

Down Time

By the Old Screw

There are two words in corrections that are very critical but not understood by most families and even new Staff—DOWN TIME. The need for down time can be the cause of a lot of misunderstanding and arguments among Officers and their spouses. The spouses usually have difficulty grasping why the Officers need space when they get home from work, why they need to read a book, watch TV, exercise, or work on something instead of talking with their partners. The need for down time can also cause a lot of hurt and anger from children who do not comprehend why daddy or mommy wants to be left alone for a little while after getting home from work.

Some staff will argue that they can leave work and step right into family life—that they feel no stress from their work, that “there’s nothing to it.” Only God knows how many times this was said before the divorce. (I know. I am on my second marriage.) Anytime we put our life on the line day after day, no matter what type of facility we work in, the thought that someday we may not come home is always in the back of our minds. We fear (here’s the forbidden word!) that someday that lovely wife or husband or small children might not see us again.

Male Officers have a real problem with their emotions. They think it makes them less of a man to admit to experiencing stress, and so they try to hide these feelings. In my opinion it takes a braver man to admit to the stress.

The truth is that in our line of work the adrenaline starts pumping sometimes even before we get to work. Just thinking about what happened there the day before, or what we have to deal with once we get there, can get us going. And the adrenaline surge doesn’t stop just because we’re heading home at the end of our shift. It continues to circulate in our system when we walk in the door. That’s why we need the down time. We need the time and space to shift from the stress-filled work world to family life.

Some Staff think that a few beers or other drinks after work with fellow Officers are the way to relax, and that they even deserve that kind of break. Many an affair has started during these times.

Affairs also happen because an Officer thinks that only another Officer will understand them. Officers can come to believe this when their spouses don’t accept and respect their need for down time.

It seems at times like getting a divorce is a requirement for the job. Most of the problems seem to start with the unmet need for down time.

For those of you married to an Officer, it is rough when your spouse comes home from work and doesn’t want to talk or do anything with you for a while. You may think, “What did I do wrong?” The answer usually is, “Nothing.” It’s just that **your spouse**

/+needs Down Time! Officers don't like to bring their work home. Some of the things that happen in our profession are very crude or downright sick. By not talking about them, they think they are protecting you. Even when both spouses work in corrections it is sometimes hard to relate. Yes, even these families need down time.

The best solution is when the spouses are open and explain things to each other. This can be hard to do, but the reward is a more stable marriage and better understanding of one another. So, when your spouse who works in corrections seems to be withdrawn and quiet, give them breathing space. Take the kids and go for a ride, or do something that your spouse can join in on later, when he or she is ready.

I am not a counselor or psychologist, but I will try to explain corrections to any family member who wants to ask. I neither know all the answers nor claim to. I come from over three decades of working in corrections and know very well the need for down time.

To me, we are all brothers and sisters, and I will try to help in anyway I can. I am proud of the fine men and women that I have worked with over the years and some that I have helped bury.

No matter what anyone says about corrections, be proud of who you are and what you do. Not everyone will walk among killers and rapists—and sometimes worse—**with only a pen** to help control the people milling around them.

Take care,

The Old Screw