

PROTECTING YOUR OFFICERS

Leaders have the power and responsibility to protect their officers on and off the job. This includes recognizing uncharacteristic and suicidal behaviors.

Effective suicide prevention requires everyone in the agency to be aware of the risk factors for suicide and know how to respond. Chief executive officers and supervisors must lead the way.

If an officer seems suicidal, the time to take action is NOW. Talk to the officer before it is too late.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR: WARNING SIGNS:

Distress can lead to the development of unhealthy behaviors. People closest to the officer (fellow officers, family, friends) are in the best position to recognize changes due to distress and provide support.

Look For:

- Comments that suggest thoughts or plans of suicide.
- Rehearsal of suicidal acts.
- Giving away possessions.
- Obsession with death or dying, etc.
- Uncharacteristic behaviors (i.e. reckless driving, excessive drinking, aggressive behavior).
- Significant change in performance.
- Appearing overwhelmed by recent stressor(s).
- Depressed mood; hopelessness.
- Withdrawal from social activities.

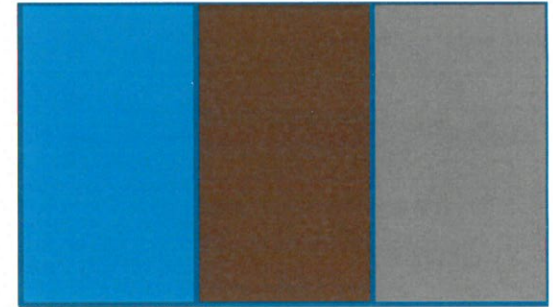
RESOURCES

The following are some of the resources available to help leaders respond to officers who may be at risk for suicide.

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**
1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- **Safe Call Now** – help program and crisis referral services for public safety employees and their families. **24 Hour Crisis Help Line: 206-459-0320**
Website: <http://safecallnow.org/>
- **COP-2-COP 24-Hour Help Hotline** – Cop clinicians, peer counselors and peer supporters understand, listen and want to help. 24-Hours a day/7 days a week. **1-866-Cop-2-Cop**
- **Cops Alive** – Information, strategies and tools to help cops plan happy, healthy and successful careers, relationships, and lives. **Website: <http://www.copsalive.com/>**
- Contact your local EAP.
- www.preventsuicidewi.org
- afsp.org
- www.badgeoflife.com

EFFECTIVE
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A LEADER'S GUIDE TO SUICIDE PREVENTION



Question...a person about suicide;

Persuade...the person to get help; and

Refer...the person to the appropriate resource.

WHAT TO DO

It is best for mental health or medical professionals to assess and manage suicidal officers, but there may be times when leaders or peers find themselves on the phone with a suicidal officer. In any situation, if an officer threatens suicide, take him or her very seriously. You may have very limited time and only one chance to intervene. The most important thing to do is take action.

By Phone:

- Establish a helping relationship (get your foot in the door).
- Quickly express that you are glad the officer called.
- Immediately get the telephone number that he or she is calling from in case you are disconnected.
- Find out where the officer is located.
- Get as much information as possible about the officer's plans, access to means of self-harm, and intent.
- Listen and do not give advice.
- Keep the officer talking as long as possible until help can reach him or her but avoid topics that may agitate the officer (i.e. an unfair supervisor, cheating spouse, etc.).
- Follow up and ensure the officer was referred to help.

In Person:

- Find out what is going on with the officer.
- Use open-ended questions such as: "How are things going?" or "How are you dealing with...?"
- Share concern for his or her well-being.
- Be honest and direct.
- Listen to words and emotions.
- Repeat what he or she says using the officer's own words.
- Ask directly about his or her intent, "Are you thinking about suicide?" This will not put new ideas into the officer's head.
- Keep the officer safe – DO NOT leave him or her alone. Have a capable officer with him or her at ALL times. Take steps to remove potential means of self-harm including firearms, pills, and knives.

- The officer may be so intent on suicide that he or she becomes dangerous to those attempting to help. Talk to a mental health care provider for advice on whether to call an ambulance or transport him or her yourself. If the advice is to transport the officer in your vehicle, a person must sit at each door to prevent the suicidal officer from exiting the vehicle.
- Call the resource numbers on your QPR card, the back of this pamphlet, or call 1-800-SUICIDE for guidance on what to do next.

WHAT TO AVOID

Leaders should let their officers know they are safe and in good hands if they ask for help.

- DO NOT minimize the problem. DO NOT ask, "Is that all?"
- DO NOT overreact to the problem.
- DO NOT create a stigma about seeking mental health treatment.
- DO NOT give simplistic advice such as, "All you have to do is..."
- DO NOT tell the officer to "suck it up," or "get over it."
- DO NOT make the problem a source of agency gossip. Involve others on a need-to-know basis.
- DO NOT delay a necessary referral.
- DO NOT embarrass, criticize, or demean a person who is experiencing emotional difficulties.
- DO NOT allow harassment or mistreatment of your officer – outside the office or internally.

AGENCY CLIMATE

- Know your officers. Be involved with what is going on in their lives. Let them know you are interested and care about them.
- Establish a climate where seeing a mental health provider is not a character flaw but a sign of strength.
- Train all of your officers on QPR and instill a sense of looking out for one another, physically and mentally, in all of your officers.
- Establish an officer wellness program at your agency.

RESILIENCY

Officers are expected to deal with difficult events that will change their lives. The death of a fellow officer, shift work, dealing with society's worst, and personal struggles are just a few examples of challenges officers face. Many officers adapt to these challenges while other officers react with a flood of emotions and a sense of uncertainty.

Resiliency is the ability to recover and adapt well in the face of adversity, trauma, illness, and changes or misfortunes. Resiliency means "bouncing back" from difficult situations. Anyone can build resiliency by learning how to incorporate adaptive behaviors, thought processes, and appropriate actions that allow the person to recover from difficult experiences.

Officer resiliency is a combination of factors that includes a sense of belonging to an agency, having the inner strength to face adversity, having the capacity to connect with his or her fellow officers, having a caring and supporting relationship within and outside the family, a positive self view, confidence in strengths and abilities to function as an officer, and the capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses.

BUILDING RESILIENCY

- Be active in agency activities.
- Join support groups, faith-based organizations, and other groups.
- Accept and face your fears.
- Nurture good relationships with family and close friends.
- Accept help and support when you need someone who cares and is willing to listen.
- Regulate your emotions and avoid impulsive behavior.
- Maintain realistic optimism. Believe in your ability to survive and function as a good officer.
- Problem solve and work towards positive outcomes.
- Make a commitment to physical health.
- Nurture your spiritual well-being – be connected.