

# Embedding **SELF-CARE**

Throughout the

## **OVERDOSE FATALITY REVIEW**

Process



### **What Is Self-care?**

According to the World Health Organization, self-care is “the ability of individuals, families, and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a health care provider.” Self-care is deliberately taking care of one’s well-being through restorative activities such as exercise, sleep, healthy eating, and social connection.

### **What Is the Role of Self-care in an Overdose Fatality Review (OFR) Team Meeting?**

OFRs can be mentally, psychologically, and physically exhausting. Reviewing each death and the missed opportunities for prevention and intervention can take a toll on those participating in the review. In addition, some OFR team members, through their professional encounters, might experience psychological effects from repeated exposure to stress and trauma, resulting in compassion fatigue, secondary trauma, vicarious trauma, and burnout if not prevented.

### **What Trauma Exposure Looks Like in an OFR Meeting**

OFR members in response to what they are processing in the meeting or through their professional work might display some of the following behaviors throughout the review meeting:

#### **Unprofessional Engagement**

- Disengaged or closed-off:
  - During a virtual meeting, members may choose to keep their cameras off or leave part way through a meeting.
  - During a meeting in person, members may sit away from the group or be responding to emails or texts on their phones.
- Inappropriate side conversations that may or may not have anything to do with the case or group discussion
- Limited discussion during the case presentation—team members are quiet or not contributing; for example, when asked questions, they keep responses to a minimum or do not clarify information.

#### **Unfriendly Climate**

- Negative mood throughout the OFR team
- Defeatist attitude or ranting without finding solutions or work-arounds to barriers; such as “that will never work” or “that’s just the way it is”
- Resistance to ideas or recommendations; for example, “we tried that before, it is useless”

#### **Inappropriate Language**

- Consistently using frowned-upon terminology, such as “addict” or “clean/dirty drug screens”
- Using victim-blaming language, such as “there was nothing we could have done for him because he chose to use drugs” or “she abused drugs—what did she think was going to happen?”
- Biases presenting throughout meetings (“of course she was a ...”)

# Self-care Strategies for the OFR Process

## Recruit

### Effective OFR Meeting

OFR facilitators, coordinators, and team members can implement various strategies to help address and reduce these effects and ultimately support the well-being of members and lead to a more constructive, proactive, and engaged review. Here are some potential strategies to consider embedding throughout the OFR process.

### Engage partners who are aware of community resources.

Engage partners for professionals and invite them to bring information to the team, as needed, or to be an OFR member. Hospice providers or chaplains have their own resources specifically focused on supporting individuals and can offer resources in a professional capacity to ensure that the OFR team gets the assistance it needs.

### Invite a bereavement professional.

Consider inviting a chaplain who is associated with an agency that is already participating in the review team, such as the law enforcement chaplain. This individual may have additional information to share with the team about a case and can explain any outreach or bereavement resources for next of kin that are currently available within that agency.



# Self-care Strategies for the OFR Process

## Plan

### Limit the length of the OFR meeting.

The national standard for OFR team meetings is between 1½ to 2 hours. Staying in that time frame limits fatigue of case review but does not rush the review process.

### Limit the number of cases reviewed to two to four cases.

Typically, each case will take, on average, 30 minutes depending on the review team's experience, data and information available, and the complexity of the case. Limiting the number of cases reviewed reduces psychological burnout and fatigue in team members.

### Report on activities since the last meeting.

Have members, as well as the OFR coordinator, report on what is going well or any new updates at the start of the meeting to demonstrate the progress being made in the community.

### Hold meetings without case reviews.

Allow team members to have a break from case reviews by having a meeting that does not look at decedent information but, instead, focuses on a topic related to overdose or a recommendation. Meetings without case reviews could include presenting on local data, reviewing recommendations that have been generated, holding a strategic planning meeting,

celebrating partners wins outside of OFR-related activities, holding a community building event, or acknowledging the release of an annual report.

### Do not review cases that are close to a member(s).

Cases where there are personal connections should not be reviewed. Members are encouraged to communicate when they cannot participate because they have a close tie to an individual case and to work with the coordinator to have someone else reassigned to represent the agency and/or share the information. Conclude the OFR meeting with a moment to unwind and remind the team to do something positive after the meeting. A facilitator can end the meeting 10 minutes earlier than scheduled so that the team members have the time budgeted into their calendars to use for individual self-care strategies.

### Do not schedule another intense meeting or activity right after an OFR meeting.

Keep calendars clear after an OFR meeting so there is time to process, reflect, and address one's needs. Build in time after the OFR meeting to allow for a break and not go straight into another meeting.

# Self-care Strategies for the OFR Process

## Facilitate

### Build the OFR team community.

Take time to have positive team relationship building so that instead of it being just another meeting, the OFR team members become a supportive community for one another. This can be done through one-on-one meetings or team building throughout the OFR meeting, such as an intensive ice breaker to deepen relationships.

### Stress the importance and availability of employee assistance programs and create a list of local resources.

Employee assistance programs are voluntary, employer-sponsored programs that help employees navigate stressful life circumstances. A facilitator should remind members of that resource.

Make a master list of mental health organizations, free or reduced counseling online options, or national resources such as a suicide hotline/text line to provide to the team.

### Recognize when team members sound like they are fed up or discouraged and follow up with them.

Facilitators and team members should listen to the tone and the conversation of fellow team members to

take note of any language that demonstrates negative feelings or discouragement. This could be done by creating a parking lot of ideas, tabling the negative discussion, asking questions about what could be done or looking at what went well as a community response to highlight positivity.

### Reach out and debrief with others as necessary about any emotions or responses you experience.

Find someone who can support you and connect with you when you need to process your emotions and not the confidential case details. Schedule consistent time to debrief with that individual in confidence.

### Validate that these reviews are difficult.

Recognizing to those in the room that what is discussed in the OFR meeting is heavy and difficult validates the work they are doing and the feelings that they might be having.

### Model and share how you are managing the difficulty of the topic.

Share at the OFR meeting that this is challenging content and examples of how you process and take care of yourself. Sharing personal experiences of how one manages their own self-care makes the meeting a

# Self-care Strategies for the OFR Process

## Facilitate (continued)

safe space for others to reflect on what they are doing or what they might need, as well as validate their own emotional responses.

### Celebrate wins.

Acknowledge important work that people are doing or have done. For example, publicly congratulate agencies when they receive funding or an individual when they receive a promotion.



## Build a Recommendation Plan

Balance discussion time to allow for more time processing or recommendations and prevention activities and less on “getting all the data.”

Ensure that there is comprehensive time budgeted into the review process to have the discussion on what could be done as a community response or what intervention and prevention strategies can be identified. This will balance the time spent reporting decedent information and the time spent problem solving and identifying solutions.

Check with the team about the pace of the meetings and whether there are parts of the OFR process that can or should be tweaked to make it less traumatic/heavy.

Check in with the team about the pace of the meetings and whether there are parts of the OFR process that can be tweaked to make the meeting less traumatic or heavy. Ask team members whether they would like to have breaks throughout the meeting. Examining the review process and soliciting feedback from members ensures that all voices and needs are being acknowledged and respected.

# Self-care Strategies for the OFR Process

## Data

Write annual reports highlighting the value and impact of the work.

Producing a report that showcases the success and impact of the OFR reinforces to the team members that the work that they are doing is meaningful.

### Request Additional Support or Technical Assistance

Regardless of your role on an OFR, sometimes it is valuable to speak with someone about what you are experiencing and brainstorm possible strategies to address them. Anyone involved in an OFR is encouraged to request additional support or technical assistance at [Training and Technical Assistance—Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Abuse Program \(COSSAP\) Resource Center](#) ([cossapresources.org](http://cossapresources.org)).



Visit the COSSAP Resource Center at [www.cossapresources.org](http://www.cossapresources.org).

Learn more about OFRs and facilitation at <https://www.cossapresources.org/Tools/OFR>.

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This project is supported by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention by Grant No. 2017-AR-BX-K003 awarded by BJA. The contents of this document were developed by the Institute for Intergovernmental Research and do not represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice or the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.