

# Family Matters

## Agency Considerations for Officer Family Preparedness Reference Guide



**COPS**  
Community Oriented Policing Services  
U.S. Department of Justice



In the aftermath of an emergency, law enforcement personnel often face the burden of reporting for duty and leaving their families behind. To ease the stress officers may experience, agencies can take proactive steps to ensure law enforcement families are well prepared for a variety of emergencies.

### *Types of Crises and How to Prepare for Them*

It is important to consider that different emergencies require different responses and strategies. Incorporate the following events when building comprehensive preparedness strategies for your agency:

- Active shooter situations and other critical incident responses
- Man-made disasters such as a toxic chemical spills or infrastructure collapse
- Natural disasters such as fires, flooding, or other catastrophic weather events
- Public health emergencies or pandemic infections of an easily transmitted virus

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## *Culture of Preparedness*

Officers may experience stress and appear distracted while performing their duties if they are concerned about the welfare of their family. When agency leaders help families become more prepared, the officer can focus on protecting and supporting the greater community. Agencies can build a culture of preparedness by offering opportunities for families to learn about emergency response:

- Build a relationship with local and state emergency management organizations to identify what events are most likely to occur in your area and discuss their preparedness recommendations with family members.
- Create a private platform for sharing information that facilitates communication between the agency and family members.
- Gather a list of organizations that offer flexible and emergency child care services.
- Gather input from officers and families by hosting focus groups on what emergency preparedness support they would benefit from.
- Use or enhance existing family support groups to communicate and connect with family members about preparedness events.

## *Family Programming*

- Create fact sheets on preparedness to distribute at department events with family members in attendance. Customize resources from [ready.gov](https://www.ready.gov).
- Host a family day focused on emergency preparedness. Provide supplies or checklists for families to build their own emergency kits.
- Host webinars on preparedness topics and encourage family members to participate by asking questions or sharing steps they have taken to be prepared.
- Partner with local emergency management personnel to present information directly to families.
- Share annual reminders with officers and their families to update their emergency plans.

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## *Communication during an Emergency*

Agencies should be proactive in developing communication strategies to inform both officers and their families when faced with a critical incident:

- Allow flexibility for officers who wish to use personal devices to communicate with family members that they are safe.
- Consider working with the family or spousal support group to develop a communication plan in the event of an emergency.
- Identify multiple methods of communication such as phone trees, private social media groups, email lists, robocalls, and newsletters.

## *Agency Support for Officers and Families Post-Emergency*

The response after an emergency is just as critical as the response while the event is in progress. Agencies can take valuable steps to support officer families emotionally and physically after the threat has passed.

- Communicate with family and spousal support groups about concerns from family members and their needs that could potentially be addressed by the department.
- Consider hosting a debrief session for officers and families once the emergency has passed.
- Share available resources for officers and their families such as EAPs and peer support services, as well as steps to access needed services.
- Use anniversaries as an opportunity for healing, rather than a painful reminder. Support long-term care resources and check-ins as needed.

## *About the IACP*

The **International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP)** is a professional association for law enforcement worldwide. For more than 120 years, the IACP has been launching internationally acclaimed programs, speaking on behalf of law enforcement, conducting groundbreaking research, and providing exemplary programs and services to members across the globe.

Today, the IACP continues to be recognized as a leader in these areas. By maximizing the collective efforts of the membership, the IACP actively supports law enforcement through advocacy, outreach, education, and programs.

Through ongoing strategic partnerships across the public safety spectrum, the IACP provides members with resources and support in all aspects of law enforcement policy and operations. These tools help members perform their jobs effectively, efficiently, and safely while also educating the public on the role of law enforcement to help build sustainable community relations.

## *About the COPS Office*

The **Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office)** is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation's state, local, territorial, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources.

Community policing begins with a commitment to building trust and mutual respect between police and communities. It supports public safety by encouraging all stakeholders to work together to address our nation's crime challenges. When police and communities collaborate, they more effectively address underlying issues, change negative behavioral patterns, and allocate resources.

The COPS Office awards grants to hire community policing professionals, develop and test innovative policing strategies, and provide training and technical assistance to community members, local government leaders, and all levels of law enforcement. Since 1994, the COPS Office has invested more than \$14 billion to help advance community policing.



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U.S. Department of Justice  
Office of Community Oriented Policing Services  
145 N Street NE  
Washington, DC 20530

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