

# RESPONDERSTRONG

## ResponderStrong Mental Health Curriculum from NDRI Ventures

**As part of NDRI Ventures, ResponderStrong's mission is to improve mental health supports for Emergency Responders and their families.**

### Our Work

We know resilience is vital to the overall performance and wellbeing of Emergency Responders from recruitment through retirement, as well as to their families, and the people and communities they serve. The ResponderStrong Mental Health Curriculum was developed by a team of Emergency Responders, educators, researchers, and mental health clinicians to incorporate into Emergency Responder training at any level: entry, peer support, in-service, or leadership. This half-day curriculum provides students with foundational knowledge of Responder mental health, including:

- Suicide – occupational data, risk factors, and response
- Stress – the body's physiologic response, and why and how it manifests in Responders
- Post-traumatic stress injury– what it is and how to seek help
- Resiliency – what it is and ways to develop it further

Our goal with this training is not only to increase knowledge but more importantly to erode the stigma that leads so many Responders to suffer in silence. Through the increased awareness and skills generated in this short course, Responders find themselves empowered to better manage the mental and emotional challenges of the job.

### Where the Curriculum is Implemented

In January 2018, we began implementing this 4-hour course within LEO, EMS, and Fire academies throughout the community colleges across Colorado. Through word of mouth, the popular program spread to be included in agency-based training academies, peer support trainings, and family events. It also expanded to encompass other Emergency Response populations including Dispatch, Ski Patrol, Healthcare Workers, and others who serve their communities in the wake of disaster and emergency. In August 2020, the University of Denver incorporated it into their Public Safety Leadership Development Program which educates rising leaders throughout the Emergency Response world with a particular focus on rural leaders. In 2021, Warriors Rest Foundation, a national peer support development group focused on emergency responders, integrated this curriculum into their 40-hour training. As of January 1, 2021, the Colorado Peace Officers Standards and Training (POST) Board of the State Attorney General's Office named our curriculum their mandatory, minimum mental health training for law enforcement. To amplify our reach and scale effectively, we have partnered with sponsors to provide the Train the Trainer experience free to participants across the country, organizations including AT&T FirstNet, Global Medical Response, Kaiser Permanente, and the United Way have sponsored one-day Train-the-Trainer events to help empower local wellness champions. To date, more than 2,000 Responders have been trained as facilitators of this program.

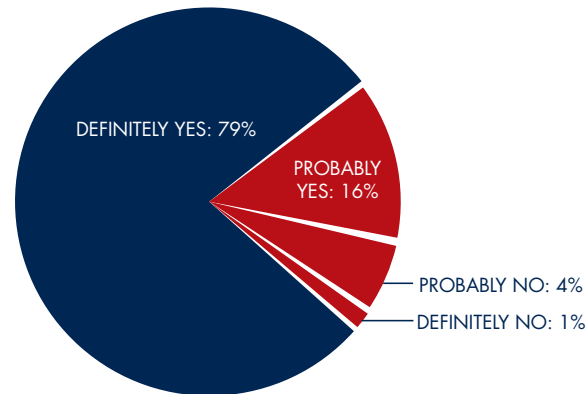
### Course Assessment

From the beginning, we have seen the impact of this content. 130 students took a 12-item assessment before and immediately after the course between January 2018 and January 2020. After the course, responders showed a statistically significant increase in their mental health knowledge. The median pretest score was 83% while the median post-test score was 92%. A recent cohort reported that 44% believed anxiety and depression were permanent conditions. After the course, 100% recognized that these conditions can develop in response to stress and can be treated if recognized.

## Course Satisfaction

When asked whether they would recommend the course to fellow responders, 95% of participants during the first two years responded “definitely yes” or “probably yes.”

### When asked if participants would recommend this course to their peers...



**This course was valuable to students because it addressed a critical, often unspoken topic: Responder stress and suicide.**

### Students shared:

- “I am a veteran with two years in Iraq. In the years since I got out, I’ve lost many more soldiers to suicide than I did in the war.”
- “I liked that this is being discussed at all. I have had multiple trainings in other fields in PTS, vicarious trauma, and cumulative career stress trauma and was surprised how little it’s talked about in law enforcement.”
- “How staggering the statistics are (suicide, divorce, cardiac arrests). It really brought to light how much I need to pay attention to myself, my family and my coworkers.”
- “Having to write down your three important things (why you wake up) then taking them away, made me realize I can be at risk if I don’t focus on them.”
- “I wish I had this training earlier in my career.”
- “This was obviously created by people who get the job- it’s the most relevant mental health class I’ve ever had.”
- “I WISH MY FAMILY HAD BEEN HERE FOR THIS CLASS- IT EXPLAINS SO MUCH!”