ABOUT THIS TOOL

Audience
EMT's, firefighters, emergency dispatchers, paramedics, ER workers, ICU teams, police safety aids, police officers, and others who identify as emergency service workers

Description
This combines slow breathing, intentional body posture, and a short mental cue to help your brain shift from "off-duty mode" into "ready mode" — without ramping up anxiety in the process.

When to Use
In the moments before the start of your shift

Pre-Shift Reset

NEW YORK STATE | Office of Mental Health

New York State Trauma-Informed Network & Resource Center

WORKPLACE STRESS

Emergency workers face some of the most demanding conditions of any profession — responding to crises, making fast decisions, and staying composed when the stakes are high. That level of intensity, shift after shift, takes a real toll on the mind and body. Stress can show up as physical tension, difficulty sleeping, emotional exhaustion, or trouble leaving work at the door when the shift ends. It does not mean something is wrong — it means the work is hard and the body is responding naturally. Using quick, practical tools to reset during and after a shift helps emergency personnel manage that buildup before it becomes burnout, keeping you sharp, steady, and ready for whatever comes next.

THE PRACTICE

Work through each step slowly and in order:

- Breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds — steady and even, not a gasp
- Breathe out slowly for 6 seconds — the longer exhale is the key part; let it be gentle, not forced
- Let your shoulders drop — chances are they've been creeping up toward your ears without you noticing
- Unclench your jaw — let a little space open between your back teeth; this is where a surprising amount of tension hides
- Press your feet into the floor — feel the ground underneath you; this simple move brings you back into your body and out of your head
- Silently say to yourself: "Ready, steady, clear." — not as a pep talk, but as a quiet signal to your nervous system that you've done the prep work and you're present
- Repeat the breathing cycle 3–4 times while you work through the body steps.

WHY THIS HELPS

Think of this reset as warming up before a game. You wouldn't sprint a mile cold. Your nervous system deserves the same respect.

Slow breathing lowers baseline heart rate and reduces anxiety before stress hits

Intentional posture sends a physical signal to the brain that it's time to focus

- Mental cue sets a clear intention, reducing the scattered feeling of jumping in cold

Together, they create a calm, alert state so your first calls don't catch your system unprepared

WORTH KNOWING

- The stress of this work doesn't just come from the big calls. It builds in layers — the paperwork, the waiting, the things you saw last shift, the noise, the sleep you didn't get. This reset doesn't erase any of that, but it gives your body a moment to recalibrate before the next layer starts.
- This isn't about "calming down" — it's about showing up regulated. There's a difference between feeling calm and being ready. This routine aims for the second one. You can be alert, focused, and even a little amped up while still being in control of your nervous system.
- Consistency is what makes it work. Done once, it's a nice breathing exercise. Done before every shift for a few weeks, it becomes a trained response — your body starts to recognize the routine as a signal that it's time to shift gears. That's when it really pays off.
- You're building something. Every time you do this, you're strengthening your ability to recover quickly, stay connected to your team, and stay grounded during long and demanding shifts. That's not soft — that's a skill.

WHY THIS WORKS

When you breathe out longer than you breathe in, your heart rate slows and your body's calm-down system kicks in. It's not a trick — it's basic biology. A longer exhale sends a signal to your brain that says "we're okay, stand down a little." That doesn't mean going into the shift half-asleep. It means starting from a steadier baseline so that when stress does hit — and it will — your body isn't already running hot. Small body adjustments like dropping your shoulders and relaxing your jaw also matter more than people think. Tension lives in these spots quietly, and releasing it sends the same calming signal to your brain as the breathing does. The short phrase at the end acts like an anchor — a way of mentally marking the transition from wherever you just were to where you need to be now.

Resources:
Find additional wellness information on the NYS Trauma Informed Network and Resource Center at traumainformedny.org

Looking to go deeper?
Explore BREATH-BODY-MIND™ (BBM) for weekly breathwork practice, expert tips, and a welcoming community.
Check out the website here for additional details.

Source:

Lehrer, P. M., & Gevirtz, R. (2014). *Heart rate variability biofeedback: How and why does it work?* Frontiers in Psychology, 5, 756.