



**RIO VISTA**  
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

# **El Paso's Premier Destination for Hope and Healing**

**1390 Northwestern - El Paso, Texas – 79912**

**(915) 209-4513, Option 1 for Admissions**

# Rio Vista First Responder Liaisons



Jose Luis Lopez  
Retired El Paso Police Officer  
25 years



Mario Herrera  
Retired El Paso Fire Lieutenant  
23 years

# First Responder Stress

First responders are routinely exposed to chronic, repeated, and often unprocessed trauma, including life-threatening situations, injury and death, moral injury, and responsibility for others' safety.



# First Responder Stress

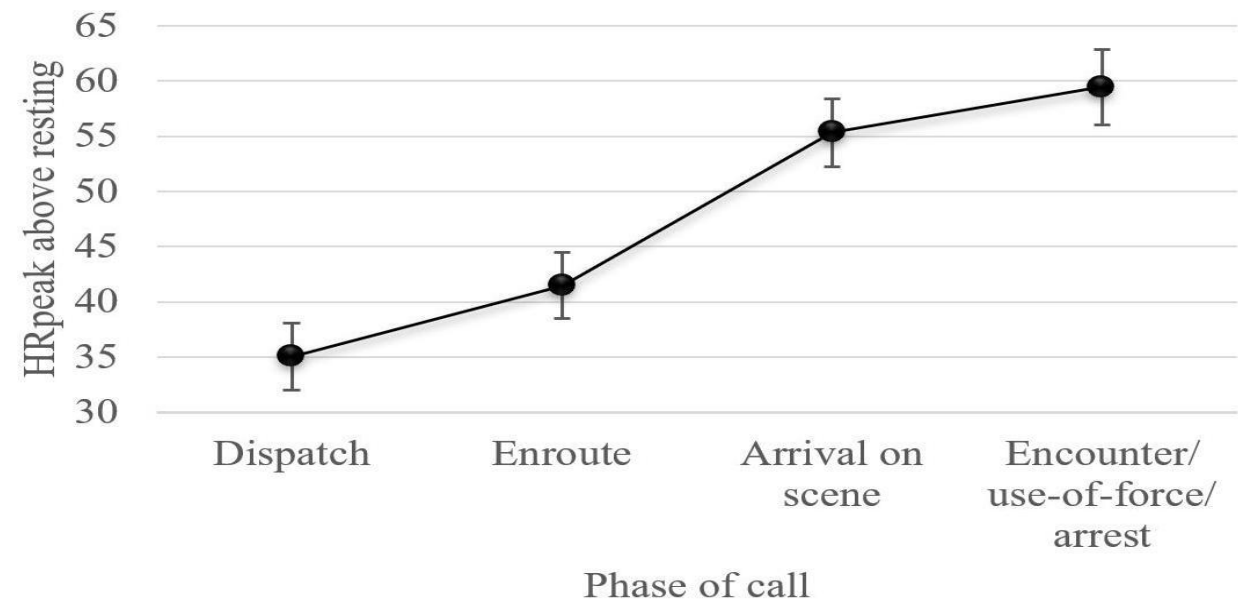
Unlike single incident trauma, this type of exposure is ongoing and embedded in the job, leaving little opportunity for recovery before the next critical incident. Over time, this can contribute to hypervigilance, emotional numbing, sleep disruption, irritability, concentration difficulties, and heightened stress response, often without a clear sense of “when it started.”

# First Responder Stress

When a person experiences an emotional and physical arousal based on a thought or perception this is referred to as Anxiety.

In the First Responder world this is a necessity and is required to perform their duty effectively.

## Allosteric Load: Why the stress breaks first responders



Baldwin, S., Bennell, C., Andersen, J. P., Semple, T., & Jenkins, B. (2019). Stress-activity mapping: Physiological responses during General Duty Police Encounters. *Frontiers in Psychology, 10*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02216>

# First Responder Stress: What makes it unique?

## Culture:

The development of a mindset that was meant to protect against the stressors of the police work but can be devastating to a first responder's mental health

- Seen as weak and incapable of doing the job
- Just trying to get out of working
- Diagnosis of certain conditions prevent the first responder from returning to work
- Emotionally dysregulated and are seen as being dangerous

# Unresolved Trauma: Symptoms

The problem is that buried trauma doesn't go away. It remains and continues to grow, until ultimately, it surfaces in unexpected and disproportionate ways.

Dr. Judith Zackson, PHD

- Hypervigilance (Can't let guard down)
- Lack of Trust
- Dissociation (Numbness)
- Control Issues (overcompensate)
- Anger Issues
- Sleep Difficulties
- Bodily Memories (small, taste, pain)
- Development of Mental Health Conditions (Anxiety, Depression, PTSD, Substance abuse)

Gupta, S. (n.d.). *What is unresolved trauma?*. Verywell Mind. <https://www.verywellmind.com/unresolved-trauma-symptoms-causes-diagnosis-and-treatment-6753365>

# Treating Unresolved Trauma

Treating unresolved trauma begins with finding a safe and nurturing environment so the first responders can feel safe to open the “box” where trauma is found. The first responder needs to become aware of the traumatic experience. Developing a healthy perspective of the experience and learning how to integrate the experience into their lives is key.

# Rio Vista First Responder Program Overview

Our treatment planning prioritizes functional stability and readiness for duty, with careful consideration of how mental health interventions may impact a first responder's ability to safely and effectively perform job responsibilities, including carrying a firearm, operating a vehicle, and making split-second decisions under stress.



# Rio Vista First Responder Program Overview

Our goal is to support first responders, many of whom are veterans, not only in managing trauma symptoms, but in sustaining long-term functioning, well-being, and readiness for duty, while honoring the complexity of the roles they serve and the experiences they carry.



# Rio Vista First Responder Program Overview

## Our Emphasis:

- Understanding trauma triggers that may arise both on and off duty
- Identifying early physiological and emotional warning signs
- Teaching grounding, regulation, and reset strategies that can be used in real-time and in high-stress environments
- Supporting meaning-making, resilience, and recovery without minimizing occupational realities

# Rio Vista First Responder Program Overview

## Diagnoses:

- Our diagnostic formulation emphasizes clinical accuracy, symptom severity, functional impact, and response to treatment, rather than diagnosis alone.
- We apply thoughtful diagnostic approach in recognition that certain diagnoses can carry administrative, legal, or occupational implications.

# Rio Vista First Responder Program Overview

## Medication Management:

- When our first responders are engaged in medication management with the internal provider, we remain mindful that certain medications may affect alertness, reaction time, or cognitive processing.
- With proper consent, we collaborate with prescribing providers to ensure treatment plans support occupational safety and return-to-work goals.

# Rio Vista In-Patient Services

## **Seven- 20 bed units and One- 12 bed unit**

- Two wings are designated for Military and First Responders
- One wing is designated for the women's program
- Two wings are designated for adolescents 11 to 17 years of age
- Two wings are designated for adults
- One flex wing

# Rio Vista Out-Patient Services

## Levels of Care & Schedule

### **Partial Hospitalization Program (PHP)**

- 5 days per week
- 9:30 AM – 2:00 PM

Provides intensive, structured care for stabilization, skill development, and trauma-informed treatment without inpatient hospitalization.

### **Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP)**

- 3 days per week
- 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM

Serves as a step-down or entry level of care supporting ongoing recovery and gradual reintegration into work and daily responsibilities.

# Rio Vista Out-Patient Services

## Treatment Tracks Offered

- **General Mental Health Track**

Focuses on depression, anxiety, stress management, emotional regulation, sleep disturbance, and adjustment-related concerns. Emphasis is placed on coping skills, resilience, and functional stabilization.

- **PTSD & Trauma Track**

Treatment includes trauma-informed psychoeducation, trigger identification, nervous system regulation, grounding skills, and trauma-focused processing within a safe and structured framework.

# Rio Vista Out-Patient Services

## Treatment Tracks Offered

- **Substance Use Track**  
Addresses alcohol and substance use concerns commonly seen in first responder populations. Programming focuses on relapse prevention, coping strategies, accountability, and recovery-oriented skill building while respecting occupational and return-to-work considerations.
- **Co-Occurring & Specialized Needs Track**  
Supports individuals experiencing overlapping mental health, trauma, and substance related challenges. Treatment is integrated and coordinated to address the full clinical picture and identity transitions related to duty status or career impact.

# Specialized Training Related to First Responders

- **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)**- Designed to address symptoms and emotional distress due to trauma.
- **Cognitive Processing Theory (CPT)**- Helps patients learn how to modify and challenge unhelpful beliefs related to the trauma.
- **Prolonged Exposure**- Teaches individuals to gradually approach their trauma-related memories, feelings and situations
- **Polyvagal Therapy**- focuses on regulating the autonomic nervous system to move from states of fear or freeze into safety, connection, and calm
- **Somatic Experiences**- Helps resolve chronic stress, PTSD, and trauma by focusing on bodily sensations (interoception) rather than just thoughts

# Rio Vista Behavioral Health

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