



Best Practice in Mental Health Training for Law Enforcement Personnel

Professionals in the area of mental health and law enforcement have considered and developed best practice guidelines¹ for the training of law enforcement personnel, which include all of the following four levels:

1) New Skills – basic training

As part of an initiative to ensure that all personnel have a basic understanding of mental illness and how to best respond, this training is appropriate for all staff who has not received any of the training listed below.

Who: All personnel, especially supervisory staff and front counter staff

Hours: 2

Content: Understanding mental illness (who, what, attitudes about, basic response information).

2) Recruit Training

At recruit academy for all pre-service recruits as part of their general police training, to balance “control and contain” training, understand legal rights and responsibilities of police and persons with mental illness, to raise awareness of signs of mental illness and increase knowledge (academic and practical application) of how to most effectively respond to mental health issues/crises.

Who: All police recruits

Hours: 8 – 15

Content: As per 1 above plus: legal component (Mental Health Act, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, applicable Criminal Code sections, internal police report requirements); recognition and response component (assessment, crisis intervention, response options), booking considerations (psychiatric assessment options, suicide screening, medication management).

3) In-Service Training

As part of required annual training for all officers.

Who: All officers

Hours: Will vary depending on relevant content, but minimum 2 hours

Content: Mental health issues would include updates on relevant law, policies, and procedures; resources; and medical/psychological information.

4) Advanced Skills (specialized) Training

Training of a select group of officers to prepare them to be part of department initiatives such as Crisis Intervention Teams or other specialized mental health response units. Cross training at the community level of integrated groups of first responders (dispatch, ambulance paramedics, hospital emergency room intake staff, etc.) is preferred in order to build understanding and sustainable partnerships between agencies.

Who: Officers selected to participate in specialized mental health response initiative.

¹ Guidelines are based on the US Criminal Justice/Mental Health Consensus Project Report 2002 Chapter VI, downloaded September 18, 2008 from http://consensusproject.org/issue-areas/law-enforcement/profession_lawenforce2



Hours: 40

Content: In-depth curriculum on:

- a. Mental illness: specific mental illnesses, developmental disabilities, neurological disorders, suicide, medications and side effects, substance misuse and co-occurring disorders, cultural and gender issues
- b. Relevant law and legal issues, and agreements: confidentiality and information-sharing, protocols, memoranda of understanding, civil liability, civil and criminal law options, Directors warrants, reports, prosecutions, etc.
- c. Assessment and Response: This segment must include at least one day of practical application experience
 - i. Identification of mental health issues, dispatch information-gathering and relay, on-scene assessment of behaviour and causes, crisis intervention, de-escalation techniques and communication skills, suicide awareness and prevention, high risk situations, victim/witness assistance
 - ii. Non-custodial options, partnerships with mental health and community resources
 - iii. Custodial options, suicide screening, in-custody psychological assessment options, medication management