

## **STEPS TO DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN A SPOUSAL SUPPORT GROUP**

1. Choose a location. Reserve a room at the PD, contact local community center or host the meeting at your home.
2. Spread the word. With support from the PD, meeting times and group information can be sent via department email. As members join, create a spreadsheet to make future communication easier.
3. Determine boundaries. Confidentiality and privacy are paramount. Begin every gathering by re-establishing your commitment to never share what goes on in our group with anyone.
4. Develop a mission statement. For example: "To create and maintain an organized peer group that provides support for families of \_\_\_\_\_(city or dept)\_\_\_\_\_ Law Enforcement Officers".
5. Make it official. You are not a gossip group, develop a pamphlet explaining your mission and outlining what you can provide. You will be taken seriously if you contact the PD and ask them to present your group at briefings, also asking for your information to be posted in gathering rooms. Create a logo, print business cards and start a secret Facebook group for communication and information regarding meetings and events.
6. Plan ahead. Initially, schedule monthly meetings and communicate via the police department, through your Facebook group and an email distribution. Develop a list of topics to draw from for future meetings and, whenever possible, invite expert guest speakers (psychologists, financial planners, home organization help, marriage coach).
7. Survey your members. You wanted to know specifically what your members need and want from the group. Tally the results and gear your meetings toward those topics.
8. Be creative, flexible and, yes, social. Many of your members may live far away from the PD or may have small children that would make attendance difficult. Always try new ways of gathering the members together by holding virtual meetings via Facebook live or try the "Zoom Meeting" app, rotate locations between homes, restaurants, police department or community rooms. Additionally, include social gatherings as well as informational meetings, promoting the idea of personal connection and friendship.
9. Meet with your department's peer/trauma support team (if available). If your officers are fortunate enough to have a Peer-based Support Group or Trauma Support Group, try meeting with the director of that unit to get a solid foundation of how traumatic events are handled with the officers. Give them your material to hand out to the spouses and put the word out that you desire to attend any training given by the department in order to gain wisdom on the signs and symptoms that spouses should look for regarding the affects of trauma upon the officers.
10. Create a critical event communication plan. With safety and legal ramifications of communicating too much, or inappropriately, recognize how careful you must be in the event of a critical, on-duty situation. Meet with your department and develop a plan for 1) what is allowed to be communicated, 2) when and 3) to whom.

Every step in this process will look different in your department, depending upon your avenues of communication, legal ramifications and whether or not you have a Peer/Trauma Support Unit in operation. You will need a connection with these units in order to gain insight and build trust.

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**More info at: [www.PeaksAndValleys.life](http://www.PeaksAndValleys.life)**