



*My View*

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## **EFA for Emergency Responders**

I spent last week in Sacramento, CA. The Sacramento Fire Department asked me to train all of their captains and battalion chiefs in Emotional First Aid (EFA). I taught 6, 3-hour courses over a 5 day period. The classes were not only attended by fire officers, but by police officers, detectives, personnel from the Coroner's office and staff from Risk Management.

I must admit that this was one of the biggest challenges of my TIP career for a number of reasons including:

- Because of the budget cuts, attendees were feeling stretched and initially perceived having to provide EFA as another demand.
- Emergency responders are notorious for their folded arms, stares and "show me" attitude during training sessions.
- Emotional First Aid skills are not perceived as essential skills or as affecting emergency responders' job performance.
- I was an "out of town" mental health person who didn't know the department.
- This was mandatory training which didn't sit well with some.
- From a trainer's perspective, teaching the same material repeatedly throughout a week is tough.

Despite the challenges, I felt that the week was worthwhile and "mission accomplished." I think that my sincere belief that emergency responders can provide EFA in simple and quick ways, and that this EFA is extremely important to survivors came through and overcame the initial resistance. At the very least, I accomplished two (2) things in the training:

1. I put the emotionally wounded on the "radar screens" of these first responders.
2. I convinced them that providing EFA, although in most cases it's doing simple things, is very important to survivors (and remembered by them "forever").

One of the aspects of emergency response work that I came to more fully appreciate is the lack of follow up responders receive from those they serve. In TIP, we have the opportunity to receive and read "thank you's" from our clients. However, responders really have no way of knowing if what they do/say works. My major contribution may have been reaffirming many of the EFA skills the

responders are already using, and letting them know what a positive impact they have on survivors of tragedy.

Of course, another part of the training responders seemed to appreciate was the “What to Say/What Not to Say” section. It almost seemed like at the beginning of each session attendees were saying to themselves “Just tell us what to say. That’s all we need.” Two other things happened during my trip to Sacramento that made it worthwhile.

1. One of the 3-hour sessions was videotaped. They will show it to all personnel in both police and fire departments. I think with some editing, we will have a usable product.
2. I stirred up a lot of interest in starting a TIP Affiliate in Sacramento.

All in all, it was a worthwhile trip, and I look forward to being able to respond to requests for EFA training from emergency agencies with “we’ll send you the training on DVD.”

Wayne would like to hear your thoughts.  
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