

# Family Matters

Executive Guide for Developing Family-Friendly Law Enforcement Policies, Procedures, and Culture



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







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## *Letter from the Acting Director of the COPS Office*

Colleagues:

Law enforcement officers experience stressful situations regularly during their shifts; to support their long-term holistic health, a positive network of friends and family is critical. At the same time, the law enforcement career impacts not only the officers themselves but also their network of family and friends. To create an organizational culture of wellness for officers and their support networks, agencies should develop family-friendly policies and procedures to foster positive performance and health outcomes.

This executive guide and the accompanying tools for families and agencies were developed to stimulate discussion and conversation around the topic of family wellness and highlight the positive impact of supportive family-friendly policies. The guide identifies best practices and innovative ways to create a collaborative relationship between agencies, officers, and their support networks. The executive guide also explores other aspects of the law enforcement career that are pertinent to family members and officers, including retirement planning, dealing with loss of colleagues, family planning and childcare, and personnel disciplinary considerations.

The COPS Office is a strong advocate for officer holistic wellness, including family-friendly policies and organizational cultures in which agencies collaborate with officers and their support networks. On behalf of the COPS Office, we are grateful to the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) for their attention to and leadership on this important topic. The executive guide and supporting tools will have a direct, positive impact on the lives of officers and their families as well as the community at large. The COPS Office looks forward to a continued partnership with organizations such as IACP that support officer safety and wellness.

Sincerely,



Robert E. Chapman  
Acting Director  
Office of Community Oriented Policing Services





## *Letter from the President of the IACP*

Dear colleagues,

As President of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), I extend my deepest gratitude and sincerest thanks to the officers who dedicate themselves to the safety of their communities. Many times, officers' families also feel the stress of the job, and the need for enhanced family wellness has become a central focus in officer health and wellness discussions. At the IACP we continue to recognize the significant role spouses, partners, parents, children, and all family members play in keeping our officers both mentally and physically healthy and safe.

The IACP is proud to present *Family Matters: Executive Guide for Developing Family-Friendly Law Enforcement Policies, Procedures, and Culture*, a roadmap for departments to use in their family wellness efforts. The Executive Guide's objective is to positively affect police performance by stimulating dialogue around family engagement and identifying opportunities for police leaders to commit to officers' families.

We are pleased to partner with the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) to offer agency leaders promising policies, procedures, and organizational culture considerations to strengthen their family engagement efforts.

While much progress has been made in recent years, we will continue to work to meet the evolving safety and wellness needs of our officers. We encourage agencies to use these necessary tools, information, and resources to lead and sustain an agency culture of wellness and apply them within their department.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cynthia Renaud". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Cynthia" and last name "Renaud" clearly distinguishable.

Chief Cynthia Renaud

President

International Association of Chiefs of Police



## Introduction

Law enforcement officers are routinely exposed to stressful, demanding incidents that challenge them both physically and mentally. The support system officers return home to at the end of a shift can have a significant impact on their resiliency. Whether they process the emotions following a shift by playing with their children or communicating with their partner, these interactions ensure an officer can return to work healthy and perform effectively. Members of these support systems—such as partners, children, parents, and friends—should have their own strategies and resources in place to foster a stronger support system for an officer.

Organizational characteristics like management support and social connections are good predictors of law enforcement personnel job satisfaction, which in turn impacts productivity, performance, and effectiveness.<sup>1</sup> Family and friend support systems provide officers a route to embrace positive social and organizational values—loyalty, camaraderie, trust, teamwork, and commitment—in order to be happy, healthy, and effective law enforcement professionals.

Officers who experience high levels of stress and do not deal with it effectively are more likely to disengage from family activities, experience marital issues, and take stress out on loved ones. Officers who report more work-family stressors also have more health complaints and higher suicidal ideation than officers whose work environment is less stressful.<sup>2</sup> All of this stress also affects officers' families. A high percentage of partners report experiencing stress as a result of their officers' jobs, including shift work, overtime, fear of the officer being injured or killed, and the officer sharing either too much or too little about their work.

Work and family relationships are interconnected, as stress at work may cause stress at home; stress at home may affect job performance; and job performance affects the community. If law enforcement agencies dedicate the time and resources to engage family members when developing their policies and procedures, then the agency will strengthen the well-being of their officers and those they go home to.

## Purpose of document

The law enforcement profession affects not only the personnel who serve day in and day out but also the network of friends and family members who support officers. In recognition of the important role support networks have in officer wellness, agency effectiveness, and community wellness, the purpose of this executive guide is to create a roadmap for law enforcement agencies to develop stronger family-friendly policies, procedures, and organizational culture.

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1. Kaan Boke and K. Nalla, "Police Organizational Culture and Job Satisfaction: A Comparison of Law Enforcement Officers' Perceptions in Two Midwestern States in the U.S.," *Journal of Criminal Justice and Security* 11 (2009), 55–73.

2. John M. Violanti et al., "Police Stressors and Health: A State-of-the-Art Review," *Policing* 40, no. 4 (2017), 642–656, <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/PIJPSM-06-2016-0097/full/html>.

This document is not intended to provide specific model policies or to encompass every possible aspect of work-family integration. Instead, its objective is to positively affect police performance by stimulating professional dialogue around family inclusion and highlight opportunities within agencies to strengthen relationships with law enforcement families.

## Key definitions

The term “family” holds many different meanings. As law enforcement agencies proceed with developing family-friendly policies, procedures, and culture, they are encouraged to establish and define key terms that they plan to use moving forward.

Following are a few terms that appear in this guide, which agencies may include in their own documents:

- **Family.** An officer’s family may or may not be equivalent to the nuclear family. In this document, an officer’s “family” refers to their support system, which may encompass a spouse and children but may also include parents, siblings, and friends—anyone officers rely on for support in their personal life.
- **Partner.** Because relationships take many forms, it is recommended for agencies to frame their policies around partnerships instead of marriages; therefore, these relationships will be framed as a “partner” or “partnerships.”
- **Children.** In this document, the term “children” includes adopted children, foster children, stepchildren, legal wards, and anyone for whom the employee stands or has stood in loco parentis—i.e., anyone for whom the employee has acted in a capacity equivalent to that of a parent. The coverage includes children over the age of 18, if they are incapable of caring for themselves.

In addition to defining family, this guide also defines concepts that apply to scenarios impacting families.

- **Secondary traumatic stress (STS).** The behaviors and emotions that may result from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced by another and the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person.
- **Vicarious trauma.** An occupational challenge for people working and volunteering in the fields of victim services and law enforcement because of their continuous exposure to victims of trauma and violence.



## The value of family support

Because organizations are most effective when employees are healthy and happy, what matters to officers should also matter to agencies.

For agencies, the benefits of family friendliness are clearly tangible. Agencies that provide family-inclusive wellness support to officers and their loved ones may be able to improve overall department effectiveness through the following means:

- **Increasing recruitment and retention.** Agencies that prioritize the health and wellness of officers and their families can often overcome the challenges associated with officer recruitment and retention. Agencies that promote family-inclusive wellness resources may be more appealing to potential recruits and make them more likely to stay with an agency as their families grow and they evolve throughout their career.
- **Enhancing officer performance.** Officer health and wellness are key considerations for agencies, as officers perform best in the field if they are healthy physically, mentally, and emotionally.

Modern technology makes it challenging for police officers to keep home and work separate. Text messages, emails, and other instant communication means that home issues creep into work time and work issues come up during family time. In this environment, family-friendly policies and procedures can support a culture that fosters a healthy work/life balance.

- **Creating a workforce that reflects the community it serves.** Research suggests that when diversity in law enforcement agencies increases, so does public trust of those agencies because community members tend to feel more confident in public institutions when they mirror the communities that they serve and represent.<sup>3</sup>

Although diversity in this regard typically refers to markers such as race, gender, religion, and sexual orientation, it could just as easily encompass family makeup. Police departments that are deliberately and strategically inclusive of all family types are more likely to mirror the communities they serve, and therefore may be more effective at serving them.

## Understanding cultural context of families

Agencies should work to understand the cultural context in which families exist and how this culture constantly evolves. To ensure that family-friendly policies, procedures, and culture foster healthy family units and a workforce that is healthy, motivated, and productive, law enforcement agencies may consider widening their focus to include all family structures, each of which should receive the same recognition, dignity, and respect in the eyes of the agency.

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3. U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, “Advancing Diversity in Law Enforcement,” last modified October 2016, <https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/interagency/police-diversity-report.cfm>.

Agencies may consider looking at families through the following lenses:

- **Generation.** Households are no longer confined to the nuclear family. Officers might also reside with or have close relationships with parents, grandparents or grandchildren, aunts and uncles, or other family members.
- **Sexual orientation and gender identity.** LGBTQ families are composed of various structures. Inclusive agencies can establish a space that gives fluidity to the term “family” and recognizes the different ways law enforcement personnel are members of those families.
- **Partnership arrangement.** Not all officers are married. Instead of a spouse, for example, an officer may have a common-law partner, a girlfriend or boyfriend cohabiting with them, an ex-spouse, or a co-parent—or they may be single and unpartnered.
- **Parental status.** For officers with children, parenthood can take many different forms. Perhaps an officer is raising children with the help of their own parent or sibling. Agencies should consider addressing the subject of parenthood with sensitivity and provide parents with options to accommodate alternative parenting arrangements.
- **Religion and ethnicity.** An officer’s family values and dynamics may be guided by their race, ethnicity, nationality, or religious and cultural affiliation. Law enforcement agencies should be culturally sensitive when shaping policies, procedures, and agency culture to accommodate officers and their families participating in a wide variety of familial traditions, beliefs, and practices.

## Objectives

In the pages that follow, law enforcement executives will encounter a host of policy components and considerations that propose opportunities to develop promising practices that can improve the experience of officers and families in law enforcement. The items are offered with the following objectives in mind:

- To demonstrate for law enforcement agencies the importance of family-friendly policies, procedures, and culture
- To illustrate the ways in which healthy families can foster positive health outcomes for officers and, in turn, positive performance outcomes for law enforcement agencies
- To stimulate law enforcement innovation and conversation in the areas of officer health and wellness and family friendliness

## *Employee Benefits*

Agencies that wish to recruit, retain, and motivate personnel should consider approaching benefits with families in mind. This means looking for opportunities to go above and beyond to serve the whole law enforcement family from recruitment through retirement. Agencies should consider addressing family and personal medical leave; pension, retirement, and financial planning; overtime and secondary employment; and routine access to mental health services.

### **Family and personal medical leave**

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is a federal law that provides eligible employees of covered employers to take unpaid, job-protected leave for specific reasons. It requires group health benefits to be maintained during leave as if employees continued to work and entitles employees to return to their same or an equivalent job at the end of their FMLA leave. In particular, FMLA provides eligible employees with up to 12 work weeks of leave in a 12-month period for (1) the birth of a child and to care for the newborn child within one year of birth; (2) the placement with the employee of a child for adoption or foster care and to care for the newly placed child within one year of placement; (3) to care for the employee's spouse, child, or parent who has a serious health condition; (4) a serious health condition that makes the employee unable to perform the essential functions of their job; or (5) any qualifying exigency arising out of the fact that the employee's spouse, child, or parent is a covered military member on covered active duty. Further, FMLA provides eligible employees with up to 26 work weeks of leave in a 12-month period to care for a covered service member with a serious injury or illness if the eligible employee is the service member's spouse, child, parent, or next of kin.

Agencies that want to establish a family-friendly culture and reputation should err on the side of expanding FMLA benefits. By proactively seeking out and collaborating with relevant groups such as legal counsel, unions, and local government, agencies can adopt the best policies for the agency and its personnel. Here are three circumstances where FMLA leave deserves extra consideration and sensitivity:

- **Maternity/paternity leave for new parents.** Federal law provides that both parents may take FMLA leave to care for a newborn child and both may take FMLA leave for prenatal care.

Agencies should proactively encourage eligible officers to take maternity or paternity leave. Through this practice, they are establishing a family-friendly foundation on which both the agency and the individual officer can build. Research suggests that parents who take time off to bond with young children will have the opportunity to create stronger family units, which can subsequently be leveraged for support for the officer and the family throughout the remainder of the officer's career.

- **Parental leave for parents of adoptive or sick children.** The law also applies to parents who wish to bond with a new child placed in their home through adoption or foster care. Likewise, the law applies to parents who need leave to care for a child with a serious illness. While this does not apply to a child home from school with the flu, it potentially applies to a child with a disability requiring emergency child care.
- **Elder care for officers with aging parents.** The average global life expectancy is now 72 years.<sup>4</sup> This means many individuals—including law enforcement—have or will have elderly parents who need care and assistance. FMLA gives adults the option to take unpaid leave to provide care and assistance should their elderly parent be stricken with a serious health condition that requires them to miss work sporadically or for extended periods to be a caretaker.

FMLA establishes a useful foundation for legal standards regarding family accommodations. Agencies can build on this foundation to foster a space that encourages personnel to work with their human resources unit or a designated FMLA liaison to navigate qualifying circumstances. FMLA benefits can help alleviate a source of financial and social stress to devote precious time and energy to personal issues that might otherwise have affected their health, safety, and performance at work.

## Pension, retirement, and financial planning

Finances are a significant stressor for 62 percent of Americans, according to the American Psychological Association, which says Americans are more worried about finances than anything else in their lives.<sup>5</sup> Law enforcement families and officers are not immune to financial stress and its impact on job performance. Agencies may consider incorporating financial literacy, education, and wellness into training curriculum or benefits packages. For example, some agencies offer financial literacy classes to new recruits in the academy. Other agencies offer similar classes as in-service trainings or provide the opportunity to meet with a financial coach or planner. Potential subjects during these trainings may include debt management, budgeting, deferred compensation, and retirement planning.

Many officers retire younger than people in other careers. This comparatively early retirement provides officers many opportunities for fulfilling post-career experiences. However, with more retirement years to plan for and the potential for unexpected changes in pensions or health care costs, officers should take an active and engaged approach to retirement planning.

Because of the potential impact of financial stress on families, law enforcement agencies should consider extending the same financial planning and literacy benefits to officers' partners. Officers who attend financial management courses or coaching sessions could be encouraged to invite

4. World Health Organization, "Life Expectancy and Healthy Life Expectancy, Data by WHO Region," last modified April 6, 2018, <http://apps.who.int/gho/data/view.main.SDG2016LEXREGv?lang=en>.

5. Lea Winerman, "By the Numbers: Our Stressed-Out Nation," *Monitor on Psychology* 48, no. 11 (2017), 80, <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2017/12/numbers>.



partners to attend with them. Departments might also offer separate training opportunities for partners and other family members. Police departments that offer personal finance courses during the academy, for example, might simultaneously offer the same content during a Spouse or Family Academy.

Whatever the approach, the goal should be putting officers and their families on sound financial footing. When done effectively, departments may mitigate future financial stress that can disrupt officers' personal relationships—and, in turn, their professional performance.

## Overtime and secondary employment

One financial subject that deserves special attention from law enforcement agencies is overtime and secondary employment. When officers pursue supplemental income, additional work hours may impact physical, mental, and emotional health. Without time for themselves or their families, their bodies, minds, and relationships may become strained. This leaves them vulnerable to illness and injury, preventing them from pursuing additional employment opportunities they have come to rely on while adding to the burden of financial stress.

This scenario illustrates the value of financial literacy. Agencies can mitigate financial crises among personnel by providing the information and tools necessary to apply pay from overtime and secondary employment toward specific goals such as saving for the down payment on a home, funding a family vacation, or saving for retirement rather than using it as primary income.

Financial education is one way to help officers avoid the pitfalls of overtime and secondary employment, while another strategy is overtime management. Although agencies are used to managing overtime for budgetary purposes, it could be beneficial to create policies that encourage supervisors and command-level officers to also view overtime through the lens of wellness. Agencies may limit overtime, which ensures their officers have ample time for rest and personal hobbies.

## Routine access to psychological services, peer support, and employee assistance programs

Law enforcement work is inherently stressful both for the officers and their family members who bear witness to its occupational stressors and challenges. Research shows that law enforcement officers are more likely to engage in suicidal behaviors and are more vulnerable to substance misuse, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than the general population.<sup>6</sup> Left untreated, the consequences of poor mental health can lead to poor physical health, impaired decision-making, and potentially suicide.

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6. *Police Mental Health: A Discussion Paper* (Toronto: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2018), <https://www.camh.ca/-/media/files/pdfs---public-policy-submissions/police-mental-health-discussion-paper-oct2018-pdf.pdf>.

Investment in mental health services can have significant dividends in helping officers and families cope with the psychological stress of law enforcement as well as everyday stressors such as chronic illness, the death of a loved one, marital discord, and financial strain. Departments should consider the interventional value of the following:

- **Qualified mental health professionals (QMHP).** QMHPs contracted by agencies can be a viable option. There are numerous criteria by which departments should evaluate such professionals, but the most important from an officer perspective is cultural competence around law enforcement and public safety. To be effective with officers and officer families, QMHPs must be perceived as credible, empathetic, and trustworthy, which in turn requires them to be literate in the circumstances, challenges, and work environments unique to law enforcement. Agencies can work with families to help them understand mental health coverage for these services through the agency's medical insurance plan.
- **Employee assistance programs (EAP).** An EAP typically falls under the purview of an agency's or jurisdiction's human resources department, which administers it for the purpose of providing free mental health counseling, referrals, and follow-up services to employees and their families. Some law enforcement agencies face barriers in the use and acceptance of EAPs. Officers may fear lack of anonymity while accessing these services because of concerns over potential loss of job duties or reassignment if mental health care access is disclosed. They may also believe that service providers do not understand the unique challenges faced by law enforcement. While some officers may refrain from accessing these services because of perceived implications on their job duties, EAP services can be a valuable entry point into counseling for those seeking services or those recommended by a supervisor. In most circumstances, law enforcement personnel who access EAPs can do so anonymously. Agencies may be able to work with EAP providers to ensure that officers and their families will receive access to vetted mental health professionals who are familiar with law enforcement issues and concerns.
- **Peer support programs.** Peer support programs can provide officers in need with a way to seek support from a trusted peer.<sup>7</sup> Such programs can leverage officers' affinity for camaraderie and mentorship to overcome barriers to accessing mental wellness resources. Peer supporters are frequently trained to recognize warning signs and risk factors of suicide as well as protective factors such as hopefulness and resilience. Peer supporters should receive training on how to respond to situations within the scope, role, and policies of their duties. One of the greatest benefits of peer support programs is their customizability. Because a majority of the program is hosted internally for agencies, it can be molded to fit specific needs and budgets.

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7. Police Psychological Services Section, *Peer Support Guidelines* (San Diego, California: International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2016), <https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/all/p-r/Psych-PeerSupportGuidelines.pdf>.

- **Family support and services.** Because family members play a critical role in officers' mental health, law enforcement agencies should consider strategies to engage families around the topic of mental wellness. This might include extending mental wellness services such as QMHPs, EAPs, and peer support programs to family members who need support of their own or educating family members about the mental wellness services available to officers. Ideally, this information will be shared frequently with families at events such as family orientations or family support group meetings. During family events, agencies can present on topics related to mental health resources, suicide prevention strategies, and early warning signs to help family members recognize potential issues before stress escalates.

Agencies may offer psychological services to officers and their families as well as acknowledging and addressing the barriers that prevent officers from accessing them. These barriers include fear of losing their service weapon, being placed on modified duty, or missing out on promotional opportunities.

Concerns about confidentiality can deter officers and families from using available services. Although agencies should remain cognizant of what policies and insurance allow, every effort should be made to ensure that officers and their family members have access to confidential mental health services.

In the case of peer support programs, agencies that remain conscious of suicide sensitivity and stigma encourage at-risk officers to approach their trained peers. Confidentiality is key to the success of both EAPs and peer support programs. In cases of suicide, both mental health professionals and peer supporters are subject to mandatory reporting requirements if an officer threatens self-harm.

Although police culture still faces the stigma of seeking out mental wellness resources, departments across the United States have made great strides in changing this environment. Leadership should take an active role in being both vocal mental health advocates and visible mental health role models to eliminate the stigma and improve workplace culture.





## Trauma

As public safety professionals, law enforcement agents regularly encounter traumatic events. Exposure to trauma may impact not only their work but their personal lives as well. Research shows that workplace stress often causes officers to develop an emotional barrier to protect themselves from potential trauma and that officers routinely take the effects of their work home to their families.<sup>8</sup> Officers may appear distant and disengaged, suffer from insomnia, have trouble communicating, and rely on unhealthy coping mechanisms like substance misuse, all of which can place personal relationships in jeopardy. When this occurs, officers are at their greatest need for intervention.<sup>9</sup>

Agencies' resources can include intervention training for supervisors, peer supports, and families to recognize and respond to behavior changes or unusual symptoms that may indicate a need for peer support response or a mental wellness check. To remove the stigma officers associate with mental wellness checks, agencies may conduct periodic or annual wellness checks for all employees to normalize the process. Agencies can promote proactive (rather than reactive) checks in their response to mental health by encouraging these regular wellness checks.

**Agencies can schedule annual wellness checks to remove the stigma associated with mental health and support services.**

## Traumatic incidents

Traumatic incidents (e.g., officer-involved shootings, line-of-duty deaths, natural disasters, mass-casualty or violent deaths or losses, harm to or death of a child) can create a physiological response to stress that manifests physically during the event when the brain's survival mechanism—fight, flight, or freeze—kicks in.<sup>10</sup> After the event, however, the physical symptoms of stress frequently appear as psychological and emotional symptoms that can vary in intensity.

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8. Kerry Karaffa et al., "Perceived Impact of Police Work on Marital Relationships," *The Family Journal* 23, no. 2 (2015), 120–131, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1066480714564381>

9. "Understanding the Stress Response," Harvard Health Publishing, last modified July 6, 2020, <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/understanding-the-stress-response>.

10. "Understanding the Stress Response" (see footnote 9).

## Symptoms\*

- **Personal**

- **Physical.** Headaches, fatigue, impaired immune functioning
- **Emotional.** Powerlessness, numbness, anxiety
- **Behavioral.** Irritability, sleep and appetite changes, self-destructive habits, impatience
- **Spiritual.** Loss of purpose and meaning, questioning goodness, disillusionment
- **Cognitive.** Diminished concentration, pessimism, self-doubt, distressing thoughts

- **Professional**

- **Performance.** Decrease in quality and quantity of work, low motivation, perfectionist standards
- **Morale.** Decrease in confidence and interest, negative attitude, apathy, dissatisfaction
- **Behavior.** Arriving late, overwork, exhaustion

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\* “The Vicarious Trauma Toolkit,” Office for Victims of Crime, accessed September 8, 2020, <https://ovc.ojp.gov/program/vtt/tools-law-enforcement>.

## Agencies, officers, and families should all be prepared to manage both direct and secondary or vicarious trauma.

*"Traumatic incidents may overwhelm an individual's normal coping mechanisms and cause extreme psychological distress. This may also be referred to as a critical incident or potential traumatic event (PTE)."*

To protect both officers and their families from the fallout of traumatic incident stress, access to mental health services through peers, EAPs, and other sources are vital. Research suggests that positive social support is also crucial and may help alleviate the effects of trauma.<sup>11</sup> One tool that can be effective in law enforcement agencies is a critical incident stress management (CISM) team comprising a mental health professional and trained peer supporters who can provide education, resources, and social and emotional engagement during and after incidents to families and officers who choose to access the support.

Because social support is equally important at both home and work, agencies and properly trained CISM teams may consider involving families in post-incident care and response. This involvement should start in the immediate aftermath of traumatic incidents with notifications to families, who should receive a notice that an incident has occurred and be invited to participate in a debriefing. Debriefings can potentially cover the trauma the officer has experienced, how it might affect the officer's behavior and relationships, how to recognize signs and symptoms of PTSD and suicidality, and what resources are available to help them cope with trauma's emotional aftermath. Thereafter, family members should receive ongoing access to mental health services alongside officers.

Often, an officer's instinct following a critical incident is to isolate themselves or compartmentalize trauma in an attempt to protect their families from its impact. However, it is possible for officers to maintain family connections and communicate openly with trusted family members in ways that foster emotional connections but avoid retraumatizing the officer or spreading trauma within the family. Departments can support officers and their families by providing easy access to appropriate psychological services and resources.<sup>12</sup>

11. "Trauma on the Job: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Law Enforcement Officers," Lexipol, last modified February 12, 2016, <https://www.lexipol.com/resources/blog/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-law-enforcement-officers>.

12. Jack Digliani, *Law Enforcement Critical Incident Handbook* (Larimer, CO: Jack Digliani, 2012), <http://post.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/postnv.gov/content/Training/Critical%20Incident%20Handbook.pdf>.

## Secondary or cumulative trauma

Secondary trauma, also known as cumulative or vicarious trauma, is less conspicuous than critical incident trauma, but it can be just as destructive to officers and their families. Secondary trauma results from the emotions of knowledge of a traumatic event and the stress of assisting an individual experiencing direct trauma. Similar to critical incident trauma, secondary or cumulative trauma can lead to various physical and psychological symptoms.

Although the psychological and social effects can be similar to those of critical incident trauma, secondary trauma generally builds over time. Among the potential reactions of secondary trauma are negative coping behaviors like aggression, anxiety, substance misuse, and suicide that have adverse effects on colleagues at work, people in the community, and families at home.

For law enforcement agencies and executives, the key to protecting officers and families from secondary trauma is to offer resilience training and alternative coping mechanisms, train and teach officers to use them, and encourage their adoption using cultural means such as role modeling. Alternative coping mechanisms might include professional counseling and EAPs, peer support, exercise, animal-assisted therapy, exposure to nature, or strategic rest via conscious downtime.

Because secondary trauma builds so slowly, officers may not immediately recognize its effect on them or their own symptoms; law enforcement executives should approach this proactively instead of reactively. One way to do so is with routine mental wellness checks recommended by supervisors on a regular schedule and as needed for officers demonstrating stress or fatigue while on duty. Periodic meetings with a mental health professional are the equivalent of an annual physical and support holistic officer wellness. If leaders also partake in the checks, and the professionals performing them are experienced and fluent in law enforcement issues, personnel buy-in will be easier to achieve.

Agencies may also seek to implement routine debriefs as a strategy to encourage officers to verbally process trauma with one another immediately after a critical incident. Standard debriefing sessions are not the only way to mitigate stress after an incident; agencies are encouraged to research other evidence-based solutions that fit the needs of their agency and officers.

Openly informing officers and their families about these processes can normalize the use of these services.

## *Pregnancy, Postnatal, and Child Care*

Representation of women in law enforcement has remained slow since the 1970s when they first began entering the profession. By 1987, there were only 27,000 women serving in law enforcement.<sup>13</sup> Today, women constitute 12.6 percent of police officers in the United States.<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately, law enforcement agencies frequently struggle to recruit and retain female officers. Current female officers suggest this is due to a lack of family-friendly policies that disproportionately affect female personnel.<sup>15</sup> Departments seeking to strengthen relationships with current and future officers can direct attention and resources toward creating and improving such policies.

### **Duty while pregnant**

Under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978, it is illegal for employers to discriminate against pregnant women in matters of employment.<sup>16</sup> Beyond just protecting the jobs of officers who are pregnant, family-friendly agencies can enact policies and create a workplace culture that makes returning new parents feel confident, comfortable, and capable in their jobs.

Of special concern in this matter are practices related to duty during pregnancy. It is important to realize that, unless pregnant officers cannot perform the essential functions of a police officer, agencies should generally not remove them from their assignments or require them to assume light-duty assignments. Instead, women in consultation with their doctors and families choose for themselves when it is appropriate to transition from full to modified or light duty based on the agency's expectations of modified duty roles.

Agencies working toward a family-friendly environment may wish to embrace more innovative benefits that make police work practical and possible for pregnant women. This could be done through a plain clothing allowance during modified duty assignments. Agencies may also establish a designated liaison or point of contact for employees to help navigate the potential changes that come with pregnancy and employment.

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13. Brian A. Reaves, *Local Police Departments, 2013: Personnel, Policies, and Practices*, Bulletin (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015), <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/lpd13ppp.pdf>.

14. "Table 74 Full-time Law Enforcement Employees," *2018 Crime in the United States* (Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2019), <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2018/crime-in-the-u.s.-2018/tables/table-74>.

15. Rianna P. Starheim, *Women in Policing: Breaking Barriers and Blazing a Path* (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 2019), <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/252963.pdf>.

16. "Pregnancy," International Association of Chiefs of Police, accessed September 8, 2020, <https://www.theiacp.org/resources/policy-center-resource/pregnancy>.

## Lactation spaces

One accommodation required of law enforcement agencies for new mothers is lactation spaces—private locations where new mothers can express milk for breastfeeding babies. The requirement exists as part of the federal Break Time for Nursing Mothers law, which requires employers covered by the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)—including federal, state, and local government agencies—to provide basic accommodations for breastfeeding mothers at work. These accommodations must include “reasonable break time” for women to express milk and a private, although not necessarily permanent, space in which to do it.<sup>17</sup> The FLSA establishes minimum wage, overtime pay, recordkeeping, and youth employment standards affecting employees in the private sector and in federal, state, and local governments.<sup>18</sup>

The federal Break Time for Nursing Mothers law does not require employers to pay women for breaks needed to express milk.\* However, the U.S. Department of Labor advises that if paid breaks are provided by the company, then those breaks must continue to be paid if nursing moms use them to pump at work.† The need to pump or express breastmilk is a biological need, similar to the need to eat or sleep.

\* “Reasonable Break Time for Nursing Mothers,” Federal Labor Standards Act, 29 U.S.C. § 207(r).

† “Fact Sheet #73” (see note 17).

The space must be “a place, other than a bathroom, that is shielded from view and free from intrusion from coworkers and the public”<sup>19</sup>—for example, a vacant office with a lockable door and no windows or a “wellness room” that can be used by other personnel when not used for lactation.

Policy considerations should also include storage of milk collected throughout the day and cleaning of lactation equipment. Including a small refrigerator in the lactation space provides an easily accessible area for a mother to store her milk, although there are no hazards or contamination issues to the milk or food of others when storing it in a communal refrigerator. If the space has a sink, consider include a drying rack for pump pieces or a convenient place to store them. These additions not only create a supportive environment for the mother but can also potentially cut down on break time needed for nursing.

Agencies are encouraged to exceed the legal minimum to promote a positive working environment for new parents.

17. “Fact Sheet #73: Break Time for Nursing Mothers under the FLSA,” U.S. Department of Labor, last modified April 2018, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fact-sheets/73-flsa-break-time-nursing-mothers>.

18. Fair Labor Standards Act, 29 U.S.C. §§ 201–219, <https://law.justia.com/codes/us/2011/title-29/chapter-8>.

19. “Frequently Asked Questions – Break Time for Nursing Mothers,” U.S. Department of Labor, accessed September 8, 2020, <https://www.dol.gov/whd/nursingmothers/faqbtm.htm>.



## **Child care**

Child care is of major concern to parents in law enforcement. Although a small number of agencies might be able to consider on-site child care for officers, most law enforcement agencies are not in the position to offer such benefits. But there are other, more feasible things agencies can do to make policing easier on working parents. One that has already been discussed in this guide is offering both parents the FMLA leave they are entitled to after the birth of a child. Agencies may also offer Dependent Care Flexible Savings Accounts (DCFSA), employer-sponsored, pre-tax savings accounts that give employees a tax-advantaged means to save money for child care.

Finding quality child care can be challenging for officers, especially for those working evening and weekend shifts when options are very limited. Agencies may consider developing a list of nearby child care services that offer flexible, last-minute, or unconventional hours. Personnel could work with the EAP provider, Human Resources department, local Health and Human Services agency, or state child care licensing programs to access or create a child care provider list and potentially secure enrollment with a child care provider based on family needs.

Agencies choosing to offer flexible work schedules and rotating shifts could also be advantageous to families. Even small cultural modifications can make a positive impact.

Policy and culture changes that acknowledge and accommodate the needs of officers who are parents can set the tone for family friendliness in fundamental ways, helping law enforcement agencies attract and retain top officer talent for whom family health and wellness are of principal concern.



## *Disciplinary Considerations*

At some point in the course of their law enforcement careers, police officers may be involved in internal and external investigations, disciplinary measures, license suspension, civil lawsuits, or even criminal prosecution. These professional actions can have profound personal, professional, and community consequences.

Discipline and accountability are critically important, as research shows that merely reassigning officers instead of disciplining them actually spreads misconduct instead of stopping it.<sup>20</sup> Investigative and disciplinary interventions can have repercussions that impact law enforcement families as much as they do individual officers. Officers who are the subject of investigations and potential discipline may experience fear, anger, hopelessness, recklessness, and guilt paired with physical symptoms in the form of headaches, weight loss, and sleep disruption. These events may trigger mental health conditions such as depression, panic disorder, or PTSD. All of this disruption can be further compounded by the risk of substance misuse.

### **Internal and external investigation**

Internal and external investigations can cause large amounts of stress that leave officers and their families in a state of prolonged crisis. Because they may have professional implications and consequences—for example, reassignment, suspension, reduced pay, demotion, and termination—allegations against an officer can create financial, emotional, and interpersonal conflict. Even if officers are ultimately cleared of wrongdoing, the occurrence of allegations and investigations can have long-term social and reputational consequences that can make officers angry, anxious, and depressed.

Agencies are encouraged to remain open with officers to mitigate the impact an investigation may have on their personal lives. For examples, agencies can inform and educate officers and their families about what to expect from the investigative process, including potential timelines, milestones, and outcomes. Although details may need to remain confidential while investigations are ongoing, knowing what the investigative or disciplinary roadmap looks like can ease anxiety and helps families prepare to manage the challenges ahead. Communicating regular updates that investigations are proceeding can potentially reduce officer anxiety.

Mental health education and resources should be offered to families so they know how to identify an officer in distress, how to intervene if they believe their loved one is in crisis, and whom at the police department they can contact for objective and confidential support for themselves or their officer.

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20. Edika G. Quispe-Torreblanca and Neil Stewart, “Causal Peer Effects in Police Misconduct,” *Nature Human Behaviour* 3, no. 8 (2019), 797–807, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-019-0612-8>.

To mitigate the stress of lengthy investigations, some agencies have policies that require investigations to proceed and conclude in a timely manner as determined at the discretion of the agency, as officers and families cope better with investigations when they know they will be finite.

## Substance misuse

Law enforcement officers may misuse drugs and alcohol for many reasons. When officers turn toward substances as a coping mechanism, they place both themselves and their agency at risk. Substance misuse by police officers may damage the reputation of their agency and relationship with the communities they serve—particularly when it violates laws, in which case public trust, confidence, and credibility are potentially at stake.

Substance misuse is much more than just a professional liability. Officers impaired by alcohol or other substances are at a higher risk than those who are not for committing domestic violence or having suicidal ideation.<sup>21</sup> Police departments making family health and wellness an objective often prioritize preventing and treating substance use disorders. For most agencies, the first line of defense against substance misuse is a substance use policy. Routine random drug testing, prohibition of controlled substances, and banning the use of alcohol on duty are mainstays of agency policies. Less standard are the procedures agencies codify for dealing with officers who violate their substance use policy or are at risk of doing so.

Agencies have found success with a treatment approach as opposed to a punishment approach. This approach does not focus solely on disciplining officers but on treating their condition. At one police department, officers who agree to treatment must complete the following items prior to approval to return to the field:

- Sign a release allowing their treatment team to share progress reports with a peer liaison and provide access to the agency's mental health services.
- Stay in regular contact with that liaison during their treatment.
- Attend a weekly Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meeting for public safety personnel.
- Meet regularly with a therapist.
- Successfully complete a light-duty assignment.

Some departments have become more proactive and will work with officers and their EAP to find counseling or outpatient treatment facilities which may allow them to stay in their current position.

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21. Laurence Miller, "You're It! How to Psychologically Survive an Internal Investigation, Disciplinary Proceeding, or Legal Action in the Police, Fire, Medical, Mental Health, Legal, or Emergency Services Professions," *International Journal of Emergency Mental Health* 11, no. 3 (2009), 185–190, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/f444/05df53c024165fd3dd1a4301875240390e75.pdf>.

To be successful, treatment-based approaches require a team effort, which includes families. When a recruit enters the police academy, spouses and other family members should receive the following:

- Education that makes them aware of the substance use risks associated with law enforcement
- Tools to identify early warning signs and potential problems
- Connection with confidential department resources they can tap for interventional help if needed

Families of veteran officers may receive similar education and assistance and should become partners in officers' treatment alongside agencies. Agencies may consider referring spouses and children to their EAP alongside officers. Families may need assistance coping with and supporting officers' recovery, finding support groups that welcome law enforcement families, and accessing treatment for themselves if substance misuse is a family issue.

## Intimate partner violence / domestic violence

Police officers who perpetrate domestic violence and undergo an internal investigation should be held accountable for their actions by their agencies just like anyone else. With the proper policies in place, agencies can establish a culture of prevention and accountability.<sup>22</sup>

Agencies are encouraged to be cognizant of the complex dynamics that exist between victims and their abusers, which should be reflected in agency policies. Having a policy and ongoing training of all sworn and civilian personnel are critical in order to ensure fair and consistent reporting and treatment of all officer-involved domestic violence (OIDV) allegations.

When recruits enroll in the police academy, law enforcement agencies should educate their families about early warning signs of abusive tendencies and mental crises so interventions can take place proactively. Agencies may also be prepared to connect officer family members to support groups and other OIDV resources.

Intimate partner violence occurrences within the ranks of agency personnel can be dealt with by establishing a clear and confidential reporting system, reasonable accommodations to support the victim, and internal resources for victims such as the peer support team and EAPs to use at their discretion. Agencies should use both victim advocates embedded within their own agency and external advocates who come from social service organizations or other community partners.

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22. Law Enforcement Policy Center, *Domestic Violence: Model Policy* (Alexandria, VA: International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2019), <https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/Domestic%20Violence%20Policy%20-%202019.pdf>.





## *Death of an Officer*

Agencies should consider implementing systematic policies for responding to officer deaths. With such policies, agencies can be swift, organized, and sensitive in the aftermath of a tragedy. Although every officer death is devastating, different circumstances demand different approaches. Law enforcement agencies should therefore develop unique practices for line-of-duty deaths, off-duty deaths, suicides, and retiree deaths, each of which demands situation-specific protocols.

### **Line-of-duty deaths**

Although it is difficult for departments to eliminate line-of-duty deaths, they can mitigate the effects of such occurrences by having an effective response plan in place.<sup>23</sup>

Establishing an incident management team (IMT) to lead the agency's response is a good first step. Often, IMTs are administered through nonprofit foundations comprising multiple law enforcement agencies. This allows agencies to mourn their own fallen officer while professionals from peer organizations handle the administrative aftermath.

Immediately following a line-of-duty death, IMTs can be activated to help agencies and survivors coordinate everything from ceremonial burials to long-term support for families, which might include not only spouses and children but also other dependents such as elderly parents. When officers die in the line of duty, they leave clearly illustrated holes in their families. IMTs can provide resources to help families cope with the voids and move forward in ways that fill them.

Naturally, many of the gaps fallen officers leave behind are emotional in nature. Others, however, are financial. Agencies and IMTs can ensure those gaps are addressed by making sure that officers update their insurance beneficiaries and have a legal will in place.

IMTs are most effective when they know officers' wishes and who constitutes officers' families. Some IMTs therefore ask officers to voluntarily complete an annual critical incident communication folder that includes a comprehensive and confidential post-death questionnaire. Officers are asked to share their burial wishes, what honors they'd like to receive, and whom they would like to be notified of their death, including spouses, children, or others their colleagues—and perhaps even their immediate family—might not know about.

Unlike standard emergency contact forms, critical incident communication folders should provide detailed wishes. For example, if an officer's parents live out of state, the officer would indicate they want them to be notified by a fellow officer in person instead of remotely by phone. These folders should remain sealed and be opened only if an officer is killed in the line of duty.

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23. Law Enforcement Policy Center, *Line-of-Duty Death: Considerations Document* (Alexandria, VA: International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2019), <https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2019-07/LODD%20Considerations%20-%202019.pdf>.

Critical incident communication folders are as much about speed as they are sensitivity: In the modern era, news spreads quickly online. Knowing whom to notify and how to notify them helps IMTs stay ahead of social media to ensure that survivors learn of such news from the right people and through the right channels. This practice is essential as it sets the tone for the entire survivorship journey. Official liaisons, for example, are trained to deliver death notifications in unambiguous language—“Your loved one died,” for example, instead of, “Your loved one is gone”—and to do so without making premature disclosures about the cause of death. Notifications that come from unofficial parties or public channels may create confusion, and from confusion may come mistrust.

It is critical that survivors trust law enforcement agencies and IMTs because they are their primary sources for important survivorship information and resources. For example, families may be entitled to a federal death benefit from the U.S. Department of Justice through its Public Safety Officers’ Benefits Program.<sup>24</sup> PSOB benefits are not guaranteed and require an application process to obtain, so families may need help navigating the process. Agencies are encouraged to be ready and willing to sustain relationships with families of the fallen as long as the survivors want them to.

Law enforcement is a difficult profession because it demands that fellow officers move on immediately after a line-of-duty death. Agencies can sustain healthy officers and families by doing their part to promote healthy processing of emotions and grief.

Because every family has unique needs and wishes, agencies should avoid drafting a universal “policy” for survivor outreach, which may come off as impersonal. Instead, they should focus on building a culture of respect and remembrance. From that culture may spring any number of goodwill gestures—for example, an annual email remembering the fallen officer on the anniversary of their death, sent from the chief to agency personnel and copying the fallen officer’s family; annual birthday cards for the fallen officers’ children, signed by officers; police presence at special family events like sports games, christenings, or high school graduations; and invitations to official police social events, like banquets, barbecues, and picnics.

Agencies seek feedback from families about what they want and need in the way of continued law enforcement presence in their lives. Some families may wish to have no contact with the police department, which is entirely acceptable. For those that want a relationship, long-term outreach can provide valued comfort and critical support that help families through the difficult process of rebuilding and recovering.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that fallen officers’ colleagues and their families may also need to rebuild and recover following a line-of-duty death. This is especially true for those who were close to the fallen officer, those who were involved in the incident during which the officer

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24. “Public Safety Officers’ Benefits Program,” Bureau of Justice Assistance, accessed September 8, 2020, <https://psob.bja.ojp.gov/>.

died, and those who survived situations similar to that in which the officer was killed. Agencies that are mourning an officer must therefore remain present enough to keep watch over personnel and provide them with needed resources, such as EAP services or peer counseling.

## Off-duty deaths

Officers who die outside the line of duty or because of causes unrelated to the duties of the job may not be entitled to federal PSOB benefits. Financial stress, therefore, may be more pronounced for families that experience off-duty deaths than for families that experience line-of-duty deaths. This demonstrates how important it is for officers to update their insurance beneficiaries and complete a legal will.

Whether they are the result of an accident, a medical problem, or another circumstance, off-duty deaths of police officers may not garner as much public attention or sympathy as line-of-duty deaths. With this knowledge, near- and long-term outreach by agencies and IMTs—which can just as easily be deployed after off-duty deaths as they are after line-of-duty deaths—may take on additional significance. Agencies and affiliated organizations, such as spousal groups or family groups, can be a resource to provide survivors with the support and referrals for further assistance.

## Suicide

While law enforcement officers are aware of the physical dangers they may encounter on the job, they may not realize potential job-related risks that could also affect their mental health and well-being. Officers are at a greater risk than the general public of negative mental health outcomes because of their repeated exposure to critical incidents, environmental hazards, and traumatic events.<sup>25</sup> The 2019 Virginia Public Safety Mental Health Pilot Survey illustrated the dangers of repeated, compounded trauma. The survey found that the more traumatic experiences an officer reported, the more likely they were to have suicidal thoughts. Officers who reported three out of five traumatic reactions were twice as likely as the average first responder to have suicidal thoughts.<sup>26</sup>

In 2019, a total of 228 officer suicides were reported to Blue H.E.L.P., a nonprofit organization that brings awareness to law enforcement suicide and mental health issues. Of the 228 suicides reported, 34 included retired law enforcement personnel. The topic of suicide in law enforcement continues to receive international attention, with an increasing number of agencies addressing this issue through peer support programs, suicide prevention and awareness campaigns, and expansion of available mental health resources.

25. *Disaster Technical Assistance Center Supplemental Research Bulletin First Responders: Behavioral Health Concerns, Emergency Response, and Trauma* (Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2018), <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/dtac/supplementalresearchbulletin-firstresponders-may2018.pdf>.

26. Jaysyn J. Carson et al., *2019 Virginia Public Safety Mental Health Pilot Survey* (Fairfax, VA: Fairfax Coalition of Police Local 5000, 2019), 4, <http://fcop5000.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/2019-Fairfax-County-Police-Pilot-Survey-Summary.pdf>.

Family members and support networks are important when it comes to suicide prevention efforts throughout an officer's career. Agencies should ensure accessibility of available resources to support mental health and wellness of officers and their families.

Exposure to suicide has been found to increase suicide risk and also has been found to increase the risk for related problems such as complicated grief, major depression, and PTSD.<sup>27</sup> Agencies are encouraged to have procedures in place to appropriately engage with and support families and survivors following an officer suicide attempt or death to help them process the loss into their lives. This consists of ensuring that families receive the support they need to care for themselves following an officer suicide attempt or suicide death, which includes resources for families of officers and reintegration back into the agency or community. Agencies may also consider contacting family members to determine the appropriate level of involvement for the agency to have in any posthumous plans.

## Retiree deaths

Law enforcement personnel who retired from an agency or left in good standing warrant assistance for surviving family members and funeral services following their death. The agency's involvement should be at the discretion of the surviving spouse and family, so departments should have plans in place if their services are requested. Individual circumstances may influence the agency's participation and the scale of the memorial services.

Departments can honor the retired officer by issuing an internal memo or courtesy email about the officer's service, accomplishments, and contributions to the community. If the family requests agency involvement, it would be appropriate to inform agency personnel about the memorial service.

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27. International Association of Chiefs of Police, *Preventing Suicide Among Law Enforcement Officers: An Issue Brief* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Assistance, n.d.), 17, [https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/\\_NOSI\\_Issue\\_Brief\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/_NOSI_Issue_Brief_FINAL.pdf).

## *Early- and Post-Career Engagement*

Law enforcement agencies must focus on health and wellness to remain effective in modern policing, which is best accomplished through a holistic approach and the inclusion of families. Safety and wellness are priorities throughout an officer's career, but new recruits and those approaching retirement bear special consideration.

### **Early-career and recruit preparations**

Law enforcement agencies that wish to pursue a wellness agenda for officers and families should therefore embrace a long-term vision based on incremental change, the benefits of which will be realized gradually as a new generation of police officers rises through the ranks and spreads this perspective among veteran personnel.

Law enforcement agencies should consider the following opportunities to make a substantial impact on early-career police officers while laying the foundation for their own wellness and that of their current and future families:

- **Academy integration of families.** The police academy is where recruits learn how to be effective law enforcement officers. If police departments want their officers to have healthy families, they may teach healthy family behaviors alongside marksmanship, criminal investigations, traffic control, and other core policing skills.

Rather than treating family wellness as an elective subject, agencies can integrate the concept across the entire academy curriculum so recruits repeatedly receive the message that their occupation has implications for their families, the negative impacts of which can be proactively managed and mitigated.

Of course, family wellness cannot be the responsibility of officers alone. Family members also contribute. For that reason, it is critical to orient families to the law enforcement profession at the beginning of a recruit's career through existing mechanisms such as police academies. Many academies have a "Family Day" or even an extended Family or Spousal Academy. During these events, participating family members—including parents, siblings, and children as well as partners—can learn what a career in law enforcement looks like; what physical, mental, and emotional risks exist for officers and their families; how they can help officers maintain a healthy body, mind, and relationships; and what resources are available for officers and family members in crisis. Maintaining connections to these resources can be done through regular spousal or family support groups.

For officers and family members alike, information shared during the police academy serves as a foundation to build a healthy life while serving as a law enforcement officer. Officers in the course of their lives may have many different assignments and many different family members, including new partners, spouses, and children. Law enforcement agencies may

therefore view every professional or personal change in an officer's life as a milestone that prompts family-focused training and education similar to the training received during the police academy. When an officer experiences a major life change, an opportunity exists to assess how the officer's inner circle has changed and to provide outreach to new relations. Likewise, assignment to a new unit provides an opportunity to revisit family wellness and discuss how the new assignment might impact his or her family life.

- **Social support.** Research demonstrates that social support can increase morale, motivation, retention, and productivity in law enforcement officers, not to mention physical and mental health. Social support can be equally beneficial for spouses and other family members. Law enforcement agencies should therefore make it a priority to help recruits and their families establish social connections early in officers' law enforcement careers. Some agencies may require law enforcement applicants to enroll in an extended pre-academy readiness program during which they engage in informal activities and discussions with other applicants. During the program, applicants form close bonds with one another that can subsequently sustain them while they go through the police academy and in their career. Agencies can facilitate similar relationships for spouses and other family members by connecting them with pre-existing partner groups to facilitate social opportunities for family members to build connections with one another.

## Retirees

Law enforcement agencies cannot credibly promote family wellness to early-career officers if they do not simultaneously provide family wellness support for post-career officers.

Retirement for many people is a welcome and celebrated event. For law enforcement, however, this joyous occasion can be undercut with feelings of anxiety and conflict. Being a police officer is far more than just a job—it is a part of their identity. Retired law enforcement officers may miss being an integral part of a unit and an important part of the larger community.

Research suggests a physiological component to separation anxiety—that police officers can become addicted to the adrenaline of police work. When they no longer have access to the adrenaline they have been accustomed to, retired officers may experience a type of withdrawal.<sup>28</sup>

The negative emotions that some retired officers may feel upon separating from their agency may create a sense of disunity in families that can potentially damage their relationships. At their worst, these feelings may even lead to suicide: Between January 2016 and December 2019, a known 711 law enforcement officers died by suicide—including 78 retired officers, 25 of whom had been retired for less than 24 months.<sup>29</sup>

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28. Brian A. Kinnaird, "Life After Law Enforcement," *Psychology Today*, last modified July 15, 2015, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-hero-in-you/201507/life-after-law-enforcement>.

29. Law Enforcement Suicides: 578 Known Deaths January 1, 2016 through June 31, 2019 (Auburn, MA: Blue H.E.L.P., n.d.), <https://bluehelp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/2016-to-2019-.pdf>.



Law enforcement agencies may be able to improve and perhaps even save retirees' lives by continuing to care for and about officers and their families into retirement. Doing so requires a consistent culture of community. Agencies can achieve this culture of community by inviting retired officers to agency functions, including them in regular agency news and communications, and continuing to offer access to department services when possible. Retired officers can also serve as an asset in supporting active officers by giving them the chance to get involved as peer supporters, guest speakers or trainers, or contributors to a column in the department newsletter.

Agencies can further help retirees by developing a "reverse" police academy or other transitional programming where time is spent preparing officers to leave law enforcement just as they spend time training recruits to enter it. In this way, agencies can equip retirees with the emotional, social, and financial tools they will need to begin their next chapter successfully.

Chief executives set the example: Law enforcement is a family, and there is no such thing as "aging out" of one's family. Family members are family members for life.



## *Conclusion*

Recognizing that healthy police officers lead to the healthy and safe communities, many police departments prioritize a foundation of officer safety, health, and wellness. For many, that means re-engineering policies, procedures, and culture to promote not only healthy bodies but also healthy minds and relationships.

As this guide illustrates, there is ample opportunity to prioritize family roles in operations. From employee benefits to early intervention, traumatic incidents to line-of-duty deaths, and recruitment to retirement, families simultaneously affect and are affected by virtually every aspect of law enforcement.

Of course, the concept of family is nothing new to law enforcement professionals, for whom professional relationships have always been deeply personal. The challenge ahead is for law enforcement agencies to widen the circle that is the law enforcement “family” in ways that embrace everyone in officers’ domestic support system. When they can do that, police departments will be rewarded not only with stronger families but also with stronger police officers and, ultimately, stronger communities.



## *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.

Rather than simply responding to crime, community policing focuses on preventing it through strategic problem-solving approaches based on collaboration. The COPS Office awards grants to hire community policing officers and support the development and testing of innovative policing strategies. COPS Office funding also provides training and technical assistance to community members and local government leaders, as well as all levels of law enforcement.

Since 1994, the COPS Office has invested more than \$14 billion to add community policing officers to the nation's streets, enhance crime fighting technology, support crime prevention initiatives, and provide training and technical assistance to help advance community policing. Other achievements include the following:

- To date, the COPS Office has funded the hiring of approximately 130,000 additional officers by more than 13,000 of the nation's 18,000 law enforcement agencies in both small and large jurisdictions.
- Nearly 700,000 law enforcement personnel, community members, and government leaders have been trained through COPS Office-funded training organizations.
- Almost 500 agencies have received customized advice and peer-led technical assistance through the COPS Office Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center.
- To date, the COPS Office has distributed more than eight million topic-specific publications, training curricula, white papers, and resource CDs and flash drives.
- The COPS Office also sponsors conferences, round tables, and other forums focused on issues critical to law enforcement.

COPS Office information resources, covering a wide range of community policing topics such as school and campus safety, violent crime, and officer safety and wellness, can be downloaded via the COPS Office's home page, <https://cops.usdoj.gov>.





Law enforcement officers regularly experience stress and secondary trauma during their shifts and rely on their families and friends as a positive social support network to maintain holistic wellness. The purpose of this executive guide is to create a roadmap for law enforcement agencies to develop stronger family-friendly policies, procedures, and organizational cultures to work in collaboration with officer support networks.

The publication and companion tools for families and agencies guide professional dialogue around holistic wellness innovations, best practices to support employees, and opportunities within agencies to strengthen relationships with law enforcement families. The executive guide includes information on employee benefits, family planning, trauma and loss, disciplinary considerations, and retirement planning.



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

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