



Police Family Health

Law Enforcement Family Health and Wellness

The stressors that police officers have always faced can have serious implications for overall health and wellness. In these times of unprecedented stress and uncertainty, officers must take additional steps to prioritize their mental and physical wellness. The following guide, adapted from the International Association of Chiefs of Police and other sources, offers practical tips for officers and their families.

Stress on the Job

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. How we respond depends on our background, personality and even our community. First responders may react more strongly to difficult experiences due to the responsibility of maintaining public safety, the cumulative exposure to traumatic events, and the concern for loved ones at home.

Pay Attention to Your Mental Health

It is essential to pay attention to your mental and emotional health. Taking care of your health can help you think clearly and react to urgent needs in a timely manner, both at work and at home. While some situations may seem overwhelming and out of control, focusing on what you can control will help reduce stress.

- **Refocus on your purpose to help avoid burnout.** Assess the impact of your daily routines, which can help you to restore your energy and motivation. Questions to consider include:
 - Why did I join the policing profession?
 - How does my work make life better for other people?
 - How can I add more meaning to what I do every day?
- **Take care of your body.** Maintain healthy habits such as eating nutritious food, staying hydrated, exercising regularly, and getting plenty of sleep. Steer clear of nicotine and excessive alcohol intake.
- **Connect with others.** Maintain social relationships with those close to you. Set aside time to communicate with friends and family to keep your support system informed and strong. Consider using social networking or town halls to stay connected with your community.
- **Practice mindfulness.** Take short breaks to reset and recognize what you need to do to cope with your emotions. Mindfulness activities include finding time for yourself, practicing deep breathing and participating in activities you enjoy.
 - Exercise or go for a walk
 - Listen to music
 - Read a book
 - Take a relaxing bath or shower
 - Spend time with loved ones
 - Meditate or practice yoga
 - Be creative through art
 - Keep a journal of your thoughts
- **Avoid overexposure.** Staying informed is important, but too much information can become overwhelming and impact overall wellness. Refrain from turning on the news at home, or set a time frame during which you will disconnect for the day.
- **Seek help when needed.** Talk to those around you, such as your fellow officers, command staff, executive leadership, chaplains, family, psychologist, or someone you can confide in. Remember that you are not alone.

Be Mindful of Those Around You

- **Practice empathy and compassion.** If you feel on edge or stressed, those around you might too. Show support for others because they might respond to stress differently than you:
 - Following a natural disaster, 12 percent of individuals with low social support developed PTSD compared to 2.5 percent of individuals with high social support, according to a National Institutes of Health study.
- **Have patience for yourself and loved ones.** Daily stressors of the policing profession, coupled with anxiety from family members about their loved one in the field, can produce tension at home. Remind yourself to be patient and listen:
 - Deliberate breathing can reduce negative feelings, including hostility, guilt, and irritability, and reduce physiological markers of stress.

- **Check in regularly with those in your support system.** Between the demands of work and personal obligations, it may become difficult at times to stay connected to colleagues, family, and friends:
 - Among police, social support from colleagues is associated with less psychological distress in the face of traumatic events, another National Institutes of Health study found.
- **Practice gratitude.** Focus on the good in your life rather than negative situations that are beyond your control. Reflecting daily on what you are grateful for can help people to sleep better.

Resources

- International Association of Chiefs of Police Agency Safety and Wellness Resources: <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/document/officer-safety-and-wellness>
- Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice: <https://bja.ojp.gov>

Keys to Helping Law Enforcement Children Thrive

During times of stress, officers and their partners at home must work to ensure that their children and teens have the skills to navigate challenges and embrace healthy coping techniques. Children and teens may worry about the inherent dangers of the law enforcement job and the resulting fear and anxiety may have a negative effect on their emotional health. Events such as public unrest, public health crises, and high-profile incidents involving the police may also cause stress for law enforcement children and teens.

Stressful experiences, when handled in a positive manner, can be integrated in your child's or teen's life in ways that will contribute to their growth, strength, and perseverance. This resource from the International Association of Chiefs of Police provides information to assist law enforcement parents with strategies to foster their child's or teen's resilience.

Resilience and its Importance to Overcoming Stress

Resilience is the ability to adapt in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threat or significant sources of stress. Being resilient allows you to learn and grow from challenges, and building resilience helps children and teens navigate stressful moments and experiences.

Keys to Building Child and Teen Resilience

For children and teens to thrive during stressful times, law enforcement parents should help to build their individual resilience and coping skills. The following strategies can help foster healthy coping and resilience.

Stress Management and Healthy Coping

- Exercise regularly and engage in healthy physical activities
- Eat balanced meals and minimize sugar and fatty foods
- Get plenty of sleep

Relaxation Exercises to Decrease Stress

- Practice mindfulness exercises
- Perform deep breathing exercises
- Exercise progressive muscle relaxation techniques
- If appropriate, utilize spiritual or faith-based exercises

Maintain Social Connections

- Encourage your child to connect with friends through fun activities and foster connections with family members to build a supportive network and community.

Healthy Communication

- Communicating and expressing feelings are healthy ways to cope with stress.
- Children and teens must feel supported and receive reminders that they are not alone.
- Parents should create a safe environment for children and teens to discuss their feelings.
- Encourage healthy expression of emotions by modeling and normalizing open two-way discussion.
- Help children and teens to identify and express their feelings. Check in with them to ensure that they are hearing what you are saying and that you are hearing what they are intending to communicate.

Creative Expression

- Encourage your child or teen to draw or write to express how they feel. According to research, writing about feelings is associated with positive health outcomes.
- Drawing and writing can serve as therapeutic outlets for children and teens to express their frustrations, anxieties, fears and stressors in a safe and natural way.

Optimism and Gratitude

- Foster an attitude of optimism and gratitude through activities and role modeling.
- Encourage your child or teen to maintain a daily gratitude journal or to write a thank you note to someone.
- Practice gratitude at the dinner table by sharing a positive experience from the day. This will help your child focus on what is going right rather than on challenges they may be facing.
- Assist your child with developing positive self-talk to navigate difficult times. Promote phrases such as: "I can do this"... "tomorrow will be a better day"... "I made it through before so I can do this again."

Deliberate Acts of Kindness

- Acts of kindness are effective ways to help your child or teen build confidence and connections by shifting focus to someone else in need rather than dwelling on their own situation.
- Help your child or teen do yardwork for an elderly neighbor, donate books or old clothes, or participate in community volunteer work.

Realistic Goal Setting

- Setting goals can help decrease frustration and achieve feelings of accomplishment, which helps build resilience.
- Help your child or teen examine their goals and map out a plan to accomplish achievable short-term goals to increase feelings of success and promote confidence. These goals can be set for school, music, sports, or at home.

Healthy Problem-Solving

- Assist children and teens in developing solutions to problems.
- Collaborative problem-solving instills a genuine sense of support and comfort and help your child or teen feel less isolated.
- Assist your child or teen with creating viable solutions to problems and to address underlying feelings in healthy ways such as journaling, exercising or meditating.

Family Bonding Activities

- Routinely spending quality time with family and engaging in fun activities or meaningful projects contributes to building resilience.
- These activities create a sense of connection and emotional bonding that are essential for the growth and development of your child or teen.
- Family activities can help your child or teen look forward to a greater purpose and accomplishment.
- Activities can include planting a garden or working on a family tree, hiking or walking, playing frisbee or having a picnic at the park or beach, family movie or game nights

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Helping your Young Child Understand your Job

Children of law enforcement officers often face unique challenges when it comes to understanding their parent's job. Below are some suggestions to help navigate potentially tough conversations you may have with your child about what you do for a living. Be sure to tailor your conversation to your child's developmental understanding. Some topics to discuss:

What is your job?

When explaining your job, be sure to use age appropriate language. Provide examples of how you do your best to keep the community safe and what a typical day looks like. Discuss how you help people, protect people and stop people from hurting others. Help your children find examples in their own lives of how they help others.

Why are you always gone?

Your child may notice that your schedule means missing some events. Be honest with your child about why and when you will have to miss things. Try some of these strategies:

- Don't make promises you can't keep. Sometimes things do come up unexpectedly, so be mindful of what you are committing to and don't overpromise or disappoint your child.
- Find a special activity or event to enhance special parent/child bonding time. This will help your child feel more connected to you when you can't be there.
- Explain why the work you do is so important. Giving a purpose to the absence may bring your child some comfort.

Is your job dangerous?

Explain the safety precautions you take to stay safe. Tell them about wearing your seatbelt, wearing your protective vest, and using your training. Clarify there is no way to guarantee your safety, but you have all the tools you need to keep you safe.

Show your child your vest and duty belt. Explain to your child that you are part of a team and that your team is crucial to your safety. Tell them who your teammates are, what they do to keep you safe, and what you do to keep them safe.

Signs of Anxiety

Your child may begin to exhibit signs of anxiety when you discuss the dangers of your job. Be mindful in addressing their concerns, assuring them of your safety. Remind them you are protecting the community you both live in. Anxiety is a form of stress typically focused on what could happen. Some common signs of anxiety include:

- Excessive, persistent worrying
- Trouble sleeping
- Restlessness
- Lack of concentration
- Irritability

Model good coping skills to your child. Find healthy outlets for stress and anxiety. Exercising, journaling, or openly discussing your emotions are all ways to cope with stress and anxiety. If anxiety results in your child's refusal to go to school, fear of the outside world, or difficulty focusing, schedule an appointment with your child's doctor.

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Discussing your Job with your Teen

Teenagers of law enforcement families are sometimes faced with unique challenges, especially when it comes to navigating different views of policing from their peers and social media. Below are suggestions from the International Association of Chiefs of Police for tackling potentially difficult conversations with your teenager about your career and tools you can both use to navigate these conversations.

What do you do at work?

When explaining your job, tailor your explanation to the knowledge and maturity level of the teen. Discuss what a typical day looks like, the tasks you enjoy doing in your position and how your work contributes to the profession and public safety. Encourage your teen to ask questions about your role and how it relates to their current perspective of law enforcement or what they might see on social media or TV.

The community often sees law enforcement as the most readily accessible representative of the government. Explain to your teen how you work to engage with the community and how listening to the concerns of community members is crucial to building respectful relationships.

Why are you always gone?

Your teenager may exhibit frustration and other negative emotions when your schedule interferes with family commitments and other extracurricular activities. Be honest and keep an open line of communication.

If you're going to be late or miss an event you promised to attend, contact your teen if possible and explain why. Validate your teen's emotions and remind your teen it's okay to feel frustrated. When you can make an event, be present and show your emotional investment.

When opportunities are present to share your profession, such as a family day or a department open house, take advantage of it so your teen can develop a better understanding of your job. Share with your teen when you talk about him or her at work, when co-workers ask how your teen is doing, or when you see something on shift that reminds you of your teenager in a positive way. It is important to illustrate to your teen that he or she plays a role in not only your personal life but your work life as well.

Why don't you trust me?

Law enforcement parents may be hesitant when it comes to stretching the boundaries of freedom for their teenagers. Since officers are frequently exposed to risks and dangers in their community, it's natural for them to be protective of their own children.

This can lead to conflict and disagreements. Explain that, like other specialty professions, your role gives you a different context than other parents about safety. Just as you would have more knowledge about viruses as a doctor, being an officer means your professional experience can influence your parenting. Be transparent with your teenager and be proactive in providing your teenager with the skills needed to be safe when you are not present, giving you both peace of mind.

Navigating the Views of the Profession in the Media

Your teen will read and see opinions from their peers, the media and organizations that paint the profession in a negative light. Work with your teen to understand these negative viewpoints and share tools to help your teen be mindful of the information he or she is consuming.

- Help your teen develop critical thinking skills to gather all the facts of an incident before forming an opinion.
- Explain there are missing pieces to every story. Often the community may not fully understand law enforcement policies and procedures. Similarly, your teen should continuously strive to understand how history and community opinions can influence the perceptions of their peers.
- Make your teen aware of some agency policies to explain why you might take action in a specific situation.

Is it my job to defend you?

Children of law enforcement grow up with a very different and personal perspective of law enforcement than their peers. Remind your teenager that it is not their job to defend the law enforcement profession, nor is it required to disclose your profession unless he or she wants to. Instead, encourage your teen to focus on your role within an agency, such as investigations or traffic enforcement, and highlight your work with the community.

If your teen is experiencing bullying or harassment because of your work, make the school aware and encourage your teen to walk away from the situation. If harassment continues, speak with the school about additional or administrative intervention.

If your child is faced with a difficult conversation with a peer, discuss healthy conflict-resolution and communication skills your teen can use.

Vicarious Trauma and Fear

Teenagers with access to social media and news stories may experience stress from seeing the extent of the risk officers face in the field every day. Encourage discussion of their feelings and fears. Find an outlet such as a sports team or school club for your teen to channel their attention towards or seek out someone your teen can speak with who is familiar with the challenges of law enforcement. Speak with your teen about proactive measure you take to stay safe on duty such as always wearing your vest and buckling your seatbelt in a patrol car.

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How Law Enforcement Parents can Talk to their Children about Current Events

Children with parents in law enforcement may experience stress, fear, and a variety of other emotions in the wake of global demonstrations, protests, and other civil unrest. Parents are encouraged to have an open dialogue with their children about the different views of policing in the media and how history may shape community opinions today. Consider the following guidance from the International Association of Chiefs of Police when talking with children of different ages:

How to Start the Conversation

Whether you or your child prompts the discussion, use the opportunity to have a valuable and important conversation.

- Understand your child's access to social media will likely shape the discussion and their knowledge on the subject
- Tailor the discussion to your child's age, maturity level and attention span
- Identify what is occurring in a digestible format for the child
- Acknowledge that the discussion may be emotional or uncomfortable
- Be present in the discussion, turn off any distractions, and give your child your full attention
- Conversations will look different based on each individual child, their age, and their ability to process the information given to them

Young Children

Younger children might have limited knowledge on what is occurring, instead relying on word of mouth from friends and information on the internet or television.

- Ask them what they may have seen or heard about the topic
- Address questions they have and be honest when you do not know how to answer
- Recognize that your normal routine may change
- Be aware that stress may manifest differently in young children, such as presenting as stomach aches or behavior changes

Preteens

Preteens and middle-school aged children are likely witnessing social demonstrations around the world through the lens of their peers and social media. They might lack the ability to distinguish between facts and false information.

- Find out what they know and fill in the gaps with factual information
- Acknowledge that people have very different opinions and perspectives about the issue
- Explain your role in keeping community members safe
- Share strategies to evaluate content and understand the motives of the content publisher

Teens and Young Adult Children

Older children are likely to have formed their own values and thoughts on the topic. Respect their views and encourage a healthy discussion, even if their opinions may contradict your own.

- Share your own emotions about the issue and the protests
- Listen to their concerns about policing and the law enforcement profession
- Discuss your role in protecting people's constitutional rights of free speech and peaceful assembly
- Explain that there are policies and safety measures your department has in place to maintain officer and community safety during demonstrations

Key Topics to Discuss

- Help your child develop critical thinking skills to gather all the facts before forming an opinion
- Recognize that it is acceptable for opinions to change as new information is gathered
- Explain to your teen how you engage with the community in two-way communication, take the time to provide pertinent information, listen to their concerns, and build crucial respectful relationships
- Share steps that you are taking as an officer to ensure your safety and well-being
- Address changes in your schedule and times your child can expect to hear from you while away

Supporting your Child in Peer Discussions

- If your child is faced with a difficult conversation with a peer, discuss healthy conflict-resolution and communication skills your child can use
- Remind your child that it is not his or her job to defend the law enforcement profession nor to disclose your profession unless he or she wants to
- If your child is experiencing bullying or harassment because they come from a law enforcement family, make other parents aware and encourage your child to walk away from the situation
- If harassment or threats occur on social media platforms, encourage your child to let you know

Continuing the Dialogue

- Acknowledge that this is a constantly evolving dialogue and conversations should continue in the future
- Encourage children to speak with you in the future if they have questions about the profession or common practices in policing
- Recognize that these conversations should occur beyond times of protest or civil unrest
- Prompt discussions about race and diversity in your home
- Read books with your child that show diversity, acceptance, and people from different cultures. Make these books available for teens to read on their own and discuss themes with them
- Encourage appropriate forms of activism
- Identify ways to express gratitude to those around you to help combat stress and negativity

While current events mark a turning point in community police relations, it is important to acknowledge the stress and emotions children of all ages may be experiencing at home. This is an opportunity to discuss the longstanding relationship between the police and minority communities. Assure your child that you are taking steps to keep yourself safe and you have your own feelings about what is happening. Through this valuable dialogue, children of law enforcement families can remain healthy and positive supporters of change.

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Supporting the First Responder in your Life, and Yourself

Supporting your loved one who's a first responder isn't easy. Life will never operate on a normal schedule. Emergencies happen 24 hours a day, over holidays, birthdays and anniversaries; and they can't just walk away from what they are doing.

What's important to your family and your loved one is to recognize that stressors will happen, and decide how to react. The following situations can help you recognize some of the typical stressors and how you can handle them:

- **Long shifts and odd hours.** The shift may be from 6 a.m.- 6 p.m. but if an emergency comes in 15 minutes before shift change, they won't be there for dinner. There may not be any warning either. Remember that friends and family are on their mind, but when they are in the midst of an emergency, all personal life and worries must be put aside. One rule of thumb is to anticipate that they will be at work for at least one hour past their scheduled time off.
- **They bring their work home.** Some emergencies drain a first responder emotionally, physically and spiritually. They can't simply shut it down. You can offer support and encourage your loved one to find ways to de-stress and allow them that time to process (e.g., walk the dog, go for a coffee, go to the gym, take part in a hobby).
- **They are more likely to develop a mental illness.** First responders are on an emotional rollercoaster and that can lead to higher rates of substance abuse, domestic violence and suicide. It is important to talk about it and to seek help right away if you see a change in their mood.

If a friend or partner has experienced a traumatic event, your behavior may help the recovery process. Here are some suggestions:

- **Learn about critical incident stress so you can begin to understand what the person is experiencing.** Encourage the individual to talk about the incident, but don't be overly demanding. They may feel that others don't want to hear about their feelings or that you expect them to be able to "handle" the situation. You need to challenge these beliefs by indicating your willingness to listen.
- **Ask "How are you doing?" or "How are you feeling?"** If people want to talk they will; if not, they won't. By your questions, you have at least sent the message that a listening ear is available.
- **Don't be afraid of deep emotion.** Many of us have never experienced profound grief or anguish. Seeing someone cry uncontrollably can be somewhat distressing. Traumatized individuals need to vent their emotions and if they are in your presence, they need your support. Simply be there to listen and let them talk. Afterwards, suggest a walk to help them further reduce their level of stress.
- **Share your feelings about the situation.** Don't say "I know how you feel." You may have gone through a similar experience, but no two experiences are the same. You can, however, say things like "I can imagine this must hurt a lot" or "I feel sorry for what has happened."
- **Don't make false promises such as "everything will be okay."** No one knows the future. Your role is that of a support person, not a miracle worker. If you don't know what to say, say nothing. In most cases, all people need is someone to hear them out, not someone to solve their problems.
- **Say "it's okay for you to feel the way you do."** Confirm the trauma and that it is normal to feel pain and confusion. Such a statement is particularly reassuring if you are a peer. It is helpful to have co-workers legitimize your feelings.
- **Do not explain away anything.** At this stage, your explanation is not needed; emotional release is. Your explanation may be interpreted as minimizing rather than supporting the individual's feelings.
- **Encourage counseling if the pain persists.** The situation should improve one week to next. Indications of progress include comments such as, "Yeah, I'm feeling better today," seeing less stress and strain on the individual or seeing the individual become more like his/her former self. If those signs are absent, suggest professional help, such as the Employee Assistance Program provided by your loved one's employer.
- **Take care of yourself; you are a co-survivor.** Though not involved in the incident, you may be experiencing what's called vicarious trauma, or secondary trauma. Make sure there is someone you can talk to.

Communication Strategies for First Responder Families

Successful parenting requires teamwork and effective communication in any family. For families that include a first responder as parent, teamwork and communication is even more vital to a happy and healthy home life. No matter what their profession, everyone uses both effective and ineffective ways of communicating. The key is to shift more toward effective communication skills and to avoid communication roadblocks.

Roadblocks and Communication Breakdowns

Communication is vulnerable to breakdowns due to roadblocks that turn off your listener. We are more likely to use roadblocks and have breakdowns when we are tired or stressed. Some of the roadblocks to effective communication are:

- Focusing on mistakes that the other person might have made—even when you’re sure you’re right
- Blaming (“Because you’re never home on time . . .”)
- Accusing (“You volunteer for extra shifts, when you know that it . . .”)
- Put-downs (“That was a stupid way of handling the situation.”)
- Bringing up past events that are sore topics (“I haven’t forgotten that you . . .”)
- Extreme statements, such as:
 - Overgeneralizing (“You always . . .”)
 - Catastrophizing (“This will ruin his chance of ever . . .”)
- Lack of give and take in conversations (interrupting, monopolizing, not responding)
- Pulling a third person into the conflict (your child, an in-law, a co-worker)
- Putting people off with your body language or tone:
 - Lack of eye contact
 - Sarcastic or negative tone (raised voice, yelling, profanity)

Increasing effective communication

Reducing communication breakdowns requires time, energy, and a whole lot of practice. Start by:

- Reinforcing and strengthening your relationship with your spouse/partner:
- Making time to do things you both enjoy.
- Talking about what is important to him or her
- Sharing what is important to you

Work on effective communication. Use the techniques below to help control and reduce the communication roadblocks discussed earlier:

- **Choose the time wisely.** Find time when you both can focus on the issues, problem-solve and tolerate stress.
- **Choose the place wisely.** Ensure you have privacy and that the children are not around to listen in.
- **Open the door to discussion.** Introduce problems with “I” statements about what you need, rather than blaming the other for what you are not currently getting. For example, “I wish I had more time to run errands without the kids,” instead of, “You don’t help me with the kids.” Avoid absolute statements. For example, instead of, “You never understand,” say, “Sometimes it feels like you don’t understand.”
- **Practice active listening.** Repeat what you have heard to show that you’ve been listening and to determine that it is correct. (“So what you’re saying is . . .”)
- **State appreciation.** For example, say, “Thanks for listening to my point of view,” or, “I’m so glad you could change your shift and come to the barbecue.”
- **Stick to one topic.** Jumping from topic to topic makes it hard to agree on anything. Accept responsibility for part of a problem.

Additional Tips

- Talk about what you are willing to do to help solve the problem.
- Take breaks from tense discussions as needed.
- Do things to help you calm down (take slow deep breaths, stretch out your arms).
- Do things to help your spouse/partner calm down (ask how you can help, give space, listen).
- Avoid consistently withdrawing from conflict.
- Be willing to compromise.

Dealing with Perpetual Problems

Many problems in families and between couples are based on long-standing differences or situations that are hard to change, such as work schedules. Couples survive these “perpetual problems” when they can confront them with:

- Good humor
- Effective communication
- Accepting what cannot be changed

Tips for Helping First Responders Deal with Grief

When tragedy strikes, police, firefighters, emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and crisis counselors are usually the first people on the scene. From defusing high-risk situations to assisting the injured and removing the deceased, first responders see a tremendous amount of pain and suffering. As a partner, family member, friend or co-worker of a first responder, here are some tips to help you address the feelings he or she may be experiencing.

Understanding What First Responders Do

To understand the grief many first responders experience, it is important to understand the common tasks of first responders.

The basic structure for any first responder position is:

- Preparation
- Response
- Recovery

Preparation includes having all contacts in order, having access to adequate supplies and making sure a backup plan is in place for important utilities, such as electricity and water.

Response includes procedures for impact assessments, repairs and implementation of alternate communications solutions. There are three levels of criticality that are frequently used:

- **Mission critical.** Indicates a catastrophic breakdown in response ability which could result in major loss of life, property, and system trust breakdown.
- **Important.** Indicates a severe decrease in the ability to respond to emergency needs. There could be excessive loss of life or property associated with this type of outage.
- **Minor.** Indicates that full response is possible with modifications to the response systems.

In addition to making sure any injured people are cared for and that high-risk situations have been defused, first responders may also be responsible to notify families that a loved one has been injured or killed.

Coping With Grief

From minor stresses to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), first responders may have a wide range of reactions to any given situation. As a loved one, there are some things you can do to help cope with even the most tragic situation.

- Encourage your loved one to share what he or she is upset about.
- If he or she does not want to talk, let them know the option is available.
- Encourage your loved one to seek individual or group counseling. There are many groups dedicated to grief and PTSD.
- Once you have made yourself available, give your loved one some space – he or she may not be ready to talk to you.
- Never tell a loved one to “get over it.” This downplays the tragedy he or she experienced and can undermine his or her confidence.
- Take care of yourself first. It is difficult to help someone if you are having trouble dealing with the situation as well. Consider talking to a family member, friend or counselor.

Above all else, remember that recovering from the shock and sadness of a tragedy can take time. Be patient with your loved one.

Resources

- United States Department of Veterans Affairs: www.ptsd.va.gov
- Department of Homeland Security: www.dhs.gov/science-and-technology/first-responders
- Mental Health America: www.mentalhealthamerica.net
- National Alliance on Mental Illness: www.nami.org
- National Institute of Mental Health: www.nimh.nih.gov

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