



## **Supporting Police Families**

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Given the recent attacks on law enforcement it is not surprising that, across the country, law enforcement officers and their immediate families are experiencing a range of emotions including intense fear and anger as well as sadness and confusion. In the wake of these events, there are a number of things to keep in mind to both process and cope.

- **Don't keep your emotions in:** "Stuffing" emotions creates a missed opportunity to connect with your support system and can lead to an increase in stress symptoms. We often hear people say "I didn't want my loved ones to worry about me so I didn't let them know it bothered me." Expressing emotion doesn't mean you need them to "fix" anything for you. Acknowledging what's going on and the impact it's having on you and your family is enough and creates a shared experience. This is true for both officers and their loved ones. For example, we have heard that many spouses are asking their officers to leave law enforcement because officers are being targeted. This is, of course, a normal desire given what's happened. It is important for them to hear their officer and what they need and want as well. Decisions should not be made out of fear. Hear each other and be willing to accept that you likely have two different perspectives on the issue. Work to find a way to respect and support both perspectives.
- **Heightening vigilance is likely right now:** The increase in threats should lead to an increase in awareness on the job; however, this may lead to feeling excessively tired after work. Officers may need additional recovery time after a shift. Discuss this as a family and figure out a plan together for ensuring each member of the family is getting an acceptable balance of downtime and family time.
- **Process the event:** If you feel like your brain is stuck in a loop thinking about an event, you have two options: talking about it or writing it out. If you aren't a "talker" try writing whatever thoughts are looping in your head. Don't filter yourself, just write whatever comes to mind the way you might



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vent to someone. If you are a talker, make sure you are venting with folks that can tolerate your emotions and that will offer constructive support.

- **Utilize healthy coping strategies:** Make sure that you are staying active to release cortisol (the stress hormone) build-up. Your body knows how to handle stress-through exercise. Give your body a chance to help you out by being active. Spend time with your family and friends. Continue to stay engaged in hobbies. Avoid alcohol when stressed as this can increase depression and irritability symptoms.

Law enforcement officers, and especially their loved ones, may be experiencing fear for safety right now. Talking to kiddos about people targeting law enforcement officers can be especially difficult. Keep these recommendations in mind:

- Depending on the age of your child, talk to them about the difference between the possibility of getting hurt and the probability of getting hurt. It's of course possible that someone would try to hurt an officer just simply because they are a cop (just like it's possible you could be in a car crash, plane crash, etc.) BUT the probability of any of those things happening is small. Every single day thousands and thousands of cops go to work and come home safely again just like thousands and thousands of people drive on the highways and fly in planes without getting hurt.
- Let them go hands-on with your officer's vest so they can feel how sturdy it is and show them all of the other tools at their disposal that work to keep officers safe.
- Talk to them about all the training officers go through to stay safe and if possible, show them a training video or let them observe a portion of the training.
- Help them to identify adults that they can talk to if they hear someone make a threat or say something that scares them.
- Seek out resources that are highlighting police officers receiving positive support from the community as well as them engaging in acts of kindness and acting silly (dancing, singing, etc.; anything that will highlight their resiliency and balance out the images of grief).
- Help your kids manage a sense of helplessness over what's happening by getting them involved. Have them draw a picture, write a card, etc. to send to a department that is suffering or put together a care package for a local department thanking officers for what they do for the community.



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- Some children will verbalize their fears. Others will begin to show signs of distress such as acting out, trouble sleeping, wetting the bed, irritability, or bouts of crying. If they, or any member of your family is struggling, remember that there are many resources available to your law enforcement family including Peer Support, Chaplain services, and Nicoletti-Flater Associates.