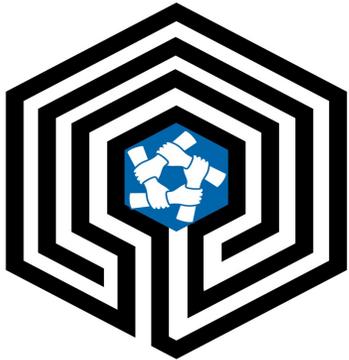


# Moral Distress and Moral Injury in First Responders



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## Workshop Schedule:

- Definition of Moral Injury (25 min)
- Demonstration of ReST for First Responders (45 min)
- Discussion and Q&A (20 min)

# MORAL CONFLICT IS A CONSCIENCE-BASED, POST-HARM STRESS RESPONSE

## Moral Conflict Levels of Severity:

1. **Moral discomfort** requires resolution to maintain relationships.
2. **Moral distress** acute enough to interfere with daily functioning.
3. **Moral injury** is profound suffering that threatens identity, trust, relationships, and meaning.

# PTSD, Trauma, and Moral Injury

**Trauma:** an emotional response to a harmful event with immediate shock and/or denial. Followed by unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, fear, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea.

**PTSD:** Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is fear and anxiety-based stress response. Symptoms include hypervigilance, startle reactions, triggering events, phobias, loss of memory, dissociative episodes.

**Moral Distress/Injury:** Moral emotions, such as guilt, shame, outrage, betrayal, grief, remorse, humiliation, frustration, and despair, are not fear-based. Feelings AFTER an incident.

# Definitions of Moral Injury

## 1. Jonathan Shay:

A betrayal of what's right, by someone who holds legitimate authority (e.g., a leader, decision-maker), in a high stakes situation. All three.

J. Shay. 2014. Moral injury. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 31(2), 182–191.  
See also 1994 *Achilles in Vietnam*, Audible book narrated by David Strathairn.

## 2. Brett T. Litz, et. al.:

The “lasting psychological, biological, spiritual, behavioral, and social impact of perpetrating, failing to prevent, or bearing witness to acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations.”

B.T. Litz et. al., 2009. Moral injury and moral repair in war veterans: A preliminary model and intervention strategy. *Clinical Psychology Review* 29, 695–706, p. 695.

See also, Litz, B.T., et. al. *Adaptive Disclosure*, Guilford Press, 2016.

# Risks for Moral Injury in First Responders

## Possible Operational Stresses:

- ▶ Dramatic and seldom clear cut situations
- ▶ Risks of physical injury or disease
- ▶ Regular ethical and moral quandaries
- ▶ Personal and professional values under assault
- ▶ Seeing human beings at their worst
- ▶ Erosion of empathy and belief in justice and human goodness

# Moral Injury Affects Teams/Communities

## Moral injury

- ▶ Disrupts trust
- ▶ Erodes grounding in shared meaning systems that sustain ethical relationships.
- ▶ Shatters ability to justify, understand, process, and integrate memories into a coherent self.
- ▶ Is not reversible.
- ▶ Can lead to team dysfunction or disruption.

# Moral Injury Recovery Is Necessary for Mental Health

Because moral injury may not manifest immediately and is distinct from trauma and PTSD, an organization's commitment to staff well-being cannot function as a tool that is only used when a staff member suffers an emergency or disaster. Access to processing must be planned and proactive because the demands on all staff reflect the extremes of the context, threat levels, and vulnerable populations' conditions. In this context, a well-defined processes for short- and long-term staff support are essential.

# Moral Injury Affects Teams/Communities

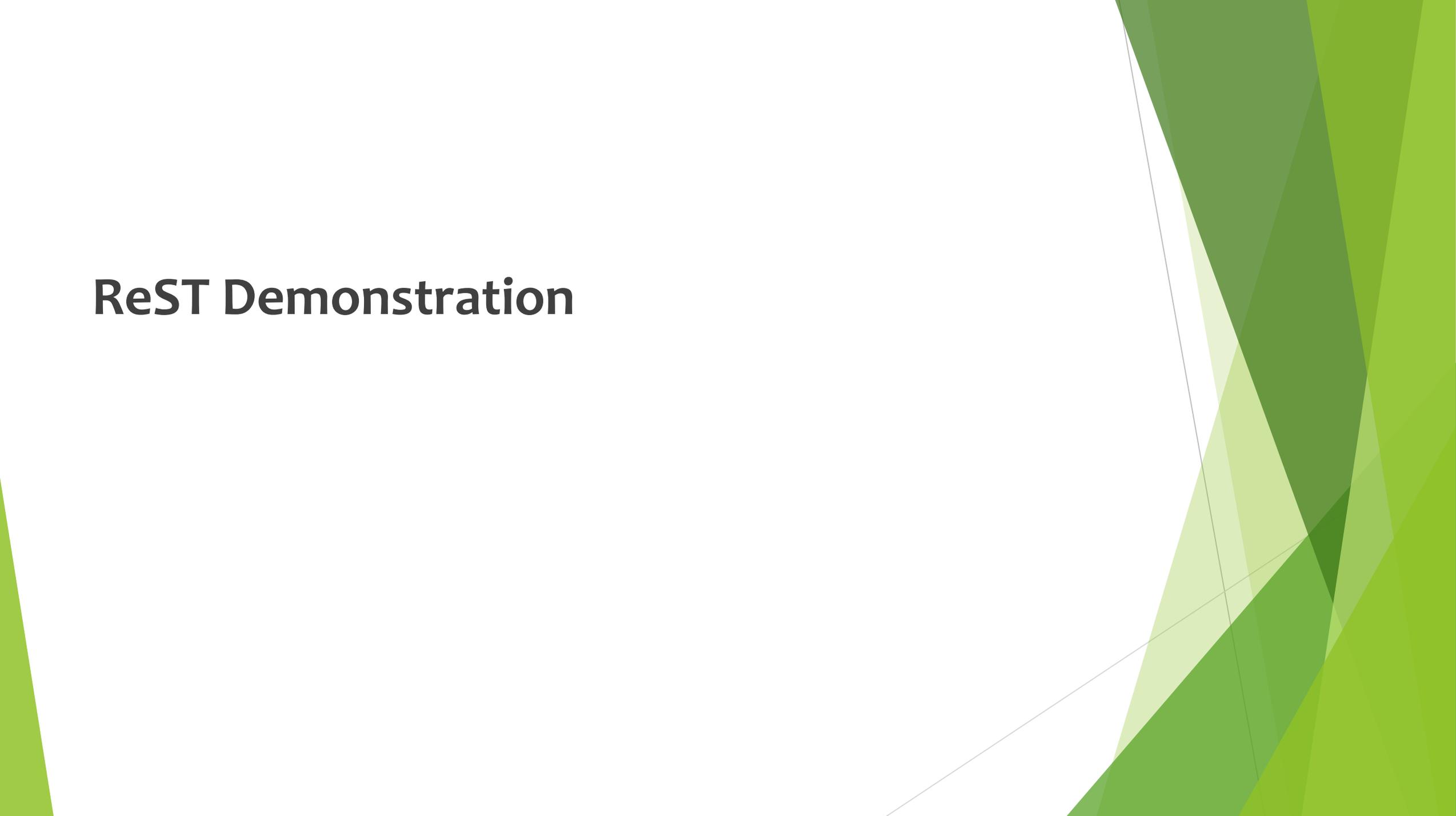
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# What is Resilience Strength Time (ReST) for First Responders?

- ▶ A virtual meeting place for First Responders to speak openly and honestly with peers about moral distress.
- ▶ Using the techniques from our evidence-based, peer support program for veterans called Resilience Strength Training™, we created ReST to help frontline personnel face the extraordinary emotional challenges of their work.

# ReST Demonstration



# VOAReST (Resilience Strength Time)

<https://rest4firstresponders.com>

Or

<https://www.voa.org/rest>

- ▶ One Hour online via Zoom
- ▶ Multiple Times a Week
- ▶ Register to see schedule of times and sign up for a session
- ▶ **Confidential, free, open to the public**
- ▶ Peer Facilitated
- ▶ Groups of up to 10
- ▶ Uses strategies of mindful breathing, guided meditation, sharing with deep listening, and affirmations.

# Peer Specialist Accompaniment for Moral Injury

*(Should always be supported by mental health specialist.)*

1. Low bar for trust
2. Mutual vulnerability and sharing
3. No need to adjudicate truth or evaluate experiences
4. Evokes empathy toward self and others
5. Utilizes negative experiences as positive for others
6. Encourages strengths-based self-worth
7. Respects agency to help each other
8. No need to “fix” or offer answers
9. Easy to scale
10. Different model alongside mental health treatment

# Recovery/Healing from Moral Injury

## Signs of recovery of heart and soul:

- Return to relationships and community, not to former self but *integrated* self.
- Increasing integration of moral injury experiences.
- Ability to look forward, to connect to others, and to experience joy, wonder, and curiosity.

# Recovery as Integration and Resilience

