

WHY SPOUSAL SUPPORT GROUPS ARE CRUCIAL

Information Disbursement: Typically, the spouse is left in the dark regarding services and support offered through the department. Forming a support group opens a safe avenue in which to provide information through trusted leaders. In the event of a critical incident or something that draws media attention, it is helpful to have the spouses well-informed enough to rest easy knowing that their officer is safe. It takes the stress of the moment away from the officer, realizing that he/she can notify their spouse or family briefly, and then the support group can take over, offering a personal visit, phone call or provide what is needed at the moment.

Officer Assistance: Do you know the signs of officer PTSD? Insomnia, nightmares, poor concentration, confusion, depression, apathy, isolation, frustration, rage, anxious, panic stricken, difficulty communicating, withdrawing, hopelessness or self-destructive behaviors are just a few of the signs and symptoms. These behavioral changes cannot go unnoticed if we want to keep officers mentally healthy. The spouse is the first line of defense for these officers, and we should be using their presence in the home wisely. The spouses can be made aware of the signs and symptoms of PTSD and officer distress during planned meetings and be knowledgeable enough to guide the officer toward the appropriate help if needed.

Self Awareness: Do you know the signs of Secondary PTSD (Compassion Fatigue)? It is important for the spouse to recognize that just hearing about the events of their officer's day can affect them. It may not be immediate but over time they can become overwhelmed. Sometimes spouses may find that they are experiencing a preoccupation with their officer's trauma, they may be feeling some fear, anxiety or even guilt. Having consistent spousal support meetings can offer a way out of feeling isolated and can bring light to an otherwise dark season of life.

Community: The officers have a "brotherhood" of sorts within their departments which helps them survive throughout their careers. The spouses are generally taking care of home, family, finances and even jobs of their own. There hasn't been much of a spotlight on this topic, but spouses need the same kind of "connection" that the officers have. The career of an officer must have a 'buy-in' from the spouse and the family in order to do their job well. The common themes of missing birthdays, kids' sporting events and even holidays seems like an easier task when spouses know they are not alone. These gatherings can help encourage mentorship, self-care and create a new community of people who truly understand each other.

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For more information, go to: www.PeaksAndValleys.life