

Attention, Regulation & Connection (ARC) Checklist™ For Operational Resilience

Right now, we are all experiencing stress. Most especially, those operating in a first responder capacity need a quick way to assess the state of their coping and “course correct” if they are struggling. To promote such resiliency, we recommend that first responders set time prompts on their phones to use this checklist twice a day during the COVID-19 response.

A dilemma exists during the impact/acute phase of a crisis. Operational tempo leaves teams with little time for fortifying resilience in the moment. And yet resilience is critical for such teams because serious breakdowns are unacceptable.

One remedy for this dilemma may be as simple as an ultra-short checklist. [Dr. Atul Gawande has diligently explained](#) why physicians and pilots alike thrive by using simple checklists. And he has backed his assertions with generous amounts of data. The data shows that using a simple checklist applies to all types of professionals who need to mitigate operational breakdowns in complex environments.

This Attention, Regulation & Connection (ARC) Checklist™ is a low-burden tool for first responders to remain resilient in a time of crisis. This minimalist approach reduces fragility, and thus the frequency and intensity of breakdowns.

To use the checklist, start with the middle Assessment column to validate how you are coping. The Assessment portion itself should take 45 seconds. If any of the six questions in the Assessment results in a “Yes,” refer to the last column for a quick but effective solution.

Assessment	Remedy
<p>1. Am I thinking about the same thing over and over again?</p>	<p>Decisions to Break Thought Loops</p> <p>Identify one specific decision, <i>any decision</i>, you can make. Gather the information you need to decide once and for all. Decide, and acknowledge your success for having moved forward.</p>
<p>2. Am I “checked out” or dissociated from the task at hand?</p>	<p>Grounding</p> <p>Look out a window. Find a way to reconnect to your environment. Psychological First Aid grounding methods include: Look around the room and name five things you see out loud. Or notice the sensation of your feet touching the fabric of your socks or other footwear.</p>
<p>3. Am I in Fight, Flight or Freeze?</p> <p>(i.e. Is my autonomic nervous system in sympathetic overdrive?)</p>	<p>Calming</p> <p>Perform a two-minute breathing technique 4 times a day</p> <p>First, gently press on your right nostril and breathe in through your left nostril, then switch and breathe out through your right nostril. Then breathe in through your right nostril and breathe out through your left nostril. Do this three times. Video link.</p>
<p>4. Do I feel woozy or wobbly?</p>	<p>Reset break.</p> <p>Mobilize your body: Take a five-minute walk. Take a restroom break. Yoga or any other intentional body stretching.</p>
<p>5. Can I voice support for one other person who, like me, is committed to the mission right now?</p>	<p>Prosocial Outreach</p> <p>Voice your support for your colleagues' efforts and do it in a manner beneficial to everyone.</p> <p>(e.g. say “<i>I see how hard you’re working.</i>”)</p>
<p>6. Do I need to say something about how I feel?</p>	<p>Prosocial Ventilation</p> <p>(e.g. say “<i>This is really getting to me. It just feels nice to be able to say it out loud to you and not be alone with this feeling.</i>”)</p>

Further Supporting Concepts for ARC Checklist™

There are dozens of wellbeing assessments and hundreds of stress management methods. However, we find that commonly available assessments and methods are calibrated for implementation in non-crisis times. Disaster psychology and disaster mental health have long characterized that different interventions should prevail in different phases. Good intentions and otherwise good methods could be ill-suited for first responders in the acute/impact phase of a crisis.

Peer-reviewed research published in the journal *Science* supports the notion that [breathing exercises have a direct effect on higher-order brain function](#). And assessment question #4 addresses how some person's stress reactions cause a "shutting down" in a manner consistent with fight-flight-freeze.

Grounding techniques allow one to focus on the present as opposed to getting stuck in the swirl of thoughts, related to anxiety, and flashbacks such as those found in persons suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Remedy #2, for example, is derived from the evidence-based approach of [Psychological First Aid from the National Center for PTSD](#) housed within the U.S. Department for Veterans Affairs.

While finding comfort in the company of friends seems self-evident, scientists have begun to connect the dots behind the chemical science of social support. Part of our adaptation to stress is that social support is boosted in the presence of oxytocin, a hormone-neurotransmitter that is secreted when we are under extreme stress. Supportive relationships are correlated with lower levels of depression and anxiety, while the absence of these relationships is correlated with poor outcomes according to [Stanford Medicine](#).