



The Chaplain's Toolkit for Grief Loss of Colleague Death

Dr. Jim Floyd
Certified Grief Educator



Week 1: The Tactical Pause — Setting the Container

This session is specifically designed for Law Enforcement Officers grieving the loss of a peer or squad mate. The focus is on creating a "black box" environment where the professional "Warrior Mask" can be safely set aside.

I. Welcome and Intent: The Tactical Pause (3 Minutes)

"Welcome. I want to acknowledge the courage it takes for an officer to step into this room. In our world, we are trained to be the fixers, the protectors, and the ones in control. When we lose a colleague, that foundation is shaken.

Today, we are initiating a **Tactical Pause**. In the field, a tactical pause is a moment to regroup, assess the situation, and ensure the team is ready for what comes next. This group is that pause. We aren't here to 'fix' you—because you aren't broken. We are here to ensure that you don't have to carry the weight of this loss alone while you're trying to hold the line."

II. The Peer Covenant: Trust and the "Black Box" (7 Minutes)

"In law enforcement, trust is the currency of survival. For this group to work, this room must be a 'black box.' What is said here stays here.

The Rules of the Tactical Pause:

1. **Absolute Confidentiality:** No rank, no reports, no 'locker room' talk. What is shared here does not leave this room.
2. **This is Not a Psych Eval:** As your Chaplain/Peer Lead, I am not here to assess your fitness for duty. I am here to be a steward of your story.
3. **No Fixing or Advice:** We don't 'solve' each other's grief. We witness it.
4. **The Single Exception:** As always, if there is an active threat to yourself or others, I must intervene to keep you safe.

By being here, you are agreeing to protect the officers to your left and right by honoring this covenant."

III. The Foundation of Safety: Tactical Grounding (5 Minutes)

"You are trained to be hyper-vigilant—to scan for threats even when you're off-duty. Your body is likely stuck in 'high-alert' because of this loss. We need to settle the nervous system to allow the heart to speak.

Activity: Box Breathing & 5-4-3-2-1

- **Box Breathing:** We'll start with the tactical breath. In for 4, hold for 4, out for 4, hold for 4. (Lead the group through 3 cycles).
- **Physical Grounding:** Plant your boots on the floor.
 - **5 - See:** Name five objects in this room.
 - **4 - Feel:** Notice the weight of your vest or the texture of your sleeves.
 - **3 - Hear:** Identify three sounds inside or outside this building.
 - **2 - Smell:** Notice two scents (coffee, floor wax, etc.).
 - **1 - Taste:** Notice one thing you taste.

Script: 'This tool pulls you out of the "what ifs" and the trauma of the scene, and brings you back to the safety of this room.'

IV. The "Warrior Mask" Concept (5 Minutes)

"To do this job, you wear a mask of professional detachment. It's a tool that keeps you effective under pressure. But after a colleague dies, that mask can start to feel like a prison. You might feel like you have to be 'fine' for the squad, for the family of the fallen, or for your own family.

In this room, the mask is optional. We are going to practice being 'Internal Status: Red' in a safe place so that you can stay 'Status: Green' when you're on the street."

V. Transition to Sharing (3 Minutes)

"We're going to keep our first sharing session focused on the impact on the mission and your own rhythm.

Our prompt for today is:

'Introduce yourself by your first name. Share one way the loss of our colleague has changed the **rhythm of your shift**, and one small "win" you had this week where you felt focused or effective.'

Remember: We are listening to understand, not to critique the performance."

VI. Session Closing (5 Minutes)

Final Check-Out (2 Minutes)

"Let's bring it back. In **one word**, what is your 'Internal Status' right now? (e.g., Heavy, Scanning, Relieved, Steady)."

Self-Care Pledge (2 Minutes)

"We close with a **Mission-Ready Pledge**. This is a single, small act of self-care you will commit to in the next 24 hours to ensure you stay resilient for the next shift."

(Examples: 'I pledge to hydrate properly,' 'I pledge to go for a 20-minute run,' 'I pledge to turn off my work phone for one hour.')

Closing Reflection (1 Minute)

"You protected the mission today by protecting yourselves. The loss of a colleague is a heavy lift, but you don't have to carry it in a solo unit. We hold the line together. **Go in peace and watch your six.**"

Week 2: The Two Backpacks — Grief vs. Trauma

This session provides the tactical language to separate the emotional weight of losing a peer from the physiological alarm system activated by a critical incident. For LEOs, distinguishing these two allows for more effective "operational maintenance" of the self.

I. Review and Grounding (3 Minutes)

"Welcome back for Week 2. You upheld our covenant of the 'Black Box' last week, and you returned—that is a win for your resilience and for this squad.

Before we dive in, let's reset our baseline. Plant your boots. We're going into three cycles of **Box Breathing** (4-4-4-4). This isn't just a relaxation exercise; it's a tool to toggle your nervous system from 'High-Alert' back to 'Ready.' (Lead breathing).

Now, name one thing you are touching. This is the 5-4-3-2-1 technique in a 'short-form' version. You are here, you are safe, and the mission for the remainder of the session is internal."

II. The Two Backpacks Metaphor (7 Minutes)

"In law enforcement, we are used to carrying gear. Right now, you are likely carrying two distinct emotional backpacks. If you try to treat them the same, you'll stay exhausted.

Backpack 1: Grief (The Loss of the Peer)

This is the personal, human response to the hole left in the roster.

- **Focus:** The **Past** and the **Absence**.
- **Symptoms:** Heavy sadness, missing their voice on the radio, 'phantom' moments where you expect them to be at briefing, and fatigue.
- **Healing Tool: Connection.** Grief is managed by talking about the person, honoring their life, and acknowledging the hole they left.

Backpack 2: Trauma (The 'Fear' or 'Alarm' Pack)

This is the physiological response to the incident itself—whether you were on the scene or just felt the shockwaves of the event.

- **Focus:** The **Present** and the **Threat**.
- **Symptoms:** Flashbacks, 'replaying' the call, jumpiness (hyper-vigilance), irritability with family, and sleep issues.

- **Healing Tool: Stabilization.** Trauma is managed by grounding tools, routine, and signaling to your brain that the 'threat' has passed.

The Professional Reality: You might be a 'Status Green' (Ready) on your Grief backpack, but 'Status Red' (Compromised) on your Trauma backpack. Naming which one is heavy allows you to apply the right tactic."

III. Tactical Self-Care for the Operator (5 Minutes)

"When your Trauma backpack is heavy, your 'Internal Alarm' is stuck on. You can't just 'think' your way out of it; you have to 'body' your way out of it.

Symptom	Backpack	Tactical Response
Hyper-vigilance (Scanning when off-duty)	Trauma	Use Box Breathing or 5-4-3-2-1. Give your brain a specific 'search' task that isn't a threat (e.g., 'Find 5 blue things').
Avoidance (Not wanting to drive past the scene)	Trauma	Don't white-knuckle it. Take a different route for a few days to lower your cortisol, then gradually re-approach when 'Status Green'.
Deep Fatigue/Brain Fog	Grief	Accept that processing loss is physically taxing. Prioritize high-quality sleep and hydration. This is 'System Maintenance.'

IV. Transition to Sharing (3 Minutes)

"Today, we are identifying which pack is the heaviest for you right now.

Our prompt for today is:

'Share one experience from this past week where you felt a "heavy lift." Was it driven by the **sadness of the loss** (Grief), or the **jumpiness and replaying of the event** (Trauma)? How did you handle that moment?'

Remember: In this room, naming the struggle isn't a sign of weakness; it's a sign of high-level self-awareness."

V. Session Closing (5 Minutes)

Final Check-Out (2 Minutes)

"Let's bring the focus back. In **one word**, what is your 'Internal Status' after naming those backpacks? (e.g., Lighter, Aware, Focused, Tired)."

Self-Care Pledge (2 Minutes)

"We close with the **Mission-Ready Pledge**. Commit to one small act in the next 24 hours that helps you 'lighten the load' of your heaviest backpack."

(Examples: 'I pledge to do 5 minutes of box breathing before my shift,' 'I pledge to share one good memory of our colleague with a friend.')

Closing Reflection (1 Minute)

"You did the work today of identifying the gear you're carrying. Don't let the weight of the Trauma backpack blind you to the love in the Grief backpack. You've got your squad here to help you carry both. **Watch your six, and we'll see you next week.**"

Week 3: The Pendulum Swing — Normalizing Oscillation

This session addresses the unpredictability of grief in a high-performance environment. We dismantle the "all or nothing" mindset by introducing the concept of oscillation—swinging between the pain of the loss and the necessity of the mission.

I. Reviewing the Baseline (3 Minutes)

"Welcome back for Week 2. Last week, we separated the weight of the **Trauma Backpack** (the alarm) from the **Grief Backpack** (the sadness). We recognized that we can be 'Status Green' in our ability to miss a friend while being 'Status Red' in our physiological response to the scene.

Before we dive in, I remind you of our covenant and let's reset our baseline. Plant your boots. We're going into three cycles of **Box Breathing** (4-4-4-4). This isn't just a relaxation exercise; it's a tool to toggle your nervous system from 'High-Alert' back to 'Ready.' (Lead breathing).

Now, name one thing you can hear outside this space. This is the 5-4-3-2-1 technique in a 'short-form' version. You are here, you are safe, and the mission for the remainder of the session is internal."

Today, we confront the myth of 'moving on.' In the job, we are often expected to have a 'linear' recovery—to get back to 10-8 status and stay there. But grief doesn't work that way. It swings. And today, we're going to normalize that swing."

II. The Dual Process Model: The Pendulum (7 Minutes)

"We don't process loss in stages; we **oscillate**. We swing back and forth between two necessary states. This is the **Dual Process Model (DPM)**, and for an officer, this is vital 'System Maintenance.'

Loss Orientation (Processing the Hole in the Roster)

This is the work of directly facing the loss of your colleague.

- **Focus:** The **Past** and the **Absence**.
- **On-Duty Examples:** Seeing their empty locker, noticing their name still on a shared report, or feeling a sharp pang of sadness during a quiet moment on patrol.
- **Purpose:** To honor the bond and process the human cost of the job.

Restoration Orientation (Mission Maintenance)

This is the work of surviving and rebuilding your professional and personal life.

- **Focus:** The **Future** and **Distraction**.
- **On-Duty Examples:** Focusing intently on a high-risk call, joking in the locker room, hitting the gym, or tackling the 'Paper Dragon' (administrative tasks).
- **Purpose:** To give your brain a mandatory break. It is the tactical reset that prevents you from burning out.

The Reality: You cannot stay on the Loss side 24/7 and remain effective. You cannot stay on the Restoration side 24/7 without becoming detached or 'numb.' The health is in the **swing**."

III. The Guilt Trap: Humor and Resilience (5 Minutes)

"In law enforcement, our humor is often our armor. But after a peer dies, that humor can activate a 'Guilt Trap.'

- **The Voice:** 'We were just laughing at briefing. Does that mean I don't care that he's gone?'
- **The Tactical Truth: No.** That laugh was a 'Restoration' moment. It was your mind taking a breath so it has the strength to go back into the 'Loss' side later.

Oscillation is not disloyalty. Being productive or finding a moment of lightness isn't 'forgetting' your colleague; it's ensuring you have the resilience to continue the mission they shared with you."

IV. Transition to Sharing (3 Minutes)

"Today, let's look at how your pendulum has been swinging this week.

Our prompt for today is:

'Describe one moment this past week when you were fully and painfully immersed in the sadness of the loss (Loss Orientation), and one moment when you were successfully distracted or focused on the mission (Restoration Orientation). Did you feel any guilt during that moment of distraction?'

Remember: We are here to validate the swing, not to judge the speed of it."

V. Session Closing (5 Minutes)

Final Check-Out (2 Minutes)

"Let's bring it back. In **one word**, how would you describe the 'velocity' of your swing this week? (e.g., Fast, Stuck, Erratic, Steady)."

Self-Care Pledge (2 Minutes)

"We close with the **Mission-Ready Pledge**. Commit to one act in the next 24 hours that gives you permission to be on the **Restoration** side—to take a deliberate break from the weight."

(Examples: 'I pledge to listen to a non-work podcast on my commute,' 'I pledge to engage in one hobby I enjoy without checking my work email.')

Closing Reflection (1 Minute)

"You successfully validated the **swing** today. Remember, your moments of focus and your moments of humor are not betrayals; they are the gear that keeps you in the fight. **Watch your six, and we'll see you next week.**"

Week 4: Liminality — The Identity of the 'Survivor Squad'

This session addresses the "messy middle" of grief. For a squad, liminality is the period where the initial shock has faded, but the "new normal" feels wrong or incomplete. We validate the disorientation of being a survivor in a high-performance unit.

I. Reviewing the Swing (3 Minutes)

"Welcome back for Week 4. Last week, we validated the **Pendulum Swing**—how we oscillate between the pain of the loss and the necessity of the mission. We established that finding a moment of humor or focus isn't a betrayal; it's a 'Tactical Reset.'

Before we dive in, I remind you of our covenant and let's reset our baseline. Plant your boots. We're going into three cycles of **Box Breathing** (4-4-4-4). This isn't just a relaxation exercise; it's a tool to toggle your nervous system from 'High-Alert' back to 'Ready.' (Lead breathing).

Now, name one thing you can smell. This is the 5-4-3-2-1 technique in a 'short-form' version. You are here, you are safe, and the mission for the remainder of the session is internal."

Today, we look at where that pendulum is swinging. You might feel like you're standing on a bridge between two worlds: the squad as it used to be, and the squad as it is now. This 'in-between' space is called **Liminality**."

II. Defining the Grey Zone (7 Minutes)

"**Liminality** comes from the Latin word for 'threshold.' It's the fog you enter after a major loss. For LEOs, we often call this the '**Grey Zone**.'

- **The Old Squad (Gone):** You knew everyone's rhythm, the jokes were established, and the trust was instinctive. That version of the team is gone.
- **The New Squad (Unformed):** The roster might have a new name on it, or the beats have been reassigned. It feels mechanical and 'off.'
- **The Grey Zone (Where you are now):** You are physically back at work, but mentally, you feel like a ghost in the machine. You're doing the job, but the 'soul' of the unit feels suspended.

●
The Experience: You might feel a sense of 'Wait, why are we just moving on?' while simultaneously wanting to just get the shift over with. This disorientation is a normal

response to the shattering of your professional 'family' structure."

III. The 'Survivor Squad' Identity (5 Minutes)

"In the Grey Zone, your identity as an officer changes. You aren't just 'Patrol' or 'Detectives' anymore; you are a **Survivor Squad**.

1. **The Empty Seat:** Whether it's the seat at briefing or the radio call sign that is no longer used, the silence is loud.
2. **The Performance Trap:** There is often pressure—internal or external—to 'perform' like nothing happened to prove the unit is still 10-8 (ready). This leads to exhaustion.
3. **The 'New Guy' Friction:** Eventually, a vacancy is filled. This can activate intense liminality—a feeling of resentment or protective 'gatekeeping' because the newcomer didn't share the trauma.

The Tactical Truth: You can't rush through the Grey Zone. You have to learn to operate *within* the fog until it lifts. Acknowledging that 'this feels weird' is the first step toward stabilizing the unit."

IV. Transition to Sharing (3 Minutes)

"Today, let's name the disorientation of the Grey Zone.

Our prompt for today is:

'Describe one moment this week where the "Old Squad" felt very present, and one moment where the "New Reality" felt especially wrong or uncomfortable. How are you navigating that "Grey Zone" in your daily shift?'

Remember: We are here to witness the disorientation, not to force a "new normal" before you're ready."

V. Session Closing (5 Minutes)

Final Check-Out (2 Minutes)

"Let's bring it back. In **one word**, how would you describe the 'visibility' in your Grey Zone today? (e.g., Foggy, Clearing, Dark, Static)."

Self-Care Pledge (2 Minutes)

"We close with the **Mission-Ready Pledge**. Commit to one small act in the next 24 hours that helps you 'anchor' yourself in the present moment, even if the surrounding

environment feels off."

(Examples: 'I pledge to spend 10 minutes in silence before my shift starts,' 'I pledge to have one honest conversation with a squad mate about how weird this week feels.')

Closing Reflection (1 Minute)

"You honored the **Survivor Squad** today. Being in the Grey Zone is exhausting, but you are crossing that bridge together. You don't have to have all the answers; you just have to keep showing up for the officer to your left and right. **Watch your six, and we'll see you next week.**"

Week 5: Moral Injury — The Wound of Betrayal

This session addresses the anger and resentment that often follow a peer's death. For a squad, Moral Injury (MI) occurs when the loss is compounded by a sense of betrayal—whether by the agency's policies, the equipment, the command staff, or the public.

I. Reviewing the Grey Zone (3 Minutes)

"Welcome back for Week 5. Last week, we named the **Grey Zone**—that disorienting fog where the old squad is gone, but the new reality hasn't settled.

Before we dive in, I remind you of our covenant and let's reset our baseline. Plant your boots. We're going into three cycles of **Box Breathing** (4-4-4-4). This isn't just a relaxation exercise; it's a tool to toggle your nervous system from 'High-Alert' back to 'Ready.' (Lead breathing).

Now, name one thing you can taste. This is the 5-4-3-2-1 technique in a 'short-form' version. You are here, you are safe, and the mission for the remainder of the session is internal."

Today, we address the heat that often burns through that fog: **Rage**. Specifically, we're talking about the rage that comes when you feel like the system, the agency, or the 'brass' let your colleague down. This is called **Moral Injury**."

II. Defining Moral Injury for the Squad (7 Minutes)

"We've talked about **Grief** (the sadness) and **Trauma** (the alarm). **Moral Injury** is the wound of **conscience**. It's what happens when your sense of what is 'right' or 'just' is shattered.

In law enforcement, we sign up for risk, but we don't sign up for betrayal. For a survivor squad, MI often looks like:

- **The Preventability Trap:** 'He'd be alive if Admin hadn't changed the backup policy.'
- **The Disposable Feeling:** Seeing the agency post the job opening before the funeral is even over.
- **The Gear/Policy Betrayal:** Feeling that a lack of equipment or a political decision made the mission unnecessarily lethal.

The Experience: This isn't just 'being mad.' It's a deep, painful feeling that the 'Blue Family' or the agency failed in its most basic duty: to protect its own. This betrayal can make you feel cynical, detached, or like the job is a lie."

III. The 'Internal Affairs' of the Heart (5 Minutes)

"When we feel betrayed by the system, we often do one of two things:

1. **The Explosion:** We vent our rage in the locker room, which provides temporary relief but keeps us in a state of 'Status Red' (High Alert).
2. **The Implosion:** We swallow the rage, which turns into cynicism and 'burnout.'

The Tactical Truth: Your anger at the system is a valid response to an injustice. Naming it doesn't make you a 'bad' officer or a 'rebel'; it makes you an honest one. We have to process the rage so it doesn't poison your ability to do the job safely."

IV. Transition to Sharing (3 Minutes)

"Today, we are opening the floor to the 'Unspeakable Rage.' This is a safe space to name the betrayal without it reaching the front office.

Our prompt for today is:

'What is one specific aspect of the agency's response, the equipment, or the "system" that feels like a betrayal of our fallen colleague? How is that sense of injustice affecting your "Status" on the street?'

Remember: We are here to witness the injustice, not to litigate the department's policies. Focus on how the betrayal feels to YOU."

V. Session Closing (5 Minutes)

Final Check-Out (2 Minutes)

"Let's bring it back. In **one word**, how would you describe your 'Cynicism Level' right now? (e.g., High, Simmering, Guarded, Exhausted)."

Self-Care Pledge (2 Minutes)

"We close with the **Mission-Ready Pledge**. Commit to one act in the next 24 hours that helps you 'uncouple' your personal value from the agency's failures."

(Examples: 'I pledge to spend an evening entirely focused on my family/hobbies, not work talk,' 'I pledge to write down my frustrations and leave them in my locker at the end of shift.')

Closing Reflection (1 Minute)

"You bravely faced the **Wound of Betrayal** today. Your rage at the system is proof of your integrity—it means you still know what 'right' looks like. Don't let the agency's failures define your value as an officer. **Watch your six, and we'll see you next week.**"

Week 6: Spiritual Injury — The Crisis of Meaning

This session addresses the shattering of an officer's worldview. In a profession dedicated to "Law and Order," death—especially a random or "unfair" one—violates the fundamental belief that the world should make sense. We explore the spiritual wound of survivor guilt and the search for meaning.

I. Reviewing the Wound of Betrayal (3 Minutes)

"Welcome back for Week 6. Last week, we opened the floor to the 'Unspeakable Rage'—the **Moral Injury** felt toward the agency or the system. We validated that your anger is a sign of your integrity.

Before we dive in, I remind you of our covenant and let's reset our baseline. Plant your boots. We're going into three cycles of **Box Breathing** (4-4-4-4). This isn't just a relaxation exercise; it's a tool to toggle your nervous system from 'High-Alert' back to 'Ready.' (Lead breathing).

Now, name one thing you can see. This is the 5-4-3-2-1 technique in a 'short-form' version. You are here, you are safe, and the mission for the remainder of the session is internal."

Today, we move from the anger at the *system* to the crisis in the *soul*. We are talking about **Spiritual Injury**. This isn't necessarily about religion; it's about your 'spirit'—your core belief in fairness, justice, and the meaning of this job."

II. Defining Spiritual Injury: The Fairness Myth (7 Minutes)

"In Law Enforcement, we are 'Order' people. We expect actions to have consequences and rules to be followed. When a colleague dies, it creates a 'Spiritual Injury' because death follows no rules.

- **The 'Why Him/Her?' Crisis:** 'He was the best of us. He had three kids and a perfect record. Why him and not the guy who doesn't care about the job?'
- **The Randomness Factor:** The realization that skill, fitness, and 'doing it by the book' couldn't prevent the loss. This shatters the illusion of control.
- **Survivor Guilt:** The quiet, persistent question: 'Why am I still here?' This is a spiritual wound where you feel your own life is a clerical error of the universe.

The Experience: You might feel like the job is meaningless, or that 'the good die young' while you are stuck in the grind. This injury can make you feel hollow, cynical, or spiritually abandoned by the very justice you represent.

III. Reclaiming the Mission (5 Minutes)

"When your worldview is shattered, you have to decide what to build in its place.

1. **Accepting the Chaos:** Healing begins when we stop trying to find a 'logical' reason for an illogical event. There is no 'reason' he is gone and you are here; there is only the fact of it.
2. **Redefining Purpose:** If the world isn't 'fair,' then our role as officers becomes even more important. We aren't here because the world is perfect; we are here because it *isn't*.
3. **Honoring the 'Empty Seat':** We don't find meaning *in* the death; we create meaning *after* the death by how we carry ourselves on the next call.

The Tactical Truth: A spiritual injury makes you feel like 'quitting' internally. Naming the unfairness allows you to stop fighting the 'Why?' so you can focus on the 'What now?'"

IV. Transition to Sharing (3 Minutes)

"Today, we are looking at the 'Why?' questions that keep you up at night.

Our prompt for today is:

'What is the "Fairness Myth" that was shattered for you by this loss (e.g., the timing, the person, the "Why him/her?")? And how is that sense of unfairness affecting your belief in the mission right now?'

Remember: We aren't here to provide theological answers. We are here to witness the weight of the question."

V. Session Closing (5 Minutes)

Final Check-Out (2 Minutes)

"Let's bring it back. In **one word**, what is your 'Spirit Level' today? (e.g., Hollow, Searching, Tired, Resolute)."

Self-Care Pledge (2 Minutes)

"We close with the **Mission-Ready Pledge**. Commit to one act in the next 24 hours that affirms your own value or purpose, independent of the job's outcomes."

(Examples: 'I pledge to spend 15 minutes doing something that makes me feel like "me" (not an officer),' 'I pledge to reach out to one person I appreciate and tell them so.')

Closing Reflection (1 Minute)

"You bravely faced the **Crisis of Meaning** today. There are no easy answers to 'Why?', but you are asking the question together. Your presence here is proof that the mission continues, even in the dark. **Watch your six, and we'll see you next week.**"

Week 7: The Myth of the Perfect Partner — Challenging Guilt

This session addresses the "Internal Affairs" of the mind. In law enforcement, we are trained to analyze every second of a critical incident to find the "error." When a colleague dies, this analytical habit turns inward, creating a toxic cycle of guilt and "If Only" statements. We work to dismantle the myth of the perfect partner and reclaim our own humanity.

I. Reviewing the Crisis of Meaning (3 Minutes)

"Welcome back for Week 7. Last week, we faced the **Spiritual Injury**—the 'Why Him/Her?' crisis and the shattering of the 'Fairness Myth.' We acknowledged that we aren't here because the world is perfect, but because it isn't.

Before we dive in, I remind you of our covenant and let's reset our baseline. Plant your boots. We're going into three cycles of **Box Breathing** (4-4-4-4). This isn't just a relaxation exercise; it's a tool to toggle your nervous system from 'High-Alert' back to 'Ready.' (Lead breathing).

Now, name one thing you are touching. This is the 5-4-3-2-1 technique in a 'short-form' version. You are here, you are safe, and the mission for the remainder of the session is internal."

Today, we move from the 'Why Him/Her?' to the 'If Only I...'. We are addressing the **Guilt** that often shadows a survivor squad. Whether you were on the scene, on the radio, or miles away when it happened, your mind has likely been running a non-stop 'After Action Review,' looking for a way to blame yourself for the outcome."

II. The "After Action Review" of the Mind (7 Minutes)

"In the job, we are trained to look for 'Human Factors' and tactical errors. But when applied to grief, this training becomes a weapon of self-destruction.

- **Tactical Guilt (The Backup Trap):** 'If only I had arrived thirty seconds sooner,' or 'If only I had checked that corner for him/her.' We treat our lack of omniscience as a tactical failure.
- **Relational Guilt (The 'Last Words' Trap):** 'The last thing I said to him/her was a joke about his/her bad coffee,' or 'We were in a tiff over a shift trade.' We feel like we 'failed' as a partner because we were being human.
- **The Survivor's Debt:** The feeling that your continued life is an insult to their

death. You feel guilty for eating, sleeping, or enjoying your own family.

The Experience: Guilt is actually a survival mechanism. If you can find a 'mistake' you made, you can maintain the illusion that the world is controllable. But this 'control' is a lie that costs you your peace."

III. Challenging the "Perfect Partner" Myth (5 Minutes)

"When an officer dies, we tend to turn them into a saint. We erase their flaws, their bad moods, and their mistakes. While this is done out of respect, it creates a dangerous imbalance for the survivors.

1. **They Were Human:** Your colleague was a great officer, but they were also a flawed human, just like you. They had bad shifts, they made tactical errors, and they had grumpy mornings.
2. **The Relationship was Real:** A real partnership involves friction. Honoring their memory doesn't mean pretending you never got annoyed with each other. It means honoring the **whole person**.
3. **Forgiving Your Humanity:** You are holding yourself to a standard of perfection that no human can meet. You were doing the best you could with the information you had at the time. You didn't have the benefit of hindsight then; don't use it to crucify yourself now."

IV. Transition to Sharing (3 Minutes)

"Today, we are going to air out the 'If Onlys.' We are bringing them into the light so they lose their power over you.

Our prompt for today is:

"What is the "If Only..." statement that has been playing on loop in your head since the loss? And what is one piece of evidence—one memory of your partner's actual, human personality—that reminds you that your relationship was real and "enough"?"

Remember: In this room, naming your perceived "failure" is the first step toward reclaiming your strength."

V. Session Closing (5 Minutes)

Final Check-Out (2 Minutes)

"Let's bring it back. In **one word**, what is the current 'Volume Level' of your guilt voice? (e.g., Screaming, Muffled, Quiet, Fading)."

Self-Care Pledge (2 Minutes)

"We close with the **Mission-Ready Pledge**. Commit to one act in the next 24 hours that is an act of **self-mercy**—a deliberate choice to stop the 'Internal Affairs' review for a set period of time."

(Examples: 'I pledge to stop replaying the incident for the rest of tonight,' 'I pledge to do one thing I enjoy without apologizing to myself for being alive.')

Closing Reflection (1 Minute)

"You bravely faced the **After Action Review of the Mind** today. Remember: Being human is not a tactical error. You were a real partner to a real person, and that is more than enough. **Watch your six, and we'll see you next week.**"

Week 8: Meaning Reconstruction — Reclaiming the Badge

This session focuses on the shift from "What happened?" to "How do I carry this forward?" We explore the concept of Continuing Bonds, helping officers integrate the best professional and personal traits of their fallen colleague into their own service. This is the work of turning pain into a living legacy.

I. Reviewing the "Internal Affairs" of the Mind (3 Minutes)

"Welcome back for Week 8. Last week, we aired out the **"If Onlys"**—the tactical and relational guilt that tries to convince us we failed as partners. We challenged the myth of the perfect partner and acknowledged that being a human being is not a tactical error.

Before we dive in, I remind you of our covenant and let's reset our baseline. Plant your boots. We're going into three cycles of **Box Breathing** (4-4-4-4). This isn't just a relaxation exercise; it's a tool to toggle your nervous system from 'High-Alert' back to 'Ready.' (Lead breathing).

Now, name one thing you can hear outside this space. This is the 5-4-3-2-1 technique in a 'short-form' version. You are here, you are safe, and the mission for the remainder of the session is internal."

Today, we move toward the future. We've spent weeks looking at the weight of the loss; now we look at the weight of the **influence**. We are going to talk about how you reclaim your badge and your mission by carrying the best of your colleague with you on every call."

II. Continuing Bonds: The Relationship Doesn't End (7 Minutes)

"In the civilian world, people often talk about 'closure.' In our world, we know that's a myth. You don't 'close' a door on a partner. Instead, you develop a **Continuing Bond**.

- **Integration, Not Erasure:** Healing isn't about forgetting the person; it's about finding a way to stay connected to their influence without being paralyzed by their absence.
- **The Living Shield:** For a survivor squad, this means your fallen colleague becomes part of your tactical DNA. You don't just remember them; you 'deputize' their best traits into your own work.
- **Reframing the Narrative:** We move from a story defined by the *end* of their life to a story defined by the *impact* of their life. You are the living proof that their service

mattered.

The Experience: You might find yourself thinking, 'What would [Name] do here?' or 'He would have found this call hilarious.' These aren't just memories; they are the bond continuing to shape you as an officer."

III. The Deputized Legacy: Choosing What to Carry (5 Minutes)

"Every officer has a 'superpower'—something they did better than anyone else. To honor them, we choose to adopt a piece of that superpower for ourselves.

1. **Identify the Trait:** Was it their ability to de-escalate with a joke? Their meticulous attention to paperwork? Their absolute loyalty to the squad? Or maybe their ability to leave the job at the station and be a great parent?
2. **Define the Action:** How can you perform **one specific act** this week that embodies that trait?
3. **The Result:** When you act out their best qualities, you aren't just 'working'; you are maintaining the line they helped build. This is how we reconstruct meaning in the face of a senseless loss."

IV. Transition to Sharing (3 Minutes)

"Today, we are identifying the 'Deputized Legacy' you are taking on.

Our prompt for today is:

'What is one specific professional or personal trait of our fallen colleague that you most respected? And what is one small, actionable way you will "deputize" that trait into your own conduct on the street this week?'

Remember: We are here to honor the whole life by the way we live our own."

V. Session Closing (5 Minutes)

Final Check-Out (2 Minutes)

"Let's bring it back. In **one word**, how would you describe your 'Connection' to your colleague's legacy today? (e.g., Stronger, Present, Clear, Heavy)."

Self-Care Pledge (2 Minutes)

"We close with the **Mission-Ready Pledge**. Commit to one act in the next 24 hours that honors your colleague's legacy by taking care of the officer they cared about—YOU."
(Examples: 'I pledge to hit the gym, because he always pushed me to stay fit,' 'I pledge to spend quality time with my kids tonight, honoring how much he loved his.')

Closing Reflection (1 Minute)

"You successfully began **Reclaiming the Badge** today. Your fallen colleague isn't just a name on a wall; they are a part of how you handle the next call, the next crisis, and the next squad. They held the line then; you hold it for both of you now. **Watch your six, and we'll see you next week.**"

Week 9: Scaffolding and Re-entry — The New Squad Rhythm

This session focuses on building the long-term structure required to sustain an officer's health and performance. We move from the internal work of legacy into the external work of daily survival, focusing on "scaffolding" (routines) and "scripts" (boundaries) to protect the new squad rhythm.

I. Reviewing the Deputized Legacy (3 Minutes)

"Welcome back for Week 9. Last week, we identified the '**Deputized Legacy**'—the specific superpower of our fallen colleague that you chose to adopt into your own conduct. By doing that, you transitioned from a story of loss to a story of influence.

Before we dive in, I remind you of our covenant and let's reset our baseline. Plant your boots. We're going into three cycles of **Box Breathing** (4-4-4-4). This isn't just a relaxation exercise; it's a tool to toggle your nervous system from 'High-Alert' back to 'Ready.' (Lead breathing).

Now, name one thing you can smell. This is the 5-4-3-2-1 technique in a 'short-form' version. You are here, you are safe, and the mission for the remainder of the session is internal."

Today, we look at the 'Scaffolding' required to hold that legacy up. As the initial support from the agency and the public begins to fade, you are entering the phase of 'Re-entry.' This is where we build the permanent structures that will keep you 10-8 (ready) for the long haul."

II. Building the Scaffolding of Routine (7 Minutes)

"In law enforcement, we rely on SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) because they provide structure when things get chaotic. Grief is the ultimate chaos. You need **Scaffolding**—non-negotiable routines—to keep your nervous system from red-lining.

- Pillar 1: Tactical Guardrails (On the Job):
Identifying your 'Activating Calls.' If your colleague died on a domestic, every domestic call for a while is going to feel like 'Status Red.' Scaffolding means having a pre-planned reset for these calls (e.g., a specific breathing pattern while en route or a mandatory 2-minute 'clear' time afterward).
- Pillar 2: Personal Anchors (Off the Job):
These are the routines that have nothing to do with the badge. It might be a

specific gym time, a Wednesday night tradition with your family, or a hobby that forces your brain to switch channels. These aren't 'luxuries'; they are the 'Armor Maintenance' required for your survival.

- **Pillar 3: Squad Maintenance:**
The new rhythm of the team. Acknowledging that the squad dynamic has changed and finding a way to check in on each other that doesn't feel like a 'clinical' intervention (e.g., 'Status Check' texts).

The Experience: Scaffolding doesn't remove the grief, but it provides a framework so the grief doesn't collapse your entire life."

III. The Re-entry Scripts: Protecting Your Peace (5 Minutes)

"As months pass, people—civilians and even some 'brass'—will expect you to be 'back to normal.' You will encounter awkward questions or dismissive comments. You need **Scripts** to protect your energy.

1. **The Public Script:** For when a citizen asks, 'Did you know the officer who died?'
 - *Script:* 'Yes, we worked together. He was a great officer. Thank you for your concern.' (Brief, professional, closes the door).
2. **The Locker Room Script:** For when a peer makes a joke that hits wrong or tries to 'fix' you.
 - *Script:* 'I'm still processing some of that, so I'm going to take a pass on this conversation right now.' (Assertive, sets a boundary).
3. **The Internal Script:** What you say to yourself when you feel a grief wave.
 - *Script:* 'This is a wave. It is a normal reaction to an abnormal loss. I am using my scaffolding to ride it out.'

The Tactical Truth: Having a script ready prevents you from being 'ambushed' by your emotions in public. It keeps you in control of your narrative."

IV. Transition to Sharing (3 Minutes)

"Today, we are identifying the planks of your scaffolding and the shields of your scripts.

Our prompt for today is:

'What is one specific "Pillar" of scaffolding (a routine) you will reinforce this week to keep your internal status stable? And what is one "Script" you will rehearse to protect your energy when you encounter the "back to normal" expectations of others?'

Remember: In this room, we are building the structure that allows the squad to survive and thrive."

V. Session Closing (5 Minutes)

Final Check-Out (2 Minutes)

"Let's bring it back. In **one word**, how would you describe your 'Stability' today? (e.g., Supported, Rigged, Fragile, Anchored)."

Self-Care Pledge (2 Minutes)

"We close with the **Mission-Ready Pledge**. Commit to one act in the next 24 hours that builds or reinforces a 'plank' in your personal scaffolding."

(Examples: 'I pledge to set a 10:00 PM "screens off" rule for myself,' 'I pledge to schedule one non-work activity for this weekend.')

Closing Reflection (1 Minute)

"You successfully began building your **Scaffolding** today. Remember: The initial 'surge' of support may be ending, but the structure we build here is permanent. You are the architect of your own resilience now. **Watch your six, and we'll see you next week for our final session.**"

Week 10: The Road Ahead — Advocacy and Sustaining the Mission

This final session focuses on the "Final Briefing." We acknowledge the work done over the last ten weeks and prepare the squad for long-term resilience. We move from internal healing to external advocacy, ensuring the fallen colleague's legacy is sustained through the squad's continued service and support for others.

I. Acknowledging the Transition (3 Minutes)

"Welcome to our final session. Take a moment to look at the officers to your left and right. Ten weeks ago, we entered this room with our armor high and our 'Warrior Masks' firmly in place. Over this time, you've done the hard, tactical work of facing the trauma, the rage, and the guilt.

Before we dive in, I remind you of our covenant and let's reset our baseline. Plant your boots. We're going into three cycles of **Box Breathing** (4-4-4-4). This isn't just a relaxation exercise; it's a tool to toggle your nervous system from 'High-Alert' back to 'Ready.' (Lead breathing).

Now, name one thing you can taste. This is the 5-4-3-2-1 technique in a 'short-form' version. You are here, you are safe, and the mission for the remainder of the session is internal."

Today is our 'Final Briefing.' The group container is closing, but the 'Black Box' of trust we built remains. Our focus today is ensuring you have the tools to sustain your health and the mission long after you leave this room."

II. Grief Waves and the Tactical Reset (5 Minutes)

"Graduating from this group doesn't mean your grief is 'over.' It means you are now better equipped to handle the **Grief Waves**. * **The Reality of Relapse**: You will have days where you feel 'Status Green,' and then a song, a smell, or a similar call will hit, and you'll suddenly be 'Status Red.' This isn't a failure; it's a normal reaction.

- **The Tactical Reset**: When a wave hits, go back to the basics:
 1. **Stabilize**: Use Box Breathing or the 5-4-3-2-1 technique immediately.
 2. **Check the Scaffolding**: Are you keeping your routines (gym, family time, sleep)?
 3. **Reach Out**: Use the peer connections made here. Do not try to solo a 'Status Red' day.

The Experience: Think of these waves as a flare from the past. Acknowledge them, use your tools, and return to the present mission."

III. Advocacy: Turning Pain into Purpose (5 Minutes)

"One of the most powerful ways to sustain a **Continuing Bond** with your fallen colleague is through **Advocacy**. This is the highest form of 'Meaning Reconstruction.'

1. **Protecting the Next Generation:** Use what you've learned here to watch the six of younger officers. If you see a squad mate struggling after a critical incident, be the one to bridge the gap for them.
2. **Improving the System:** Channel the 'Wound of Betrayal' (Moral Injury) into constructive change. Whether it's advocating for better equipment, policy shifts, or mental health awareness within the agency, you are now a steward of the 'Survivor Squad' experience.
3. **The Connection Mandate:** Do not return to the isolation of the mask. Your resilience is tied to your connection with this peer group and the broader law enforcement family."

IV. Specialized External Resources (4 Minutes)

"While this group ends today, your support network expands. You must commit to using the specialized resources available to you:

- **C.O.P.S. (Concerns of Police Survivors):** For long-term support and retreats for coworkers and families of LODD.
- **Blue H.E.L.P.:** For resources and advocacy specifically related to officer suicide loss and mental health stigma.
- **The Wounded Blue:** For those dealing with the long-term psychological impact of critical incidents."

(Refer to the 'Grief Support Resource Sheet')

V. Final Transition to Sharing (3 Minutes)

"For our final prompt, we are looking at the strength you are taking with you.

Our prompt for today is:

'What is one specific lesson about your own resilience that you will take back to the street? And what is one promise of self-care you will make to yourself to ensure you stay mission-ready for the months and years ahead?'

Remember: This is your final disclosure in this space. Make it count."

VI. Session Closing (5 Minutes)

Final Check-Out (2 Minutes)

"Let's bring it back one last time. In **one word**, what is your 'Final Status' today? (e.g., Prepared, Solid, Connected, Grateful)."

Self-Care Pledge (2 Minutes)

"We close with a **Final Mission-Ready Pledge**. This is your long-term commitment to the officer in the mirror."

(Examples: 'I pledge to attend the annual memorial for my partner every year,' 'I pledge to mentor one new officer on the importance of mental health.')

Closing Reflection (1 Minute)

"The 'Tactical Pause' is over, but the work continues. You have honored your fallen colleague by having the courage to face your own heart. You are the living legacy of the badge they wore. **Go back to your shifts, watch your six, and know that you never walk the beat alone. Go in peace.**"