

A Guide for Law Enforcement Families

Caring for Those Who Protect the Public

Facebook and Instagram are proud to work with Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE) and other nonprofits that work to promote the health, well-being and care of those in the law enforcement community. This guide, written by SAVE, is intended to help the families of those who put their lives on the line every day.

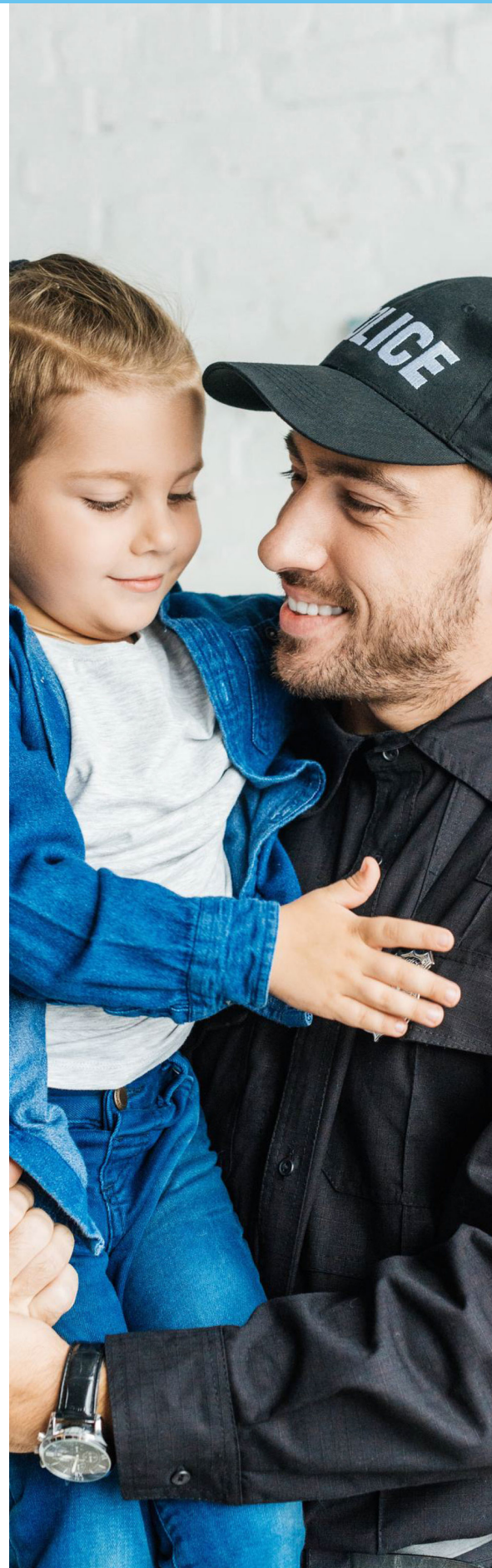


The Role of the Family

Being a caring person in the life of an officer does have its challenges. Each time they leave home, you might be afraid of what might happen on their shift. You might be impacted by differing points of view about the law enforcement community.

At the same time, you are also likely to be proud of the work that your officer does to protect all of us and want to share that with others. This guide is intended for you, the support system of officers, because we know that you need and deserve support too.

As parents, spouses, partners, siblings, children and friends, you are all critically important people in the lives of law enforcement officers. You are the foundation law enforcement relies upon for support and encouragement. Each of you, in your own way, plays a part in helping the officer in your life stay grounded in their life and community. Whether through holidays, birthday celebrations, kid's sporting events or faith-related activities, the people in the lives of officers make a world of difference.



Signals to Watch For

Due to the nature of many roles in law enforcement, there are times when the stress and pressure of the job can feel overwhelming to the officer's family as well. Therefore, it is really important for you to know what to watch for in your own life and in the lives of others in your family that might signal something is going on that needs attention. Some of the more common signs to watch for are:

- Depression, self-neglect or loss of interest in things once enjoyed
- Agitation, anxiety, irritability, brooding and constant self-doubt
- Substance misuse or abuse
- Violence
- Impulsive or reckless behaviors (such as gambling or affairs)
- Talk of suicide or attempts, escaping the pain or end of life
- Chronic pain

How Can You Help?

- Allow the officer in your life to work through their stress. As hard as it is to see someone we care about hurting or stressed, sometimes it's ok and it can even be motivating for them to make a change. Let them know what you are seeing and hearing from them, and tell them that it is okay. Also tell them that if it goes on too long (weeks or months) or if it becomes something really troubling (like violence or intoxication), you will let them know that it is time to talk to a professional.
- Give them space. They may be struggling with something they can't speak about due to clearances and other confidentiality agreements.
- Tell them you care about and love them. Your words have power.
- Be physically present, even if you can't find the words that seem to help.

Finding Balance

- If you can see their distress but don't know what to do about it, help them set limits on how much they focus on their work at home and learn healthy coping skills. They can set aside a chill-down time after work, exercise to burn off stress or stay away from watching the news.
- Talk with your loved one to gain insight into their emotions and yours. Assess the situation and make a plan together.



Take Care of You

Caring for someone who is considering suicide can be very hard. Because of the nature of the work in law enforcement, it is important that you find ways to take care of yourself as well. This means finding ways for you to cope with the stress.

It can be hard to want to be there for someone when they don't want your help or claim "You don't understand." This can certainly add stress to your relationship. In these times, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you find yourself more irritable, angry or unhappy?
- Are you drinking alcohol or taking more prescription medications than before?
- Have you thought about having an affair?
- Has gambling become a constant activity for you?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, this might be a sign that things are not going well for you. This kind of behavior could lead to bigger problems if not addressed. Here are some tips on self-care:

1 Grow a strong support network:

- Allow family, friends and co-workers to help support you.
- Find a therapist that you trust and can talk to. Ask family or friends for referrals.
- Find a support group. There are many types of support groups including ones for those who are in law enforcement. When finding in-person support within your community, exercise caution. Call in advance and speak with support-group facilitators to ask for references of current and former members that you can reach out to about the group. Make sure the location of the meeting is in a public building such as a school, church or community center.

2 Invest in your body:

- Start an exercise program, eat balanced meals and get enough sleep. Physical health, emotional health, mental health and spiritual health are all interrelated.

3 Learn how to cope with emotional issues and trauma:

- Spend time online learning from reputable sites (like www.verywellmind.com) about the dynamics of trauma and how it impacts you.
- Learn about secondary trauma: trauma that happens to someone who hears about the first hand trauma of someone else and about the ways it can also affect your life.
- Talk with a therapist or trusted friends about coping apps that you can download.
- Look for stories of others who have lived through trauma and how they survived.
- Find outlets that you enjoy where you can release emotional stress such as painting, drawing, writing, exercise and so forth.

What if You Have a Similar Job?

Those in the law enforcement industry understand things that others outside the industry have never seen, heard or imagined. If you are also an officer or have a similar job, the good news is that you share and understand the experience with your loved one and you can talk about it to each other in ways that others are unable to.

However, there are times where you might feel that you aren't able to get away from internal pressures in the department and at home. You may also feel isolation from your support network because they don't understand your family's experience.

In this case, we'd recommend reaching out to a licensed mental health professional for specific advice and reviewing some of the family resources provided by the International Association of Chiefs of Police for additional support.



When Things Become Public

One of the greatest challenges an officer and their family face is when something on the job becomes part of the public discourse. While at times these events recognize heroic acts, such as when an officer saves someone's life in the line of duty, there are other times when things become more complicated and intense, such as if an officer is involved in a death while on duty or when controversy is raised by a group, a community or the media. In times like these, life can become very difficult and stressful. Spouses worry about their spouse going to work and facing backlash, parents worry about their children going to school and being harassed or bullied. There can even be a division over what happened within a department.

It is crucial that spouses or partners and their families get the support and help that they need to get through the crisis. While officers have legitimate fears about discussing details with someone who may judge them rather than support them, finding a local therapist that can help manage the family's stress might be helpful. A licensed marriage and family therapist (LMFT), psychologist or social worker can help family members learn coping techniques and understand that their feelings are not abnormal. It is critical to make sure everyone knows who to call if they are frightened or feeling unsafe. It's also important to find ways to maintain normal activities such as meal times, faith activities and other cultural activities.

“The greatest avenue for success in strengthening the officers and their family’s mental health is support from both blue and blood families.”

ShaRonda Calderon, Blue H.E.L.P

“In many agencies, family support is part of their overall officer wellness programs. For example, the St. Petersburg, FL Police Department employs a full-time clinical psychologist who is available to spouses and children of law enforcement personnel.”

Police Executive Research Forum,
Oct 2019, p. 52

Remaining Safe Online

Experts say that one of the best ways to help prevent a suicide is for people in distress to hear from others who care about them. Facebook has a unique role to play — through friendships on the site— in connecting people in distress with people who can offer support. Whether you're worried about someone you know or you're struggling on your own, we hope Facebook can help.

You have the ability to report Facebook posts that you feel indicate someone is thinking about suicide or self harm. Trained members of our Community Operations team will review these reports and connect the person who posted with support resources if needed. When there's risk of imminent harm, Facebook works with emergency responders who can help. For more information and resources on ways to help the people you care about, visit: www.facebook.com/safety/wellbeing/suicideprevention.

For 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, you can also reach out to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or reach the organization via Facebook chat at www.facebook.com/800273talk/.



Helping Police Departments Support Families

- Check with your Chief or other trusted commander to find out what types of programs or services your department provides for families. If they do not have any, express your concern and encourage them to start support services for spouses and family members.

For example:

- ④ Police departments should provide accurate information to families on topics such as data on Law Enforcement issues.
- ④ Departments can also provide support, education and training in conflict resolution, communication skills and living with a law enforcement officer.
- ④ The departments can include family members when sponsoring workshops and other types of engagements on ways to talk openly about mental health and suicide awareness.
- ④ The departments can provide liaisons with the family for the children and their schools.
- Encourage your department to help families of retired law enforcement officers know what to watch for in retirement. Signs of distress, lack of connection or purpose and loss of control over self and finances are a few signals that indicate it may be time to search out additional support.

- Departments can also help communities find ways to support officers and their families. Parades, law enforcement recognition days, awards for merit and stories in local papers are ways communities can show appreciation for the work officers do.

Concerned About Someone in Your Family?

1 Start by asking questions

- “How are you doing?”
- “Have you been feeling ok emotionally lately?”

2 Then offer feedback or observations

- “You haven’t seemed like yourself lately.”
- “I want to help. What can I do to support you?”

3 Find and share resources

- “We can go online and use a therapist finder to find someone for us to talk to.”
- “Here is the number to a law enforcement hotline.”

Suggestions for Coping After a Loss

After any type of loss (job, financial, position/rank, death, etc.) there is a grieving process that we all must go through. It is important to know a few things about grief:

- 1 Everyone grieves differently.
- 2 There is no timeline for grief.
- 3 We all need different things as we go through the process of loss, sadness and acceptance.
- 4 The relationship that you had with whatever/whomever you lost makes a difference in how you grieve.
- 5 There is no right or wrong way to grieve (except for turning to alcohol or drugs to ease the pain).
- 6 Finding ways to keep a legacy alive or recognizing achievements helps someone move forward.
- 7 More information on suicide grief can be found at [save.org/what-we-do/grief-support/grief-resources](https://www.save.org/what-we-do/grief-support/grief-resources).
- 8 Family coping strategies for the loss of a law officer can be found at [save.org/find-help/coping-with-loss/](https://www.save.org/find-help/coping-with-loss/).



Resources to search for mental health providers

- Blue H.E.L.P. (www.bluehelp.org/) and (www.bluehelp.org/resources/family-support/)
- SAMHSAs treatment finder (findtreatment.samhsa.gov)
- Serve. Protect. (serveprotect.org)
- American Psychological Association (www.apa.org/ptsd-guideline/patients-and-families/finding-good-therapist)
- Mental Health America (screening.mhanational.org/content/how-do-i-find-therapist)

Crisis numbers (all operated 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and are free and anonymous):

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800-273-8255)
- Crisis Text Line (text “Hello” to 741 741)
- Safe Call Now (www.safecallnowusa.org)

More resources for families:

- Facebook Online Wellbeing Resources (www.facebook.com/safety/wellbeing/)
- International Association of Chiefs of Police (www.theiacp.org/ICPRLawenforcementfamily)

This guide was written by SAVE and was reviewed and endorsed by the following organizations:

Badge of Life, Blue H.E.L.P., Copline, International Association of Chiefs of Police, National Police Suicide Foundation, Safe Call Now, Serve & Protect, The Pain Behind the Badge, The Barbara Schneider Foundation



Resources

- Badge of Life (www.badgeoflife.org)
- Blue H.E.L.P. (www.BlueHelp.org)
- Copline (www.copline.org)
- Law Enforcement Wallet Card by SAVE (www.SAVE.org)
- National Police Suicide Foundation (www.psf.org)
- Safe Call Now (www.safecallnowusa.org) Hotline 206-459-3020
- Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE) (www.save.org)
- Serve & Protect Hotline 615-373-8000
- The Pain Behind the Badge (thepainbehindthebadge.com)

Facebook Groups For families

- Law Enforcement Today Group
- Police Wives of America
- National Police Wives Association
- Facebook Online Wellbeing Resources (www.facebook.com/safety/wellbeing/suicideprevention)

For law enforcement

- Blue Lives Police Support
- Police Supporter
- The Blue Voice
- Blue Line Heros

