

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Challenge: Law enforcement personnel are trained to create control out of chaos. They willingly risk their own safety to make the situation safe for others. When law enforcement personnel cannot control an incident, they may feel overwhelmed and frustrated. Coping mechanisms that instill order in their personal life may become more intense.

What Families Should Know: Families may notice their loved one becoming more controlling after a major incident. Understanding and patience can help. However, if a loved one's behavior becomes detrimental, a peer counselor or mental health professional can offer helpful suggestions.

Challenge: Law enforcement personnel are taught to hide signs of fear or weakness during their on-duty life. This allows them to effectively handle conflict. Concealing fear may serve law enforcement personnel well in the field, but it can be difficult for them to reverse that tactic and share feelings at home.

What Families Should Know: Families should not pressure their loved one to talk. By creating a comfortable environment, their loved one will be encouraged to share when ready.

Challenge: Law enforcement personnel are never "off duty." They are constantly vigilant in the protection of their communities and families. The inability of law enforcement personnel to go "off duty" can strain their life and their family's life. This can be especially true in the aftermath of a large-scale incident such as 9/11 or the sniper shootings.

What Families Should Know: Families need to be aware of this pressure to always be "on-duty" and find creative ways to help their loved one relax. Participating in activities that take the loved one away from his or her on-duty role can help.



"Family members need to understand that you may need time alone...I found that I...wanted time just to be alone to sit and reflect back on everything that [I] saw and [was] involved in and try to get a big picture of the whole operation, which was tremendous."

RESOURCES FOR ASSISTANCE

For more information, please contact one of the resources listed below.

WASHINGTON, DC

DC Crisis Helpline
888-793-4357

Fire/EMS Department EAP
202-628-5100 or 800-247-3054

Metropolitan Police Department EAP
202-546-9684

Washington Metropolitan Airports Authority
EAP 703-417-8634 or 877-237-2885

MARYLAND

Maryland Crisis Hotline
800-422-0009

Montgomery County

Fire and Rescue Service EAP
800-765-0770

Office of Wellness and Stress Management
301-279-1512

Police Department EAP
800-765-0770

Stress Management Division
240-773-6040

Sheriff's Office EAP
M-F 8 am-4:30 pm: 202-429-1950
or 800-823-1337
All other hours: 800-627-0330

Prince Georges County

Fire Department
Fire/EMS Employee/Volunteer
EAP 301-583-2200

Police Department
Sheriff's Office
EAP 877-334-0530

Psychological Services Division
301-883-6250

VIRGINIA

CRISISLINK
703-527-4077

Alexandria City

Fire and Rescue Department
Police Department
Sheriff's Office
EAP 800-346-0110

Arlington County

Fire Department
Police Department
Sheriff's Office
EAP 703-228-8721

Fairfax City

Fire and Rescue Department
Police Department
EAP 866-EAP-2400

Fairfax County

Fire and Rescue Department
Police Department
Sheriff's Office
EAP 800-346-0110

Prince William County

Fire and Rescue Department
Police Department
Sheriff's Office
EAP 800-448-4434

FEDERAL

Federal Bureau of Investigation
Employee Assistance Unit (EAU)
202-324-5244

The Pentagon
Pentagon Employee Referral Service
DiLorenzo Health Clinic
(civilian)
703-692-8917

Defense Stress Management Team
(military)
703-602-2893

NATIONAL HOTLINES

National Hopeline Network
800-784-2433

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
800-273-TALK (8255)

OTHER RESOURCES

Pentagon Responders Program of
Northern Virginia Family Service (NVFS)
703-219-3921 or email prp@nvfs.org

Survivors' Fund Project of NVFS
866-994-HOPE (4673)

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Northern Virginia
Family Service

www.nvfs.org

RESPONDING TO CRISIS

A Resource For The Families of
Those Who Serve Their Communities



The cultures of public safety and military organizations influence the ways a responder copes with trauma. Understanding an organization's culture will help families assist a loved one who responds to a difficult situation, such as the attack on the Pentagon on September 11, 2001.

Information for this flyer is based on lessons learned by public safety and military responders and their family members during and after the 9/11 attack on the Pentagon.

COMMON TRAITS

Although public safety and military organizations have different missions and traditions, there are common cultural traits all public safety workers share. Examining these common traits is a good place to start in learning how an organization's culture plays a role in a responder's coping style.

Challenge: Responders head into danger when others are heading out. To do this, they must trust themselves, each other, their training and their commanding officers.

What Families Should Know: When there is a disaster that overwhelms their resources and ability to save lives, responders can feel discouraged. This discouragement can be expressed as anger or depression. Families need to listen patiently and encourage their loved one to talk to co-workers or counselors.

Challenge: Responders are taught to detach from their emotions during an incident in order to get the job done. They "hold in" reactions that would normally surface. Because of this emotional distance, a delayed response to the incident may occur.

What Families Should Know: The emotional response to multiple incidents can build, sometimes causing a flood of emotions to come out in uncontrolled or unexpected ways. Family members should not be caught off guard. If an outburst occurs, it is better for families to listen rather than try to "solve" their loved one's problems.

Challenge: Public safety personnel are taught to entrust their lives to one another. When a person's life depends on another's, a special bond develops. Because of this bond and shared experiences in the field, coping with a major incident may be entrusted to co-workers instead of family members.

What Families Should Know: Spending time with co-workers after an incident allows responders to "debrief" and process the incident with their peers, who have shared the same experience. Families also play an important role by providing different kinds of support that co-workers cannot provide.



"It's important that [families] understand... that [if] we have been in some difficult incidents, [we] want to talk to somebody who was there with [us]...it's nice to have somebody from the outside to [talk to], but sometimes...a difficult call is best done with someone else that was there."

MILITARY

Challenge: Each military member is an integral part of a cohesive unit. A close bond is forged by members of that unit, which outsiders may find difficult to understand. This sense of cohesion allows military personnel to overcome their fears and accomplish their mission. Because of this "sense of togetherness," military personnel may not share their experiences with anyone outside the military community.

What Families Should Know: Families should appreciate and honor this "code" and understand that their loved one may not share every experience with them. Families can still assist by looking for signs of distress and encouraging their loved one to seek help if needed.

Challenge: Sometimes military members are assigned to units geographically apart from their family or to an incident far from their home. Because of this, military members may not be able to personally be with their families after an incident. As a way of coping with their reactions, military members may act "distant."

What Families Should Know: Even if they are not there physically, families can still be supportive to their loved one. This can be done by being available to talk on the phone when their loved one calls and/or by sending letters and cards showing their support. If a family member is acting "distant," families can encourage their loved one to seek help from a chaplain or service provider in the locale where the member is stationed.



"The sense of humor that you usually gain as a coping mechanism...I would say in public safety it's very different from others...We laugh at some things that people would just be disgusted at, but that's just a coping mechanism 'cause we've seen it so much that...you have to laugh at it or cry, and most people don't want to [cry]."

FIRE AND EMS

Challenge: The mission of fire and EMS personnel is to help others. While they are used to providing assistance, they are not used to asking for help for themselves. It can be difficult for firefighters and EMS personnel to ask for help. Not knowing how to provide a solution can feel like a weakness.

What Families Should Know: Families need to be aware that sometimes their loved one may need help, even if he or she is not asking for it. Families can encourage their loved one to talk (when ready) and support them in asking for assistance.

Challenge: Fire and EMS responders often use "dark humor" to break the tension of an incident and detach from the seriousness of the moment. Dark humor makes fun of something that normally would be morbid to joke about. Making light of something serious is a helpful coping mechanism. To non-responders, however, this can seem uncaring.

What Families Should Know: When dark humor is used, it can be a sign that the responder is affected by the incident. If a loved one uses dark humor at home, families should understand that this is a part of their loved one's work culture and that they are being included in this coping mechanism. While helpful for the responders, dark humor sometimes can be a problem if family members find the comments upsetting.