



FIRE DEPARTMENT ASSESSMENT AND COMMUNICATION AFTER A FIREFIGHTER OR EMT SUICIDE

FOR REGIONAL, STATE, AND NATIONAL ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVES

Use these tips to assist in helping department leadership and personnel deal with grief and to build relationships after a firefighter or emergency responder suicide.

For more information, visit www.nvfc.org/help.

WHEN SPEAKING WITH DEPARTMENT LEADERSHIP:

- Directly recognize that how they handle this situation will be part of their legacy within the department. Members will be leaning on them for direction.
- Recognize that they may not have received adequate training in recognizing signs and addressing the symptoms. (This comforts them and helps allay feelings of guilt.)
- Help them realize that they do not have to feel guilty or anxious about not recognizing the signs and symptoms. Affirm that firefighters and EMTs are great actors and many know how to hide issues that are bothering them.
- Encourage them to implement behavioral health training in their department, as personnel may be feeling helpless and this will empower them to be better able to recognize signs and symptoms in the future and know where to turn for help should they see someone in need. For resources, visit www.nvfc.org/help.
- Advise them that when working with their members on the healing process, they should try to speak from their heart. If it hurts, then they need to express that to their members. They should impart to their members that there is no shame in seeking help to deal with their grief if needed. Provide resources such as chaplain contacts, grief counselors, suicide support groups, or even the Fire/EMS Helpline **(1-888-731-3473)** to members.
- Suggest working with the family and offering help in planning a fire department funeral (if that is the wish of the family). It might be a simple ceremony, or it could be one where they invite neighboring departments but falls short of a full ceremony like a line-of-duty death.
- Follow up within a week to see how they are doing.

WHEN SPEAKING WITH FIREFIGHTERS:

- If a firefighter (non-leadership) initiates communication, determine why they are making the call and not an administrative officer. Assess the situation to see if there is a separation between members and administration.
- Ask how they knew the member to get more information as well as to see if they are coping. Sometimes the caller is looking for help on his or her own emotions rather than just reporting as an official.
- Without going into a full Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) meeting, you could also recommend that the members talk to each other to see what steps they can take for each other and for the family.
- Provide contact information for someone who may be able to help members deal with their grief – for example, a chaplain, a grief counselor, a support group, or the Fire/EMS Helpline.
- Follow up with a call a week later or right after the funeral ceremony.

***Remember to always be direct, challenge
with compassion, and thank them for
reaching out to you.***

