

# CONNECTIONS

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## FIRST RESPONDER FOCUS

### 5 Reasons First Responders Should Take Yoga Seriously

By Olivia Kvitne, Founder and Director, Yoga for First Responders

This article was first published on American Military University's site, [In Public Safety](#)

As a yoga instructor working specifically with first responders and veterans, I'm accustomed to being the one who initiates conversations with fire and police departments. So it came as a welcomed surprise to be contacted by one of the largest police departments in the country. The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) reached out to me after they lost several high commanding officers from heart attacks. The agency realized that many of its members were experiencing medical issues caused by years of unaddressed, cumulative stress. The department's behavioral sciences department was searching for ways to save their team members from such preventable medical conditions. At the time I got the call, I had spent the last several months teaching yoga to members of the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD). Word had spread that LAFD was having success using yoga techniques as a resource for reducing stress among firefighters.

Until recently, officers were discouraged from acknowledging that they were having issues coping with stress and the pressures of the job. Such admissions were often considered a sign of weakness and brought into question an officer's ability to perform his or her duties. As a result, many officers who experienced symptoms of secondary traumatic stress suffered in silence. Sadly, this stress broke many good officers, who resigned or caused them to behave in a way that caused them to lose their jobs.

Fortunately, today there are more conversations happening about how to handle the mental health challenges that go with being a law enforcement officer and first responder. While this is good news, the stigma of acknowledging stress remains, and many people are not actually taking the steps to manage that stress.



Hello City Employees!

A top issue many of our employees face is trying to manage stress and anxiety at work. Stress and anxiety can be caused by a variety of things, such as the type of work you do, the people you interact with, personal struggles weighing you down, or perhaps a combination of these things, and sometimes people are just wired to have a little more anxiety. Little actions can go a long way in helping manage your anxiety at work, and this newsletter includes some of those tips, as well as a more direct article on identifying what may be weighing you down and how to be free of it.

Stress and anxiety is very much connected to our body and the work we do, so whether you are a first responder or not, we also encourage you to read this month's First Responder Focus article on the positive impact of yoga for first responders, and see if there are aspects of this practice that you might relate to in your own life. Thank you for the work you do!

~ The EAP Team



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## Can a Yoga Practice Be the Answer?

As I got deeper into my own study of yoga, I realized that this practice is not just “good” for first responders; it is meant for them. Why? Because the original and true intent of yoga is to obtain a mastery of the mind and achieve an optimal functioning of the entire being—from the subtle nervous system to the whole physical body. This authentic objective of yoga is thousands of years old, with no relation to how recent Western culture has marketed it as trendy and hip.

Individuals who practice with this purpose are often better able to process stress and convert it into higher levels of performance. Yoga allows people to increase their ability to focus and problem-solve, gives them heightened situational awareness, and helps them make intelligent gut reactions to situations. People who practice yoga also have the ability to make self-directed biological changes, meaning they can impact the functioning of their brain and nervous system through their own actions. Such biological changes are shown to be a possible outcome of those who practice mindfulness exercises, such as yoga, thanks to research projects using biofeedback machines that track activity inside the brain and body.

When stress is trapped in the body and mind and no action is taken to process it, stress causes a depletion of a person’s health. However, when individuals take steps to consistently handle the stress they’re feeling, they can improve their well-being and even become more resilient in the face of adversity.



## How is Yoga Different for First Responders?

Yoga For First Responders takes the original intent of the practice and delivers it in a way that targets the specific needs of first responders. The curriculum provides a skill set that is simple, safe, practical and effective. This protocol primarily focuses on tactical breath work (specific breath-control techniques) to access the nervous system, physical postures for releasing stress and building mental and physical stability, and ends with a neurological reset exercise to return the system to a balanced state.

## 5 Reasons to Change Your Mind about Yoga and Take it Seriously

If, after reading the information above, you are still skeptical about stepping on a mat, here are five reasons to consider changing your thinking:

1. **It’s Simple.** It only takes three minutes to make a change in the nervous system. You can even practice a tactical breath work exercise (see exercise below) while driving in your patrol car on your way to the next call. Just one deep breath consciously directed into the belly can make a big difference.
2. **It’s Private and Introspective.** Yoga For First Responders doesn’t focus on a specific incident, but on the psychophysiological effect developed from general work as a first responder. No one has to know what you are working through on the yoga mat, if anything at all. You can practice yoga because it feels good or use it to help you process something specific. All of it can be done in the privacy of your own space, or in a public class.
3. **It’s Multifunctional.** Yoga serves many purposes. It not only removes stress from the mind and body, but it also builds resiliency and enhances mental and physical performance. This is sometimes described as experiencing “flow” or being “in the zone.” These results can be a benefit personally as well as professionally.
4. **It’s Not What You Think It Is.** Many people have the misperception that yoga is only for women. Some think it’s easy; others think it’s a religion. In India, where yoga originated 5,000 years ago, it is still primarily practiced by men and used to train their army. Marketing yoga to women is purely a tool of the West to increase business. Yoga can be confused as a religious practice because it developed alongside the culture of the East, which was heavily rooted in religions such as Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism. Some master teachers in the past would mix their cultural, religious and yoga practices together. At its foundation, yoga is a science and a philosophy. The pure teachings of yoga have no theological orientation and can help anyone of any religion.

#### 5. It's Time. Consider these statistics:

- Every 20 hours a police officer commits suicide.
- 40 percent of officers experience sleep disorders, which too often results in deadly car accidents.
- The average life span of an officer after retirement is only five years.

Something needs to change in law enforcement culture, so these statistics can change. The “macho” stereotype that has kept law enforcement away from yoga is not worth these devastating numbers, especially when you realize how strong and focused you must be to practice yoga, as well as how much stronger you will become when practicing consistently.

### Why You Should Start Now

The good thing is that it doesn't take much to start a yoga practice right away. Here is a simple exercise to begin your journey toward reducing stress in your life.

#### *Tactical Breath Work:*

- **Belly Breathing:** Sit in a chair or in your patrol car with a tall, straight spine, no slouching. Place one hand on the low belly area. Inhale slowly through the nose and inflate the belly like a balloon, feeling the belly expand against the hand. Exhale slowly through the nose and feel the belly deflate away from the hand. Continue this a few times, working to make each inhale and exhale slower and deeper and directing the breath into the belly rather than the chest.
- **Add Breath Count:** Continue the belly breathing above (hand can stay on belly or not) while inhaling and exhaling through the nose. As you inhale, count how many seconds it takes to inhale. It will probably be around 3 to 4 counts. Pause the breath at the top of the inhale, and then slowly exhale and count how long it takes to exhale. Work on making the exhale longer than the inhale. For example, if you inhale for a count of three, try to extend the length of the exhale for a count of four.

Practice the above exercise for 3 minutes at a time. Breathing through the nose while directing the breath low into the belly and consciously making the exhale longer than the inhale are the three ingredients to press the “calm” button on the nervous system. This process will also help if you are having a hard time falling asleep. This exercise is simple and subtle, yet the effect on the nervous system can make a huge difference.

For more simple and short practices on video, check **out our videos on Yoga for First Responders.**



**FOOT**  
FRIENDS OF OLIN-TURVILLE  
Preserving & enhancing Olin-Turville Park through stewardship, activities, education, and advocacy.

In partnership with the City of Madison Parks,  
Madison Police Department, and the  
Friends of Olin-Turville Park:

### The 8<sup>th</sup> Annual summer yoga series!

**What: FREE yoga in the Olin Park Pavilion**

**5:30 PM Tuesday evenings**

**When: July 2, 9, 16 and 23**

Bring your mat if you have one,  
but mats & props are available.

Samantha Kellogg is trained in the Alignment Yoga method with an interest in cycling, running, stand-up paddling and integrating yoga with other activities. This class is open to all levels and experiences, focusing on yoga fundamentals, breathing, asana postures and bringing people together to practice in a beautiful location.



**Madison Police Department**

"Policing in Partnership with our Community"



*Free and available to all*

# Work Anxiety: 10 Tips to Manage Anxiety at Work

By Kathleen Smith, PhD, [Psycom.net](http://Psycom.net)

*Is work anxiety throwing you off balance and leaving you stressed? Follow these 10 strategies for managing workplace anxiety—you'll feel better for it*

Work anxiety can drastically affect your quality of life and leave you counting down the minutes until five o'clock comes around. Roughly three out of every four people with stress or anxiety in their life say that it interferes with their daily lives, and the workplace is no exception. Anxiety can affect performance at work, the quality of the work, relationships with colleagues, and relationships with supervisors. And if you have a diagnosed anxiety disorder, then these challenges may prove even more difficult.

People report that deadlines and dealing with difficult people are the biggest causes of work-related stress.<sup>1</sup> Conflict in the workplace will elicit many different reactions. Some people love the drama, while others would rather hide under their desks until the commotion subsides. Regardless of whether or not you thrive on conflict, lack of effective communication at your job can cause quite a bit of anxiety. When several people in the office are visibly affected by anxiety, the level of stress can almost feel contagious. People begin to miss more work, the quality of work goes down, and coworkers begin to gossip or vent rather than work together to solve problems. People stop talking to one another, they start collecting mountains of grievances, and the environment can become downright toxic.

The first step in managing work anxiety is building a personal wellness plan. If you're getting adequate sleep, eating healthy, exercising, and engaging in social activities outside of work, then your odds for decreasing workplace anxiety are much greater.

But reducing anxiety in the workplace requires more than mindfulness exercises or a yoga class every now and then. You must also examine how you function in workplace systems and how you deal with others. Do you hide from your boss? Do you gossip with your coworker in the neighboring cubicle? Do you wait to speak up until you're seething with anger or bursting into tears? There are a few simple strategies you can start examining and practicing to help you arrive at work calmer and not take worries home with you. In addition to seeking professional help to manage anxiety, you can use these interpersonal strategies to help lower overall anxiety in the office and help you stay calm, focused, and productive. Let's take a look at a few.

## Know Everyone's Name

Having a solid one-to-one relationship with people in the office makes it easier to address problems with the original individual rather than gossiping or venting to others. This starts by knowing people's names and their responsibilities. If you forget a person's name, don't be embarrassed to ask again. It's never too late to start building stronger relationships at the office.

## Ask For Help

When work is hectic, it becomes all too easy to say "yes" even when you don't understand how to do something. But the discomfort of asking for help or clarification is worth it in the long run, and it can decrease overall anxiety about responsibilities. Asking for help also communicates to your superiors that you genuinely care about doing a good job.

## Avoid Triangles

Many workplaces are built on gossiping about coworkers or venting about others. Though this might provide temporary relief or entertainment, it only serves to build up tension and stress. You can almost feel it floating in the air when an office is full of this kind of negativity. Bonding with someone by talking about a third person is called "triangling," and it's an unhealthy way to manage work anxiety. Examples of triangles might include gossiping about a third person, criticizing someone behind their back, and using them as a scapegoat.

Though it might be tempting to vent to a coworker, consider how you can keep the issue between you and the person with whom you have conflict. Though it might be difficult at first, you can reduce your anxiety by approaching the individual and communicating the facts of the situation. Tell them you'd like to reach a resolution and are motivated to create an open and honest workplace. If you're an employer or supervisor, consider how you can encourage employees to work out conflict between themselves and approach you honestly if they have an issue with your leadership.

<sup>1</sup> [www.adaa.org/workplace-stress-anxiety-disorders-survey](http://www.adaa.org/workplace-stress-anxiety-disorders-survey)



## Set Honest Deadlines

Anxious people sometimes will agree to deadlines and timelines that they know they cannot meet. Often it's better to be honest upfront than to apologize later. Not every deadline is negotiable, but it will save you hours of anxiety if you can be honest upfront and work at a manageable pace. And if you finish the job ahead of time, that will make you look even better.

## Use Neutral Language

Learning to use neutral and calming language in the office can help bring down everyone's anxiety at work. Disagreements are more manageable when you begin a statement with, "Here's what I'm thinking," and end it with, "What are you thinking?" This lets people feel like they have input and makes them more likely to hear what you're saying. Questions like, "What could we each do about this issue?" or "How could we prevent this from coming up in the future?" are also great for problem-solving.

## Stay in Contact

It's human instinct to avoid or cut off contact with people who make us uncomfortable, and the workplace is no exception. Maybe you stop replying to emails that you don't know how to answer. Or perhaps you avoid the break room after you've had a disagreement with a bullying coworker. Maybe you try and duck out for the day before your boss can catch you with a question. The problem with avoidance is that it's only a very temporary solution. That twisting feeling in your stomach or other work anxiety symptoms will only get worse over time the more you use distance as a way to manage disagreement, confusion, or other difficult emotions.

Contact is a muscle you have to flex to make it stronger. The more you approach problems and communication head-on, the less anxious it will make you over the long term. Great leaders have the ability to maintain contact with people who have different points of view or styles of work. Staying in contact can also help you improve on saying "no" to additional responsibilities that make you overworked and less effective in your job.

## Don't Drag Others Down

Office drama can be entertaining at times, but it ultimately makes the environment more stressful and lowers morale. Try changing the subject when people talk poorly of coworkers or the boss, or simply come up with a reason to leave the room. Don't respond to texts or emails that seek to drag others down.

## Encourage In-Person Conversations

It can be incredibly difficult to decipher emotions and intentions electronically. Much workplace anxiety comes from misinterpreting emails or waiting to hear back about a difficult subject. If an issue is making you particularly anxious, don't be afraid to pick up the phone or have an in-person conversation to clarify things.

## Focus On The Facts

Your mind and emotions can feel pulled in many different directions when you feel overloaded, under-appreciated or misunderstood. The best way to lower anxiety is to control the conversation and what's communicated. Try to verbalize what specifically is causing your anxiety and ask other people to share their views. Then be sure to express how you'd like this specific conflict to be resolved. Focus on the facts of the situation, and stay in the present. This probably isn't the best time to pull up past grievances, no matter how relevant they may seem.

It will be tempting to pull out your arsenal of complaints when you feel reactive, but lowering anxiety is not about winning. It's about resolving. Try to avoid emotionally charged exaggerations that use words like "always" or "never." Begin your sentences with "I" statements, because "You" sounds too accusatory. If you're concerned about a volatile reaction from a coworker, then consider having a mediator, usually an HR rep, join the conversation.

## Access Resources

Many workplaces offer counseling through employee assistance programs (EAPs) or can connect you to mental health resources in the community to help you manage anxiety. Though it may be intimidating to speak up about your anxiety, when you take responsibility for your wellness, you serve as a role model for others in the workplace.

When you build more solid relationships, improve communication, and ask for help, the entire office will benefit. Anxiety is always present to some degree in your daily life, but it doesn't have to interfere with doing good work and enjoying your profession. Remember, though anxiety is an unpleasant emotion, it's also an opportunity for you to grow in your career. The more you face anxiety in the workplace rather than run away from it or simply complain about it, the more significant a stressor will have to be to make you feel off your game.

## De-Escalation Tip of the Day: Allow Silence for Reflection

By Heather Vaughn, Crisis Prevention Institute

The beloved Sufi mystic and poet, Jalaluddin Rumi, wrote: “In silence there is eloquence. Stop weaving and see how the pattern improves.”

When it comes to de-escalation, the great challenge is to be mindful of the opportunity to stop doing, stop saying, and simply be present. Anxiety may momentarily separate somebody from their ability to make rational choices, but the intention of de-escalation should hopefully be to safely reconnect an individual in crisis to their autonomy and well-being. A quiet moment to gather one’s thoughts, to consider choices that have been offered, or simply be still, can help a situation correct its course.

During CPI’s **March Mindfulness** campaign, my colleague Aryn Lietzke explored **four calming techniques for children and adults**. One of these was centered around breathing—making the connection between meaningful breath and the reduction of psychological stress was a key takeaway. Deep, mindful breathing can anchor a moment of silence for the benefit of an individual’s physical and mental well-being.

And in their in-depth piece on **behavior management strategies for educational assistants and paraprofessionals**, Jennifer Taylor, Michael Edward, and Abu Jabbar established **active listening** as the first of ten strategies for interacting with students with behavioral challenges. They recommended engaging in a **Genuine Encounter Moment** by:

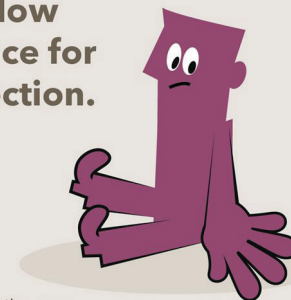
- Giving the student total and complete focus
- Giving eye contact and having a friendly and open expression on your face
- Listening closely
- Withholding judgment

Silence can truly be golden—but we must facilitate it in a meaningful, safe way for an individual in crisis. CPI’s Matt Danek reminded readers in his excellent post about using the **Decision-Making Matrix** that the ultimate goal of your CPI training is to prevent harm—by learning to understand the likelihood and severity of a potential outcome, you can pick a prevention strategy that has the greatest potential to be effective. Underlying everything we do in *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*® training is the understanding that behavior impacts behavior—and that includes the top CPI de-escalation tip to **allow silence for reflection**.

Creating a peaceful moment for an individual in crisis can enable them to find the peace within themselves. *Stop weaving—and see how the pattern improves.*

This information is not a substitute for *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*® training offered by CPI.

Allow  
silence for  
reflection.



crisisprevention.com

### CPI’s De-Escalation Techniques

*Due to the variety and nature of the work that many City employees do, there are times when employees may find themselves in an uncomfortable situation with a member of the public, or perhaps even another employee, who may be struggling with their mental health, has a cognitive or intellectual status different from our own, sees reality differently than we do, has a medical condition or medication imbalance, or has found themselves in an uncomfortable situation and is expressing themselves very inappropriately or perhaps even aggressively in the workplace. While we recommend calling 911 if anyone feels immediately threatened or unsafe for themselves or someone else due to the words or actions of another person in their work environment, sometimes situations do not rise to the level of contacting law enforcement, or you may find yourself in a situation where you feel uncomfortable or threatened but are unable to distance yourself from the individual making you uncomfortable, confused, afraid, or angry. Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) is a widely utilized and useful resource that teaches employees and organizations how to de-escalate disruptive and assaultive behavior in safe, non-violent, and respectful way, and they have developed a list of Top Ten De-Escalation Tips which the EAP will be providing to you in this and upcoming newsletter articles. If you have more questions on de-escalation in the workplace, you can confidentially contact the EAP at 266-6561 or you can view upcoming trainings offered by Human Resources on their [training website](#).*

## What Do You Need to Be Free of?

By Robert Taibbi L.C.S.W., *Psychology Today*

*Chronic problems can weigh down our lives. How to get yourself free.*

In the movie *Up in the Air*, George Clooney's character has a side business doing motivational speeches entitled, *What's in Your Backpack?* His message is encouraging his audience to look at how their lives would be different if they unloaded all the things they carry that weigh them down.

While most of us can't unload all the things that may weigh us down, for many of us there is often something at the top of our list. What is it for you? What is the one thing that if you could eliminate it from your life, would make your life better?

No doubt several things immediately come to mind. Maybe your job, or someone in your family who drives you crazy, or your claustrophobic small town, or maybe even your intimate relationship.

Or maybe your burden is less about other people and more about you: the financial debt or weight that you carry; or chronic pain or depression or anxiety; maybe an addiction. Or something seemingly more subtle, but just as disabling—your perfectionism or that self-critical voice that constantly slows you down, beats you up; or your inability to say no, leaving you feeling perpetually over-stretched and walking on eggshells.

If you're ready to break free, to get that monkey finally off your back, here are some suggestions to get you started.

### Decide what is holding you back

Yes, it may be about limited choices, about feeling trapped: You don't have the money, the options, the support you need to break out. But usually it is more complicated than this: The *feeling* that you have limited choices or the *feeling* of being trapped are often held in place by underlying beliefs that you're barely aware of. If you've been struggling for so long, you may, for example, understandably believe that nothing can ever change, and so you've given up. Your life and your burden have become, over time, your new normal.

Or maybe your beliefs are based upon magical thinking. I just need to win the lottery or get that high-paying job to get that financial monkey off my back. If I just figure out what he or she wants, if I just don't say x, if I just get the dance steps right—then he will stop hurting me, or she will appreciate me or give me the attention I desire.

Or maybe you've come to believe that whatever you do to change will make no difference. Here if you are already heavily in debt or are, say, way overweight, you say to yourself that adding that next charge on your credit card or eating those second desserts aren't at this point going to make any difference. Or, more subtly, you may believe that you don't deserve to get what you want: You blame yourself for what happens in an abusive relationship, or for your debt or your bad job, and are resigned. You see yourself as a loser; you've made your bed, and you deserve to lie in it. End of story.

These beliefs are about you, within you, but not necessarily tied to the real world. Take a hard look at the beliefs that may be holding you back. Once aware of them, you can begin to question them; by questioning them, you may begin to change them; and doing that can be the first step towards real change.





## Make a plan

In 1895, the writer Mark Twain was what would now be the equivalent of several million dollars in debt. To get out of bankruptcy, he rented out his house in Connecticut and went on a world tour, giving 122 comedic lectures in 71 cities, and was on the road for several years. But his plan worked—not only did he repay all his debts, but when he died, he had an estate the equivalent of couple of million dollars.

If you're in debt, you may not be able to work it off by going on a world tour, but you can, for example, look into the **National Foundation for Credit Counseling**, where you can get free credit and debt counseling and take small steps to eliminating your debt. Or if you are in an abusive relationship, look into **free shelters** in your community. If stuck in an awful job, start looking for a new one, even if it means that the commute is longer, or even if part of you is saying that you won't find anything. Explore and come up with an escape plan.

But as you build that plan, also take a step back and see what lessons you need to learn from your experience: maybe that you need to find ways to gain more skills before you can obtain that ideal job; that your spending is emotionally driven, and you need to learn other, healthier ways of managing these stresses and impulses. Life is about learning lessons, and by carrying these lessons with you, you can use them to make better decisions in the future.

## Realize what you can change

And if real escape right now seems out of the question, see what it is that you *can* do, that you *can* change. If you're not in a position to leave that awful job, maybe you need to talk with HR about your relationship with your supervisor, or you need to talk with your supervisor about your schedule. Or if you feel unappreciated in your job or neglected in your close relationship, but can't yet end it, maybe you need to give up the magical thinking, the self-blame, and accept it for now, but then reach out and find relationships where you are appreciated and supported.

Whether you are contemplating making a change, ready to change, or need a "tune up" on a change already made, EAP counselors would be happy to discuss your options and help guide you on this process. Just call 266-6561 to schedule an appointment.

## Changing you

And if it is you that you want to change—let go of your perfectionism or control, reduce your depression or anxiety, shed that addiction—again, come up with a plan. But resist the temptation to go big and do the make-over, the revamping of your life. Instead focus on and dedicate yourself to fixing one thing at a time, and then look for the support and skills you need to make it happen—AA or NA groups for your addiction, or therapy for your anxiety or depression, or self-help books for your perfectionism. What's important is not the means—the particular group, therapist, or book—but the end—the starting itself, and then having the support you need to keep your momentum.

And this is often the hardest challenge: namely the challenge of realizing what you are ready to be free of and then beginning in spite of those voices that say, "Why bother?" or "I just need to get it right."

As Paul Simon said in his song "50 Ways to Leave Your Lover," sometimes you need to "just get yourself free."

What are you ready to be free of?

*Thanks for reading,  
we hope you found the information useful!*

**You can reach any of us by calling the  
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**External Available 24/7:  
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