

## DISCUSSION TOPICS FOR SUICIDE AWARENESS & PREVENTION STAND DOWN

### RISK FACTORS FOR SUICIDE:

Risk factors are characteristics that make it more likely that individuals will consider, attempt, or die by suicide:

- Exposure to trauma
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Previous suicide attempt(s)
- Presence of mental health conditions
- Loss (relational, social, work, or financial)
- Family history of suicide
- Access to firearms or other lethal means

### PROTECTIVE FACTORS FOR SUICIDE:

Protective factors are characteristics that can make it less likely that individuals will consider, attempt, or die by suicide:

- Connectedness to individuals, family, community, and social institutions
- Effective clinical care for mental, physical, and substance abuse conditions
- Problem—solving skills and ability to adapt to change.
- Self—esteem and a sense of purpose or meaning in life.
- Resiliency

### SPOTTING THE SIGNS – HOW TO KNOW IF SOMEONE IS STRUGGLING?

Since firefighters spend long shifts together – either on the lines or in the station – we have a special view of each other. It's our duty to look out for one another just as we would on the front lines. Here are some common signs and symptoms of someone who may be struggling:

- Increasing alcohol or substance use, or gambling.
- Changes in energy levels – restlessness, irritability, insomnia or sleeping too much, fatigue
- Withdrawing or isolating from others, lack of motivation or focus
- Displaying extreme mood swings, including anger, a short fuse, loss or patience, or aggression
- Partaking in reckless behavior
- Changes in eating habits such as overeating or loss of appetite
- Inability to concentrate, memory recall issues or the inability to think clearly

- Expressing feelings of hopelessness, giving up or low self-worth
- Worrying about being a burden to others
- Insubordination, missing/late to work, decreased performance level

### IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING, DO SOMETHING

If one of your fellow firefighters went down in the middle of an active fire, you'd go in to get them out, right? Helping them through an emotional injury is an extension of the commitment to your fellow firefighters.

It starts with awareness. If you see the warning signs of a brother or sister in distress, ignoring it shouldn't be an option.

**BE DIRECT:** Be proactive and approach someone when you've seen them exhibiting some of the warning signs or appear to be in crisis.

**LISTEN:** Practice active listening techniques and let them talk without judgement; if it appears they are in crisis, do not leave them alone. Listen to your gut instincts -are alarm bells going off that your fellow firefighter may be struggling or in crisis?

**GET THEM HELP:** Don't be afraid to assist your brother or sister to get the help they might need. If you are not a trained peer, find one that they can speak with; or if you think this may be above what a peer can offer, assist with finding them professional help with a clinician. [HealingOurOwn.org/resources](https://HealingOurOwn.org/resources) has clinical resources that you can contact.

**BE THERE:** Everyone deals with pain differently. Be there for your injured colleague, supporting their recovery just as you would if a brother or sister went down with an injury in a fire.

***Remember:** If someone is in crisis or seems at risk of suicide, don't leave them alone.*

### HOW TO HELP SOMEONE IN CRISIS

1. **ASK:** "Are you thinking of killing yourself?" Listen for reasons. Ask if they have a plan.
2. **BE THERE:** Physically stay there or keep them talking. Listen.
3. **KEEP THEM SAFE:** Put time and distance between a person and their method. Call for help.



# HEALING OUR OWN

- 4. HELP THEM CONNECT:** Identify safety net of personal, professional, or community supports and resources a person can use.
- 5. FOLLOW-UP:** Check in to increase feelings of connectedness. Visit them, give them a call or send a text.

## REDUCING ACCESS TO LETHAL MEANS

- Safe storage of medication
- Secure firearms
  - » Partner with local police departments, Gun Shops/Ranges.
  - » Lock and store securely
  - » Limit and delay access
  - » Temporarily remove

**“By putting time and distance between a lethal means and individuals who may be at risk for suicide, lives can be saved.”**

*- Lethal Means & Suicide Prevention: A Guide for Community and Industry Leaders, National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention*

## STEPS TO SUPPORT GOOD MENTAL HEALTH

Being a firefighter is both stressful and rewarding, but it can put a strain on mental and physical health and even relationships. Prioritize these strategies to support good mental health for today, tomorrow and through your retirement:

- Familiarize yourself with the HealingOurOwn.org website.
- Have a list of supportive individuals to call in the event of a crisis
- Get enough sleep (recommended sleeping and meditation apps on healingourown.org)
- Participate in regular physical activity
- Eat healthy
- Limit screen time
- Dedicate time to yourself
- Stay connected with family and loved ones
- Seek (and accept) help when you need it
- Establish a relationship with a clinician as part of a preventative/maintenance plan. If you are struggling in the future, you can see someone you know and trust, and who already knows you.

## CHANGING THE CULTURE IN THE FIREHOUSE

Firefighters' coping methods after a heartbreaking or difficult call can vary from brushing it off through humor, to denial and alcohol or drug abuse. Consider the following:

- Firefighters feel most comfortable talking with their peers – individuals who share their experiences. That makes the firehouse the perfect place to engage in injury prevention.
- If someone opens up at the kitchen table about a bad call or a difficult experience, encourage them to discuss further. Don't shut them down.
- Briefly relate your own experiences, stories and concerns, though realizing that your stories are not the focus of the conversation.
- Knowing that they're not alone can be the best thing for a brother or sister at risk.
- Personal stories can be found at [HealingOurOwn.org/stories](https://HealingOurOwn.org/stories). When someone is struggling, you can help guide them to stories they can relate to as well.

## RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU AND YOUR FAMILY

If someone you know is in crisis, it's important to know how they can find help. Below are resources that can be used for first responders and their families:

- **PEER SUPPORT**  
Know your department's peer support resources and how to access them. If your department does not have a peer support program, establish peer support contacts with neighboring departments who do have a program.
- **PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING & PTSI INFORMATION**  
[HealingOurOwn.org/resources](https://HealingOurOwn.org/resources) has a list of professional counselors recommended by first responders for first responders and their families as well as more information about PTSI
- **NATIONAL SUICIDE LIFELINE (24/7)**  
988
- **FIREFIGHTER/FAMILY CRISIS AND SUPPORT LINE**  
844-525-FIRE (3473)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:



IAFF  
Resources



American  
Foundation  
for Suicide  
Prevention



American  
Psychological  
Association



National  
Institute of  
Mental Health