

## Warning signs

The following warning signs may indicate that an officer is experiencing a severe life stress or mental health issue:

- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities
- Feeling trapped
- Withdrawing from family, friends, or society
- Dramatic mood changes
- Anxiety, agitation, inability to sleep, or sleeping to excess
- Rage, anger, or seeking revenge
- Constricted thinking—seeing issues as all or nothing, black and white
- Increased consumption of alcohol or drugs
- Emotionlessness or numbness
- Irritability or increased conflict with others
- Hopelessness
- Disturbance in appetite and weight

## Immediate risks

The following warning signs may indicate that someone is at immediate or severe risk for suicide. The more warning signs a person exhibits, the greater the risk of suicide.

- Talking about wanting to die
- Talking about feeling hopeless
- Looking for a way to kill oneself

These feelings or behaviors can indicate that an individual is facing deeper challenges. If unresolved, they can potentially lead the individual to cause harm to others or him- or herself or to engage in problematic coping strategies, such as alcohol and substance abuse and risky behavior. While experiencing just a few of these feelings or behaviors may not be overly concerning, the behaviors can vary in intensity and each situation should be treated individually.

## The importance of mental wellness

Mental health issues are not signs of weakness or low levels of resilience. Law enforcement officers have very important jobs—jobs that potentially require them to experience stressful and traumatic situations daily. Even law enforcement officers who are trained to handle distressing events can be affected by the long-term buildup of emotions. Mental wellness is a vital part of an officer's general well-being and needs to be addressed with the same level of importance as physical health and safety.

## How family members, friends, and loved ones can help


Having the right work-life balance—as well as support from family, friends, and loved ones—will help ensure an officer's professional success. Family, friends, and loved ones of law enforcement officers play an integral role in an officer's mental health. Family members can be the first to notice when an officer is struggling and can be a critical support for an officer experiencing mental health issues. Relatives can help the officer realize how important it is to get support and can encourage them to access that help. If family members know who to call and what steps to take, they can make a difference.

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# Mental Wellness, Resiliency, and Suicide Prevention

Information for Family and Friends of Law Enforcement



*Ask for help.*



## Understanding responses to trauma

Trauma is a person's physical and psychological response to experiencing, witnessing, or being confronted with events that involve actual or threatened death, serious injury, or threats of bodily harm to self or others.<sup>1</sup> The effects of trauma can also be cumulative. Repetitive exposure to trauma can have a cumulative effect over one's lifetime.<sup>2</sup> If an officer experiences a particularly traumatic event, some of the symptoms referenced here may be part of a normal recovery. Each person is unique and will cope with trauma differently. By establishing an open dialogue with members of the department—a supervisor, human resources specialist, psychologist, peer support member, or chaplain—family members will gain a greater understanding of these reactions and know when normal coping crosses into an area of greater concern.

It is important for family and loved ones to understand how long these symptoms can last, how to best support the individual experiencing trauma, and when to engage professionals or notify the department of these issues. It is also not uncommon to see symptoms emerge after time has passed—sometimes even months or years later—as new situations or events can trigger memories of trauma.

1. "Psychological Trauma and First Responders," American Mental Health Foundation, April 3, 2015, <http://americanmentalhealthfoundation.org/2015/04/psychological-trauma-and-first-responders/>.

2. "Trauma Awareness" in *Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services*, Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) series, no. 57 (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207203/>

## Where to get help

If a family member, friend, or other loved one is concerned about an officer's behavior, it is important they express these concerns and encourage the officer to seek out professional support. Resources are available for both law enforcement officers and their families.

### COPLINE

COPLINE is a confidential, 24-hour international hot-line answered by retired law enforcement officers who have access to continuous critical clinical support.

**1-800-COPLINE (267-5463)**  
<http://www.copline.org>

### Safe Call Now

Safe Call Now is a confidential, comprehensive, 24-hour crisis referral service for all public safety employees, all emergency services personnel, and their family members nationwide.

**206-459-3020**  
<https://www.safecallnow.org>

### International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, Inc.

The International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, Inc., provides leadership, education, training, consultation, and support services in comprehensive crisis intervention and disaster behavioral health services to the emergency response professions, other organizations, and communities worldwide.

**410-313-2473 (Emergency Hotline)**  
<https://www.icisf.org>

### First Responder Support Network

The First Responder Support Network provides first responders and their families with tools to reduce personal and family stress, encourage appropriate career decisions, and reduce the effects of traumatic incident stress on an individual's life.

**415-721-9789**  
<http://www.frsn.org>

### National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization, dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness.

**800-950-6264 (NAMI HelpLine)**  
[info@nami.org](mailto:info@nami.org)

<http://www.nami.org/Find-Support/Family-Members-and-Caregivers>

### Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) – Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator

Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator is a confidential and anonymous source of information for persons seeking treatment facilities in the United States or U.S. territories for substance abuse, addiction, or mental health problems.

**800-662-HELP (4357)**  
<https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov>

### Local resources

It is important that family members of law enforcement officers know who within the agency they or their law enforcement officer can reach out to for professional support. Resources are available for both law enforcement officers and their families locally and within the department. Police agencies should include contact information for their local support opportunities, such as the department's Employee Assistance Program, the department's psychologist, the department's mental health-related programs, or trusted mental health providers in the officer and family member's local area.