



Association of Orange County Deputy Sheriffs

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Part Two: The Psychological Impact for Families Following an OIS

By: Alana N. Negroni, M.S., LMFT, The Counseling Team International (TCTI)



Editor's note: This article is the second in a three-part series. In our next issue of the Courier, you will find Part Three: Wrapping It Up with Coping Skills. If you have any non-emergency questions or comments, please feel free to email them to Lynda@aocds.org and she'll pass them along to The Counseling Team International. You can also contact TCTI directly 24 hours a day, 365 days a year at 1-844-655-1035.

For those of you who have loved ones in law enforcement, you innately understand that you didn't just choose a person to spend your life with, you chose a lifestyle to live. A lifestyle that often looks vastly different than the lifestyles of your friends and family. The change of shifts, shift work in general, cancelled plans, overtime, attending events with your loved one absent, and late nights are just a few of the simpler nuances that go alongside a loved one's career in law enforcement. In addition to this short list are entities such as

an increase in your loved one's cynicism, their desire for protection, or your increase in fear for their life.

Over the most recent times, this country has seen a shift in the respect that individuals have for law enforcement officers (LEOs) and the consequent treatment of that authority. This shift has worked to gnaw at the barrier that family members typically find protection within. This barrier has historically allowed family members to send their loved ones out into the world every day, knowing the risks they take the moment they put on that uniform. This barrier works to create a separation from the knowledge of danger and the family member's ability to carry on day-to-day as if that danger doesn't exist.



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For to have a loved one in law enforcement, one simply cannot live every day with that fear at the forefront. Due to the recent shifts in the respect for LEOs, that fear has been brought to vivid attention. As a society, we have seen an increase in officers who have lost their lives due to gunfire and an overall increase in officer-involved shootings (OIS). This painful reality has also impacted those individuals who find themselves waiting at home for their LEO to return safely.

When a family member learns about their loved one being involved in an OIS, the range of emotions can vary dependent on several factors. However, one fact remains, family members are first and foremost concerned about the health and safety of their LEO. Once family members have learned that their LEO is safe and out of further harm's way, they are left to manage the



onslaught of emotions that may come their way. It is important to remember that when an LEO is involved in an OIS, this punctures a gaping hole in the fear barrier that their family members often find solace within. When this barrier is broken through, family members may experience emotional reactions that they do not feel comfortable sharing with their LEO so as not to burden them further. In stark contrast to this, there are other family members that may freely express these emotional reactions

and consequently impact and overload the LEO following their critical incident. Regardless of the communication that takes place between the LEO and their family members, what remains true is the need for support and community. Some potential reactions for family members might include:

- An increase in irritability and anger
- Lack of attention
- Emotional outbursts, crying, etc.
- Increased need to talk and connect
- Isolation

No matter what the emotional reaction happens to be, it is important to keep in mind that every individual's process through a critical incident or OIS is a normal reaction. How we manage those reactions can be healthy or unhealthy, but the fact that these reactions exist are normal and to be expected.

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Health Hub, cont.



It is vital to keep in mind that while the LEO may be managing the situation from both a physical and behavioral standpoint, family members are also managing the situation from a potentially physical and behavioral standpoint. With this in mind, department personnel should be aware that LEO's family members are their closest support systems and should extend any support services to these family members as well. The offer and extension of support services may mitigate the negative stress reactions experienced by both family members and their respective LEOs.



Be safe!



AOCDs, in partnership with The Counseling Team International (TCTI), offers the below listed professional licensed and confidential services to members of the AOCDs Medical Trust, at no additional cost. Please visit TCTI's website at <http://thecounselingteam.com> for details.

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365 days a year by calling 1-844-655-1035.**

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