

FAMILY AND RELATIONSHIPS IN LAW ENFORCEMENT ACADEMY CLASS

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A program to educate families about life in law enforcement is a significant and vital piece to training and preparation for the years to come. The family education program “Family and Relationships in Law Enforcement”, provided by the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Academy for every new class of cadets is designed specifically for their loved ones.

“You didn’t get into a relationship, you got into a lifestyle”; states Dr. Sarah Wilkinson, Psy.D of the Counseling Team international as she teaches to families of the new cadets at the San Bernardino County Sherriff’s Academy. During the 2 hour class, she recommends books to be helpful in their ongoing understanding of the lifestyle in which they are committing. Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement; A Guide for Officers and Their Families by Kevin M. Gilmartin and I Love a Cop: What Police Families Need to Know by Ellen Kirschman. She also refers the families to TheCounselingTeam.com website for ongoing support and resources.

Many changes occur in the life of a law enforcement officer due to the nature of their training and work on the streets. The more prepared significant others are for their loved ones career in law enforcement, the better the chance of a successful relationship. Divorce rates among law enforcement personnel parallel those of other high-stress professions such as doctors and lawyers.

"There's no question about it, this is a very difficult lifestyle", says police wife Irene Schreiber. Mrs. Schreiber joined the Suffolk County Police Wives Association in 1979 and served as the group's president, gaining insight into the problems that police wives face.

There are many online resources for law enforcement families. The following information was taken from a website; “Shift work is not normal. It disrupts the body. Shift work disrupts the home. It affects the entire family. What and who we work with can change us. We can bring that change home. After seeing so much that is bad in people, can we still see the good?”

Significant others and children should be made aware of the early warning signals their loved one is starting to suffer from the accumulation of stress. Responses to stress can range from verbal arguing to drug abuse. Other indicators may include being pessimistic and not wanting to socialize, having difficulty controlling their temper, and becoming extremely critical of others. Additional signs are irritability, forgetfulness, sleep disturbances, anxiety, weight loss, poor eating habits and a tendency toward accidents. Watch for alcohol or drug abuse, excessive crying, signs of guilt and fear, paranoia, a desire for revenge and complete withdrawal. If you or someone in the family is having difficulty coping, you should take immediate action. Having an education course taught at your academies can make them more aware and take action.

If you are being affected by stress, you have to realize there is something real and positive you can do. Some forms of stress can be changed or offset by changing our attitude and lifestyle. More serious forms or conditions, such as lasting depression, need to be addressed with professional intervention and help. Be responsible and be aware that your stress and attitude are affecting the most significant people in your life. More and more departments nationwide are responding to the mental health needs of their officers and their families. These departments are taking the necessary steps to eliminate the stigma of seeking all and any help available. Call your department's employee support services and get the family help you may need.