than what stoic service cultures would encourage.

### Who should take BOS?

The BOS program is designed for any individual who has been or is likely to be exposed to Operational Stress.

# BOS PROGRAM STRUCTURE

## MODULE 6: BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

One of the most common effects of operational stress is negative behavioral change. When stress intensifies, public service personnel commonly change their daily activities, often losing interest in activities they once enjoyed as well as to become more avoidant of situations that remind them of operational experiences. This module will focus on the importance of behavioral activation and how participants can utilize graded behavioral exposure to maintain regulated and valued daily activity. Public service personnel remain healthy when they have a personal life that they value. It remains essential for public service personnel to be able to disconnect from their operational role and having valued personal activities supports their ability to do so. This module addresses this objective.

### Where is BOS delivered?

BOS is delivered at the convenience of the participants either at a WGM office or at a location chosen by the individual group. Times will be customized to facilitate specific group needs.

to misinterpreting the intentions and experiences of others. The downstream effects of this are social isolation and loss of relationships, whether personal or occupational. This module focuses on the understanding and practice of three specific communication skills that support effective communication. These three skills are: paraphrasing, perception check, and clarification. While seemingly simple, these are robust communication interventions to enhance interpersonal understanding.

## MODULE 7: COMMUNICATION

Those under operational stress commonly become less outwardly expressive. Sometimes public service personnel struggle to know what it is they're thinking and feeling, and struggle putting those thoughts and feelings into words. This creates fertile ground for communication and relational breakdown because those suffering the effects of operational stress are vulnerable

## MODULE 8: EMPATHY

There is a beautiful paradox that is implicated in a disorder like PTSD. That is, in order to suffer the effects of being exposed to human suffering, one must have an inherent empathic response to the human being to whom suffering occurs. However, having an empathetic response inherently renders one more vulnerable to that very exposure. This module serves to help participants understand that their capacity for empathy in the face of human suffering will help them to be good at their job. Yet it is that capacity for empathetic response that will render them more vulnerable to the effects of human suffering. It is this vulnerability that, if managed appropriately, will insulate them from the negative effects of operational stress.



At the conclusion of this discussion, the group will then focus on the upcoming transition away from meeting on a weekly basis to meeting each month. Following the eight-week initial delivery, the group will then be provided with 10 months of follow-up on a monthly basis. The follow-up sessions will allow for the provision of support to participants as group members consolidate the learning they have done during the initial eight weeks. Follow-up sessions will also provide opportunities for members to discuss successes and challenges as they continue to manage the effects of operational stress.





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