



## Cybersecurity and Mental Health

P2P4-T07: Cybersecurity Impact on Mental Health:  
Managing Stress, Building Resilience

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At the RSA Conference 2018, the Peer2Peer session on “Cybersecurity Impact on Mental Health: Managing Stress, Building Resilience” provided an opportunity for participants to share perspectives on the daily challenges of maintaining wellness while working in cybersecurity. The human element and mental health play critical roles for individuals and organizations responding to and managing threats in a constantly changing environment. During the conversations at the two offered sessions, participants identified and discussed common stressors in the cybersecurity field, shared ways to manage stress, discussed burnout, and learned about a “kitchen organizer” metaphor as a tool for keeping track of one’s mental inventory. A systematic approach for sorting out stress by examining a situation, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors was introduced as one way towards building human mental resilience.

Some emerging themes from the sessions included:

- Challenges of the profession. Participants described characteristics in the cybersecurity field that contributed to stress, including: high expectations as being first responders; words of thanks being rare; feelings of guilt when things are missed; constantly having to be on alert for finding holes and filling them; a culture of a “badge of honor” to take on more duties and stress; communication problems with management; more to be done in recognizing the wellness of people; stigma of mental health.
- Impact on individuals. Participants described stress issues such as: inability to “turn off” when returning home from work and the difficulty to “get away” from work-related matters; loss of positivity; limitations in terms of which people they can go to for support due to the security nature of their work that cannot be shared; protecting people in their support networks to make sure they are not overwhelmed by the stress being loaded onto them; difficulties in making staff members feel comfortable to say when their limits have been reached.

Some things that people can do to help find a new way forward:

- Dedicate time for self. Making time for fun, hobbies, activities not related to work.
- Taking moments for self-reflection, using techniques such as journaling and mindfulness.
- Keeping open communication with trusted people, looking out for each other, and getting help when needed.
- Driving cultural change through leadership emphasizing mental health as a key priority.
- Having different professional fields come together to learn from one another.

Similar to health, security has foundations of education, awareness, prevention, and early interventions. When people develop a daily habit of keeping well, they build stronger foundations for resilience.

Cybersecurity starts with mental security.

For information and resources: <http://ryanklouie.com>