



Taking Care of Ourselves in the Face of Tragedy

A brief resource guide for our
community, including our law
enforcement families.

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A Message To Our Community

The unthinkable events that have unfolded in Spring Grove, PA can produce heavy and hard emotions for many of us. You might find yourself feeling sad, scared, angry or perhaps a combination of these. In a small community like ours, these emotions can be amplified. This guide is intended to provide strategies to help cope with these unsettling emotions for ourselves, our children, and specifically for law enforcement families.

Please be aware that this does not replace the need for professional supports. We encourage anyone to seek help if you find yourself in need.

Thank you,

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Coping with Heavy Emotions

Take some time to pay attention to how you are feeling. Mindfully consider what the emotions might be and name them for yourself.

1

Examples might include “I am feeling scared right now to think that an act of violence like this has happened so close to me” or “I am very sad to think about the loss of life that occurred on Wednesday.” Recognize that our emotions are not “good” or “bad”—they are just how we feel, and they have value. They are an opportunity to notice and then choose how to act in the face of them.

Our emotions show up in our bodies in various ways—take some time to reflect on where in your body you notice these sensations.

2

Some common ways are a feeling of tightness across the shoulders, a clenching in the jaw, a knot in the stomach. Once you can mindfully notice these sensations, you can work to release that tension. Taking slow, deep breaths or a few gentle stretches are some simple yet powerful tools for this work.

Taking care of your physical needs is especially important in times of extra stress. Movement and exercise, healthy nutrition and sleep are all vitally important and will help buffer us from the impacts of stress on the body. For children, it is important to keep their routine as much as possible as well.

3

Limit your own exposure to news coverage as it is often unhelpful to spend large amounts of time reading and watching footage. Limit your exposure to an update or two and monitor how much time you are spending on social media as well. Give yourself permission to step away.

4

Supporting Our Children

It is a natural desire to shield children from hurt and pain as we want to preserve their innocence and sense of safety in our world. When tragedy strikes close to home whether it be a police-involved shooting or national media coverage of school-based violence in another community, parents and guardians should take care to ensure we are addressing the special and unique needs of children. Here are some strategies to help address these needs.

1 For school-aged children and/or children who are using online platforms of any kind, it is important for families to talk with children so you can set the tone for the conversation on your terms rather than your child being exposed inadvertently online or hearing things first from a peer or other source at school.

2 Avoid vague phrases like “passed away” or “went to sleep and didn’t wake up,” which can be confusing or even frightening. Instead, say things simply and directly, such as “the officers died” or “the person was shot.” Share only the essential facts—without unnecessary or graphic detail—and let children guide how much more they want to know. Reassure them that they can always come back with questions when they’re ready.

3 Be mindful of what children might be viewing online with regards to the critical incident as it might be traumatizing for them. Children process information differently than adults do and we need to help shield them from potentially harmful footage in the media. Encourage them to talk with you if they see or hear something that is troubling to them.

Supporting Our Children

4

Children learn to grieve by observing adults around them, so it is okay to share with them how you are feeling in the moment also. It is smart to share with them that a range of feelings is normal and share what you are doing to take care of yourself in these difficult times. Be mindful of not using your child as your source of support, though—ensure you have the support you need so you can be that for them.

5

There are many good books to use to help children understand emotions like sadness and also process loss and grief. Olivia's House has a full and varied list which can be found here:
<https://www.oliviashouse.org/grief-library/>

If you recognize the need for additional support, there are many skilled mental health therapists throughout York and Adams County that serve children and adults. A list of providers can be found here:

www.healthyadamscounty.org/media/rhcid31b/complete-bh-guide-use-to-make-revisions-june-2025-2.pdf

Please reach out to any of them. Another great resource is www.psychologytoday.com where you can search by specific location/specialization/insurance/etc.

Coping Through Connection

Grief looks different for every person - children and adults alike. What matters most is finding safe and meaningful ways to express these feelings.

For children, creative outlets can be especially powerful.

1 Encourage them to draw, write, or make a card that shares their feelings. This might be a card for a local law enforcement agency, a note of encouragement, or a drawing that represents hope. These simple actions can help children feel they are contributing in a positive way, while also processing their own emotions.

2 Families may also find comfort in community rituals such as vigils, memorial services, or other gatherings. Attending together allows children to see that grief is shared—that many people are experiencing big feelings and supporting one another. These events can reinforce that while we cannot undo tragedy, we can come together in kindness, respect, and compassion.

3 Adults, too, may benefit from these acts of connection. Making signs, writing letters, or simply showing up at community events provides a tangible way to express grief, honor loss, and channel emotions into support for others.

The key message for children and adults is this: grief is not something to hide. When expressed and shared in healthy ways, grief can help us heal and remind us that we are not alone.

Law Enforcement Families

Families of Law Enforcement Officers (LEOs) might feel this stress even more poignantly than others in our community. Even if your family did not know the officers injured or killed directly, events like these can be experienced as “too close to home”. In addition to the tools noted above, here are some additional tools for talking with your children about your unique family.

1

Explain to them the work that their LEO parent does in age-appropriate terms. Examples may include, “Mommy’s job as a police officer is to help people who need it” or “Daddy’s job involves many things including helping people feel safe and helping people when they need it”. You might want to take some time to talk about the ways your family’s mission helps to support the LEO’s work. For example, “While Daddy is at work, we all make sacrifices sometimes too—we miss him when he is away, and we work together as a team to support one another until he is off his shift.” Emphasize the importance of the work your officer does—you can even take a few minutes to talk about why you are proud of the work they do! Give kids the space to ask questions or talk about what it means to be a law enforcement family.

2

Events involving officers being injured or killed in the line of duty naturally call into question the safety of others who also do this work. It might be a good time to tell your child about the safety precautions the LEO takes to stay safe including wearing a seatbelt while driving, wearing a protective vest, and specialized trainings. Be honest that there is no guarantee of safety but there are many tools being used to keep officers safe while they work.

For example, it might be appropriate to ask your child if they would like to see the protective vest and talk about how there are other officers on their team who work to keep one another safe.

Law Enforcement Resources

There are resources available for Law Enforcement families to help them in difficult situations including those offered by *The International Association of Chiefs of Police*. Some of the tips offered in this guide were originally posted in their wellness guide referenced below. There is also a helpful article from Barbara Schwartz (referenced below) in guiding communication within law enforcement families. Information from that article was used in developing this guide.

Employee and Family Wellness Guide:

<https://www.theiacp.org/ICPRLawenforcementfamily>

Barbara Schwartz article: <https://www.police1.com/police-training/articles/how-to-talk-to-your-kids-about-the-dangers-of-policing-bUTcvlxMQ3TnDgiZ/>

While not specifically aimed at Critical Incidents, Breathe Intentionally LLC had previously developed a workshop scheduled to begin on October 21, 2025 to support wellness among Law Enforcement Officers and their families. We invite you to consider participating in this free, virtual series as a way to support the valuable work officers AND their families do in our community.

More information on this program and registration details can be found at www.breatheintentionally.net.

Additional Resources

Crisis Intervention Services for York & Adams County are provided by Wellspan Health and are available 24/7 for any individual experiencing a mental health crisis: **717-851-5320**



Crisis Text Line is free, 24/7, and confidential

