



Team Talk

A proactive, participant-led group discussion to reduce chronic stress.



WHAT IS IT?

Team Talk is a 26-week program that involves firefighters from the North Vancouver City Fire Department meeting together in groups accompanied by a mental health professional and retiree/veteran to engage in casual, open dialogue about their work week. The purpose of the program is to provide a candid environment for group discussion that promotes the de-stigmatization of mental health and PTSD-related issues without being too intrusive. The program is adapted from the Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) program and is a proactive approach rather than a reactive approach. It involves one activity, the discussion group emphasizing interpersonal communication.

Facilitate not Dictate

The role of the mental health professional and retired firefighter is not to dictate the conversation but rather facilitate it.

WHY IS IT NEEDED?

We wanted to approach this issue in the most simplistic way possible because of the pre-existing stigma around mental health, especially in men. The biggest barrier to entry for programs tackling these issues is personalities. Men do not want to be vulnerable or discuss mental health in the first place, but it is necessary, especially in this environment. Fire fighting is a high stress job where witnessing traumatic events is a regular thing, but it is experienced with your **team**, your **family**, **together**. Therefore, it is crucial that they are able and willing to be vulnerable with each other to work through any problems **together**. Otherwise, stressors no matter how big or small will continue to compound.

Talking is important and lack of talking is the root cause of many workplace stressors. Team Talk addresses that root cause because it doesn't matter if you get more money, time off, or do yoga in the morning, you're still human experiencing human emotions and talking about them needs to become a priority.

HOW IT WORKS:

- Firefighters meet in groups accompanied by a mental health professional and retiree/veteran to engage in casual, candid and open dialogue about their work week.
- Benefits include; normalizing conversating about stress, practicing collaborative problem solving, increasing mental health literacy, reducing need for chronic stress leave from work and reducing stigma associated with mental illness

OUTCOMES

Team Talk has yet to be implemented in the community. It will be carried out in North Vancouver initially with potential for expansion based on results. Expected results include quantitative data that reflects participant engagement and qualitative, participant reported data that reflects learning. As well as a report prepared by the mental health facilitator to be distributed to relevant personnel as a guide from which they can make informed changes to further increase mental wellness programming.

Not Therapy!

CISM already provides an educational component relevant to mental health literacy. Team Talk is casual and candid **not a professional environment**.

Did you know?

Fire fighters are more likely to die from suicide than they are in the line of duty.

NEXT STEPS

Firstly, we need to implement the Team Talk program at the NVCFD for at least 6 months. Once the program has been implemented and results from the surveys have been collected, we can determine whether the program should continue. Based on the results, if it is to be found that fire fighters resonated with the program and found it helpful at reducing chronic stress, further expansion to other fire departments on the North Shore and in Vancouver would be a possible next step. Continued succession of the program would warrant the implementation of Team Talk both provincially and nationally. Furthermore, if external validity is found to be high, consideration for the implementation of Team Talk in other FRs and even workplace environments in general will be the next step. Over-all, the expansion of this program relies on the success of the pilot intervention with the NVCFD.