



## Getting Started: *the administrator's guide to free and low cost strategies for improving officer and family supports*

Police work is a uniquely stressful occupation requiring officers to silence valid feelings and emotions in order to handle traumatic and often dangerous situations. The emotional control necessary to successfully perform in this type of environment contributes to long term health issues and hinders communication and relationships within law enforcement families. *Officer and family education* and *preparedness* are essential to help identify and manage the inevitable and cumulative stress that occurs in a law enforcement career.

Multiple cumulative career stress issues impact peace officers. Among the well documented physical and emotional health issues are increased cancer and heart conditions, a workplace culture with high alcohol abuse risk factors and an increased risk for divorce and officer suicide.

A state wide law enforcement administrator, officer and family member survey completed in 2008 identified critical gaps in officer and family preparation and support for addressing cumulative career stress issues. The following four areas identify unilateral priorities among survey respondents and suggest low cost strategies to address the areas of concern.

### I. Share basic department information

- Offer a Family Academy modeled after a citizen's academy. Include department philosophy, history, and current department statistics. Consider information about the use of force, special units or assignments within the department, firearms safety, internal affairs investigations and critical incident policy and procedures. Deliver in person, on line or via printed materials.
- Create and disseminate department history and philosophy for new hires and their families
- Create a department family email list. An automated list serve allows the family members to update their own email addresses. Use this communication tool to send weekly or monthly department news.

### II. Invest in and share helpful resources

Purchase multiple copies for loan

- Gilmartin's *Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement* <http://www.emotionalsurvival.com/hypervigilance.htm>
- Kirschman's *I love a Cop*. <http://www.amazon.com/Love-Cop-What-Police-Families/dp/1572301937>
- Pass along relevant mental and physical health information as it applies to officers and their families



### III. Incentivize officer and family usage of available information

- Consider assigning the modules from the Law Enforcement Family Support Network <http://www.lawenforcementfamilysupport.org/> as officer and staff training. Set aside the 30 minutes per module needed to complete them during work time.

#### LEFSN Modules

[Law Enforcement Families: What You Need to Know](#)

[Personal Health and Critical Incident Events](#)

[Staying Healthy: Managing Job-Related Stress](#)

[Emergency Planning in a Law Enforcement Family Unique Considerations](#)

- Introduce the modules to all new and current family members. Encourage family members to complete the modules
- Introduce the module as a resources to new hire families
- Resend information about available resources following a department critical incident
- Consider offering lunch with the Chief when the modules are completed by family members

### IV. Communicate policy and identify processes to address concerns about critical incident notification

- Identify a process to review department Critical Incident policy and notification procedures with all officers *and family members* annually.
- Provide printed materials related to the notification process *distribute to all family members*.
- Review the Critical Incident Contact form located on the LEFSN website <http://www.lawenforcementfamilysupport.org/> Click on the **Education** tab, select **Forms** and click on *Critical Incident Contact* form. Customize the form based upon individual department needs.
- Create policy that includes disseminating a family notification preferences form to all **family members** when hired and implement a schedule for **annual updates**. (Departments often do this during the annual performance review process) Family member notification is different than officer notification in critical ways.

### Peer Resources

Web based family academy; Saint Paul Police Department  
<http://www.lawenforcementfamilysupport.org/> Education / SPPD Family Academy

In person regional family academy, Saint Cloud Police Department, Officer Jessica Schlieman,  
[Jessica.schlieman@ci.stcloud.mn.us](mailto:Jessica.schlieman@ci.stcloud.mn.us) 320-345-4364

Family day at the department, Minnetrista Police Department, Chief David Kolb,  
[dkolb@ci.minnetrista.mn.us](mailto:dkolb@ci.minnetrista.mn.us)

New Hire Family Orientation, Anoka County, Myra Harris Johnson,  
[HarrisM@ci.fridley.mn.us](mailto:HarrisM@ci.fridley.mn.us)