



# Protect the community— protect each other

Facebook and Instagram are proud to work with SAVE and other non-profits that work to promote well-being and prevent suicide, to provide you with the warning signs that a fellow officer might be in danger and need your help.

## LIFE BEHIND THE BADGE

You committed yourself to a life of service to the community, those in need, and protecting those in danger. Most people consider law enforcement heroes, so why do some of your colleagues struggle with depression, suicidal thoughts, and even end their own lives?

You go into your work knowing it involves risk, including potentially putting your own life on the line. Some officers reach a point where their life is more at risk due to self-harm than by an incident on the job, and unfortunately this isn't discussed openly. As a matter of fact, in the Badge of Life study (Int'l Journal of Emergency Mental Health 2013), your career can be so demanding, stressful, and dangerous that between 13-18% of officers struggle with PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). Violanti's research (2014) indicated that a combination of alcohol use and PTSD results in a ten-fold increase in the risk of suicide for law enforcement personnel.

The experiences that you and your fellow officers live day in and day out are out-of-the ordinary. You may deal with domestic violence or witnessing child abuse during the day, and then try to go home and act like you haven't seen something tragic, horrible or unreal. This can create problems for the strongest among us.



POLICE STATS:

### Know the facts

Officers are 2-3 times more likely to die by their own hand than by a felonious murder on the job.

According to the National Study of Police Suicides (2012) there were 126 law enforcement suicides. Blue H.E.L.P. reported this increased to 228 officer suicides in 2019 (134 died in the line of duty).

**42**

average age

**16**

average years on the force

**93%**

were men 40-44 years old

**63%**

were single



## WHY YOU?

- Your commitment to serve your community includes protecting your fellow officers
- You're trained to respond quickly and identify risk
- People with depression are often unaware of the symptoms
- You are in a position to notice out-of-character behavior such as sloppy work, late reports, carelessness, tardiness, or frequent sick days
- A fellow officer might open up to you about their issues if they believe you really care and are concerned about them and not just informing your superiors.

## DON'T IGNORE THE EVIDENCE

Officers in distress and who may be at risk for suicide often give clues that something is wrong. Learn to recognize the warning signs of suicide, take them seriously, and respond!

- 1 Talking about suicide, wanting to die, or to killing oneself.
- 2 Looking for a way to kill oneself, such as searching online or for a place to do it.
- 3 Talking about feeling like a burden, having no purpose or reason to live, or feeling hopeless.
- 4 Showing anxiety, agitation; unable to sleep or sleeping all the time, or very little.
- 5 Increase in alcohol use.
- 6 Withdrawing from family, friends, partner, and other officers.
- 7 Acting out of character with uncontrolled anger, mood changes, and reckless behavior.
- 8 Experiencing new or more relationship problems with partner, spouse, kids, or Administration.

“Police suicide is preventable, if we make the commitment. We owe that much to the police who are serving today and to their families.”

Chuck Wexler, Executive Director

Chuck Wexler, Executive Director, Police Executive Research Forum, Washington, D.C. (October, 2019).

### Be sensitive to cultural differences.

Not every culture sees mental health the same way and that can affect how people respond to problems in their life, the way they talk about death or dying, and even the idea of suicide. It is important to be aware of these differences, respect them, and consider how you can offer help. For example, individuals from some cultures will not seek help from a mental health provider, but would be willing to talk with a faith leader or a traditional healer.

“We spend a great deal of money on resources and training to protect our officers’ physical well-being. We need to protect our officers’ mental well-being with the same level of priority. As police leaders, we need to need to make it okay to ask for help.”

Steven R. Casstevens, President - International Association of Chiefs of Police || [www.theiacp.org](http://www.theiacp.org)

## Possible warning signs of distress



When someone is posting distressing content on Facebook or Instagram, or they are behaving far different from normal, it might be a sign that they need help.

Below are some tips to help you respond. With these tips in mind, trust your instincts and experiences working with people in distress. If anyone you know is in immediate danger, call 911. Let’s start with some statuses/posts to be aware of:

**Feeling alone, hopeless, useless, or like a burden to others:** “I feel like I’m in a hole I can’t get out of;” “I don’t want to be a burden to my partner;” “I don’t want to do my shift.”

**Showing irritability, anger, or hostility:** “I hate everyone/everything;” “Screw this;” “Administration is out to get me;” “I took that in the past, but no more.”

**Withdrawal from normal activities:** “Skipped choir practice;” “Missed Sat AM pick-up game once again;” “Who needs church anyway?”

Keep in mind that warning signs aren’t always conversations or status updates. Watch out for pictures, hashtags, and any other content that seems unusually negative.

### What puts someone at greater risk of suicide?

The more risk factors, the higher the risk of an attempt. Add to this a “triggering” event such as a relationship, financial, or job problem and you could have someone thinking about suicide. In fact, for those in law enforcement, relationships gone bad are the number one reason why officers take their own lives (Lawrence: PoliceOne.com). Risk factors, combined with 24/7-365 access to a weapon can be dangerous.

Someone who is suicidal:

- Wants out of their pain
- Can’t see options or alternatives
- Doesn’t know where to go or what to do
- Has lost hope
- Doesn’t believe things can get better

### How to help an officer who may be at risk of suicide via Facebook or Instagram

If a person you are concerned about has made an explicit suicidal threat, you need to react immediately and get them to a hospital. Otherwise, you can report someone who may be suicidal to Facebook directly [here](#). On Instagram you can click on the ‘three dots’ button on the bottom right corner of every post.

- Report the image as inappropriate and choose the reason why
- Facebook and Instagram have dedicated teams committed to reviewing reported content as quickly as possible, and in some cases will provide extra resources to those in need

# 7

police chiefs took their lives in 2009

## A note to Chiefs:

“A critical first step for police agencies seeking to improve officers’ mental health and prevent suicides is to acknowledge that stigma is pervasive in policing, and to develop creative and effective ways to overcome or at least minimize it.”

Executive Summary: We need to make the prevention of police suicides a national priority. Washington, D.C., Oct. 2019

## STOP SUICIDE IN ITS TRACKS

If you think a fellow officer is considering suicide, the first step is to act! Responding to a fellow officer in need may be difficult. You may feel like you are being invasive or putting their career at risk. But the reality is that a fellow officer with a firearm might be in just as much danger as an officer facing a criminal with a firearm.

**Make a plan:** Decide how you will approach the situation. Pick someplace quiet and away from others.

**Get the facts:** Learn more about suicide prevention and how you can help. Have specific observations prepared to share with them.

**Consider your options:** Find resources in your department, such as an EAP or Chaplain, know the chain of command and the department policies on this.

**Ask the question:** Talk to them, ask them if they are ok, or if they have been thinking about taking their own life. If the answer is yes: do something!

**Respond:** Act on the plan, don’t wait. Be tenacious and make sure you follow through.

### What’s your job?

- Remind them they can feel better
- Offer them reasons for hope
- Let them know suicidal thoughts are temporary
- Avoid leaving a fellow officer alone, especially if they have had a few drinks

### REFERENCES

A Study of Police Suicide from 2008-2012: [www.policesuicidestudy.com](http://www.policesuicidestudy.com)  
*Cop Shock: Surviving PTSD, 2nd Ed.* Allen R. Kates (2008). Holbrook Street Press.  
*Police Suicide – A Comprehensive Study of 2008 National Data*, Andrew F. O’Hara and John Violanti, PhD., International Journal of Mental Health published 2009; 11(1): pages 17-23)  
Predictors of police suicide ideation, John Violanti (2004). *Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior*, 34(3), 277-283.  
An Occupational Risk: What every police agency should do to prevent suicide among its officers. Police Executive Research Forum, Washington, D.C., 2019.

### ENDORSED BY

Badge of Life, Copleline, International Association of Chiefs of Police, National Police Suicide Foundation, Safe Call Now, The Pain Behind the Badge, The Barbara Schneider Foundation

### Confidentiality: A real issue for law enforcement

Most officers will not want you to call them out or report them to their Chief or HR. Worse, many officers do not trust their department heads or programs. They may try to cover up what’s going on, but with help they can return to a normal, healthy life and career. They may need time off, a re-assignment, or a change in routine. If you know someone who could hurt them self, confidentiality is second to saving a life. Take these steps and someone may thank you for saving their life.

**Disclose information sensitively**, but do tell someone. Don’t live the rest of your life knowing that you were more afraid of hurting their career than helping them. Don’t wait for a “Cop-Doc” to show up. There aren’t many, they aren’t quickly accessible and even though they can be, most aren’t trusted because of their connection to the force. Instead:

1. Talk to a religious leader on the force.
2. Find a counselling center in your community they can go to anonymously.
3. Give them the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number (1-800-273-8255) or [SafeCallNow.org](http://SafeCallNow.org) is an excellent source of support using trained public servants.
4. Check in with them regularly, and between those times too.
5. Offer to keep their weapon safe when they are not on duty.
6. Encourage them to talk to their supervisor, offer to go with them, or even insist that you will go with them, as it is very helpful to accompany an officer when they are struggling with an emotional issue.

### RESOURCES

Badge of Life [www.badgeoflife.com](http://www.badgeoflife.com)  
Copleline <http://copleline.org> Hotline 1-800-267-5463  
Law Enforcement Wallet Card by SAVE [www.save.org](http://www.save.org)  
National Police Suicide Foundation [www.psf.org](http://www.psf.org)  
Safe Call Now <http://safecallnow.org> Hotline 1-206-459-3020  
Suicide Prevention for Police Officers, by T. Salvatore for Montgomery County Emergency Service, Inc., Norristown, PA (2009): [www.mces.org?PDFs/suicidepolice.pdf](http://www.mces.org?PDFs/suicidepolice.pdf)  
The Pain Behind the Badge <http://thepainbehindthebadge.com>  
Blue H.E.L.P. [www.BlueHelp.org](http://www.BlueHelp.org)