



RESILIENCE TOOLKIT

For Emergency Dispatchers

A Practical Guide to Staying Grounded and Strong,
At Work and Beyond



ADAPTED BY HUMMINGBIRD THERAPY CLINIC



WELCOME



It's time to rebuild your resilience

Working as a 9-1-1 operator means carrying more than most people ever will. You hear the worst moments of someone's life, shift after shift, and are expected to stay ready, compassionate, and precise. But resilience isn't about being superhuman. It's about building the capacity to recover, reconnect, and stay grounded—no matter what the shift throws at you. This guide provides you with simple, powerful practices grounded in the idea of real resilience. They're designed by dispatchers, for dispatchers to work in the real world—even when you're short-staffed, overwhelmed, or running nonstop. Use this toolkit to:

- Reduce stress during shifts
- Build resilience outside of work
- Strengthen emotional recovery after hard calls
- Improve mindset and internal dialogue
- Take actionable steps towards long-term wellness



RESILIENCE IS RECOVERY, NOT TOUGHNESS



Burnout begins when stress load outweighs recovery capacity. In other words, **resilience is your ability to recharge between stressful situations.** Most dispatchers handle extreme stress exceptionally well as they are happening, but recovery is often much trickier— the job rarely slows down long enough for you to reset and recover.

THREE COMPONENTS OF DISPATCHER RECOVERY

PHYSICAL

Requires you to reset your nervous system and lower stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol.

EMOTIONAL

Requires you to process the lingering effects of the call so that they don't come home or into the next call with you.

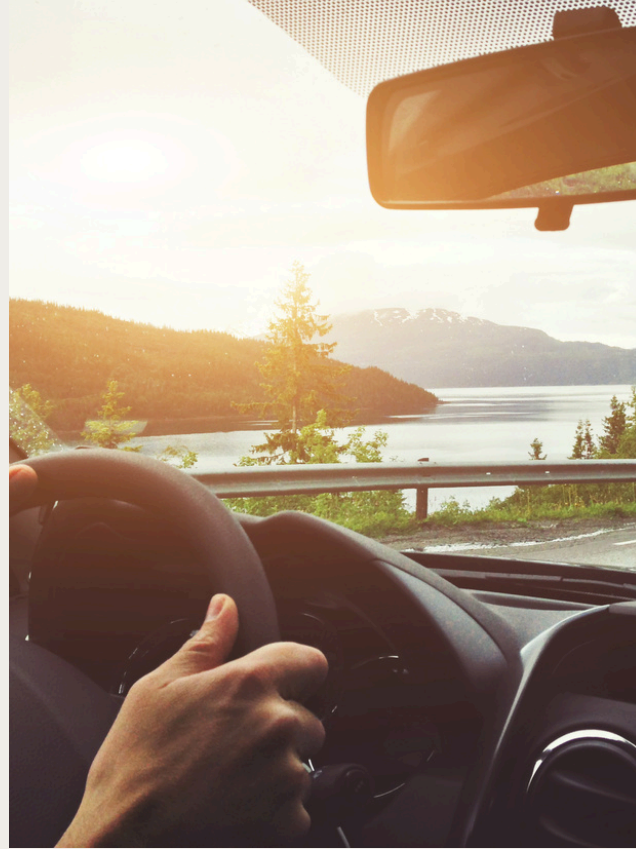
MENTAL

Requires you to adjust your inner dialogue and let go of unrealistic expectations, having more supportive thoughts instead.

When these three components are implemented, your capacity for resilience grows. When one is compromised, burnout accelerates.



HOW FULL IS YOUR TANK?



Rate each from 1 (low) to 5 (high):

1. I feel emotionally steady during most shifts: _____
2. I recover quickly after a difficult call: _____
3. I sleep well after long or stressful shifts: _____
4. My self-talk feels supportive rather than judgmental: _____
5. I feel connected to at least one coworker: _____
6. I can recognize when I'm overwhelmed before I shut down: _____
7. I make time for recovery outside of work: _____
8. I don't replay difficult calls hours after my shift ends: _____

Score:

32–40: Your resilience foundation is strong.

20–31: Your capacity for resilience is mixed— this toolkit will help you rebuild.

8–19: Your risk of burnout is high — start integrating the daily tools immediately.

A note from Dispatcher Stress: 50 Lessons On Beating the Burnout:



MOST DISPATCHERS UNDERESTIMATE HOW STRESSED THEY TRULY ARE BECAUSE STRESS BECOMES NORMAL.

5-MINUTE RESET FOR DISPATCHERS

It is important to remember to slow down and take breaks.

When to Use:

- Between high-intensity calls
- When your heart rate spikes
- When irritation or frustration creeps in

The Reset:

1. Unclench your jaw.
2. Inhale, and then exhale slowly (try 4 seconds in, 6 seconds out).
3. Relax your shoulders.
4. Name one thing you appreciate right now.
5. Quietly tell yourself “I am okay.”

This interrupts the stress cycle, and instantly calms the nervous system by lowering cortisol and adrenaline. Thoughts become clear when your body is no longer fighting for survival.



THE UNHOOKING TECHNIQUE

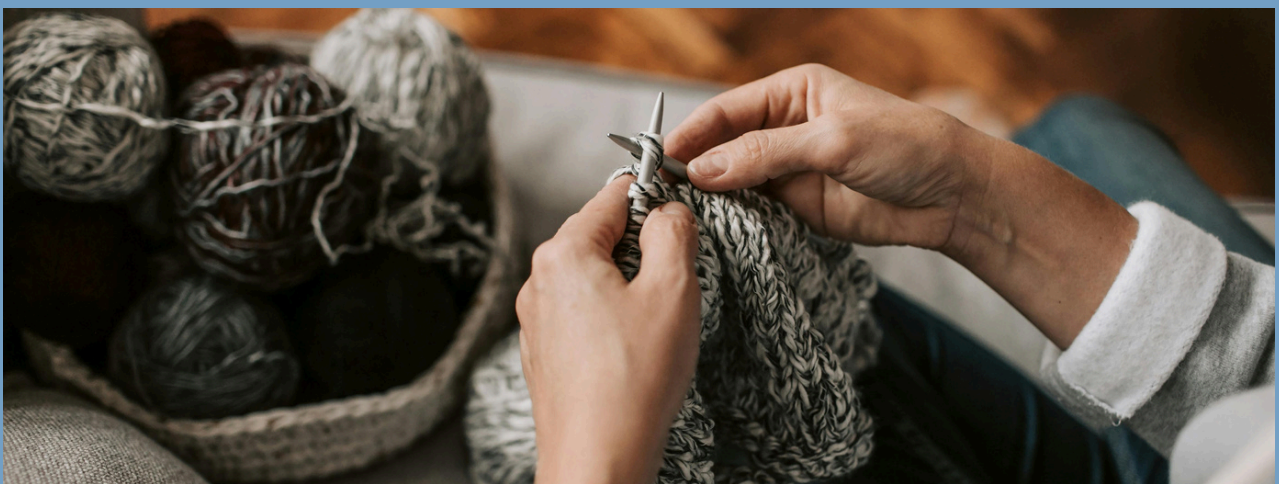
Difficult calls can be hard to move on from. You must intentionally release them so that they do not stick with you.

How to do it:

1. **Acknowledge:** “That call was difficult.”
2. **Separate:** “Their emergency is not a part of me.”
3. **Release:** Visualize the call moving into the past.
4. **Refocus:** Bring your attention back to your breath, and to the present moment.

Why it matters:

Unprocessed emotional residue is one of the leading contributors to burnout for dispatchers. The unhooking technique grounds you and clears your head so that you are ready for whatever the job throws at you.



REWRITING THE INNER SCRIPT



Dispatchers often know that what we say to ourselves can lead to burnout.

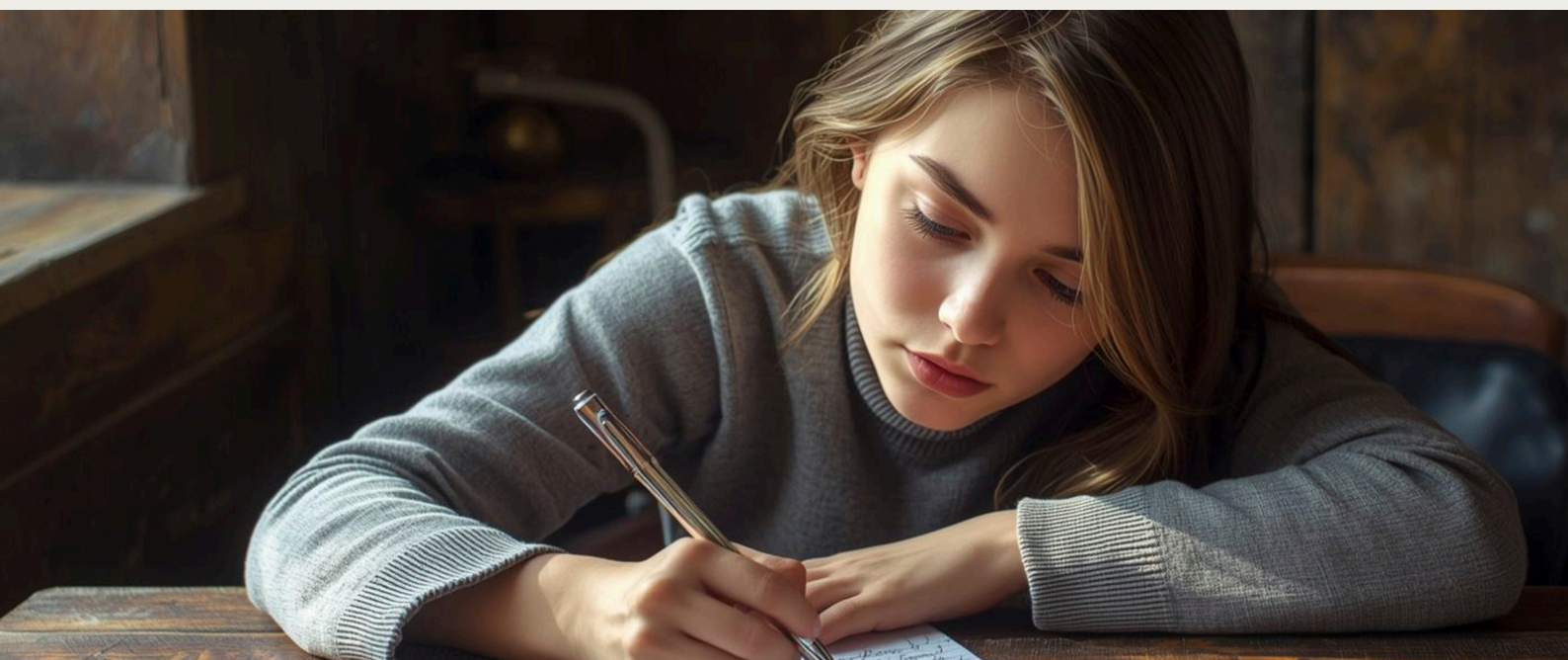
Self-talk becomes the soundtrack of our shift, which can be positive or negative.

Common Dispatcher Thoughts:

- “I could have done something differently.”
- “I made a mistake.”
- “I’m not doing enough to help others.”
- “I can’t keep up.”

The Reframe (curiosity over judgement):

- “I can’t do this.” → “What do I need right now to feel better?”
- “I’m not strong enough.” → “I am doing my best under hard conditions.”





MICRO- HABITS FOR EVERY DAY RESILIENCE

Daily Micro-Habits are small tasks you can do which build your resilience.

Some examples include:

- Drinking water and eating something before your morning coffee
- Taking a step outside at least once per shift
- Stretching in between calls
- Listen to a song that makes you feel good
- Try box-breathing for one minute
- Have a chat with a coworker



This works because your small habits build up your larger state of being. Healthier habits lead to a healthier lifestyle overall, making you more protected against stress and burnout.





THE 10-MINUTE RECOVERY FORMULA AFTER A SHIFT

In order to get out of the wired, on-the-go state that your body is in after a shift, try this routine to help you wind down.

1. Sit for one minute before starting your car.
2. Take three deep breaths.
3. Remind yourself, “My work is done for the day.”
4. Pick your favourite wind-down activity:
 - a. Music
 - b. Quiet
 - c. A relaxing podcast
 - d. Or whatever works for you
5. Set a goal for yourself. For example: “Tonight I will rest.”



YOUR RESILIENCE TRIBE

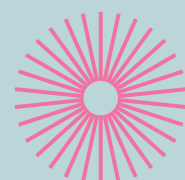
CONNECTION BUILDS RESILIENCE, NOT ISOLATION.

Consider the following:

- Who in my life, including at work, helps me to feel grounded in reality?
- Who do I trust the most?
- Who do I feel safe opening up or venting to?

Steps for strengthening your connections:

- Quick check-ins with your team at the start of shifts
- Share your gratitude and appreciation
- Debrief tough calls with the people you comfortable doing so with
- Offer connection and support to others when they look like they might need it





SUPPORTING TEAM RESILIENCE

AS A SUPERVISOR/LEADER

- Check in, instead of checking up
- Demonstrate calm in chaotic moments
- Make it normal to ask for help or guidance
- Make regular micro-breaks available
- Applaud effort, not perfection
- Help dispatchers feel seen, not scrutinized

Something to ask:



*WHAT DO YOU NEED RIGHT
NOW TO BE AT YOUR BEST?*



Supervisors set the emotional climate of the room more than anyone else. A leader who understands and cares about recovery can stop burnout before it begins.

YOUR RESILIENCE ACTION PLAN



Pick one tool you can implement:

- Stress reset
- Unhooking technique
- Inner dialogue shift
- Daily micro-habit
- After-shift recovery
- Strengthening connections

Commitment statement:

*“Today, I commit myself to building my
resilience by doing XYZ.”*

**Starting off simple and strong by setting attainable goals for
yourself makes stress recovery much less daunting.**





KEEP BUILDING RESILIENCE



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Credit to originator, The Heathy Dispatcher.