

SUICIDE PREVENTION TOOLBOX

**LAW ENFORCEMENT
OFFICERS**

LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

Men who work in law enforcement, whether in the police or the armed forces, are more likely to be exposed to human distress **that can cause them to experience greater psychological suffering than the general population.**





BE VIGILANT

What are the signs of suicidal distress? What are the risk factors to watch out for?

RISK FACTORS:

Personal

- Social and emotional isolation (break-up, distance from family)
- Substance use (cannabis, alcohol, doping, steroids)
- Difficult life experiences
- Feelings of failure or loss of control (breakup, change in career progress)
- Anxiety, depression, insomnia
- Addictions (food, gambling, substance use)

Organizational

- Unusual and rotating work schedules (disrupts family life and sleep patterns)
- Military culture (strength, discipline, emotional silence) and traditional masculinity (may see themselves as the provider and pillar of the family)
- Pressure to perform and value professional success (workaholism, difficulty resting, competitiveness)
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (hypervigilance, sleep disorders, avoidance symptoms, mood swings)
- Work-related physical injuries (chronic pain, physical injuries)
- Operational stress injury (accumulation of stressful events at work)
- Proximity to weapons (increased risk of suicide)

SIGNS OF DISTRESS

- Aggression toward self or others
- Behavioral changes (hygiene, mood, absenteeism, performance, attitude, consumption)
- Isolation and withdrawal (fear of repercussions on one's career and fear of judgment by family and colleagues)
- Direct verbal messages ("I'm going to kill myself") or indirect messages ("I'm still here")

RECOGNIZE VULNERABLE EVENTS:

- Breakup, separation from family
- Exposure to a traumatic event (death, violence)
- Issues related to returning to civilian life (temporariness, loneliness, change of environment)
- Retirement, sick leave (loss of identity)
- Disciplinary sanctions or suspension from these duties (feeling of loss of control, lower self-esteem)
- Injuries affecting work performance (impact on self-esteem)



FACTORS TO EXPLORE

1. Recognize signs of distress
2. Act quickly
3. Create a safety net
4. Equip loved ones
5. Design a plan based on individual needs

EMPATHY AND ACTIVE LISTENING TO FUEL HOPE

What are the best practices for reaching out to law enforcement officers to listen to them and encourage them to seek help?

TO LISTEN AND ENCOURAGE EXPRESSION:

- Demystify the act of asking for help (explain that it is not a failure)
- Meet in informal settings (e.g., training, meals)
- Emphasize the confidentiality of the conversation
- Build trust (respect their professional culture)
- Inform them about existing resources (lack of knowledge about services hinders requests for help)



SUPPORT

What are the best practices for encouraging them to use resources?



RESPECT THEIR PACE AND MISTRUST



REASSURE THEM ABOUT THE PROFESSIONAL IMPLICATIONS (CONFIDENTIALITY, NON-JUDGMENT)



ENCOURAGE PEER SUPPORT (FROM COLLEAGUES OR FORMER POLICE OFFICERS/MILITARY PERSONNEL)



OFFER CONCRETE, IMMEDIATE ACTIONS



BUILD A RELATIONSHIP BY REACHING OUT TO THEM, RATHER THAN WAITING FOR THEM TO ASK FOR HELP



NORMALIZE VULNERABILITY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SUFFERING



FACILITATE CONTACT WITH PROFESSIONALS (PSYCHOLOGICAL APPOINTMENTS THAT CAN BE ADAPTED TO WORK SCHEDULES, ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICES)





PROTECT YOURSELF

What protective factors should be put in place to reduce risky behavior? What would an action plan or safety plan look like for a law enforcement officer?

1. Strengthen the protective factors identified by the person (check and strengthen ties with family, colleagues)
2. Reduce or eliminate the risk factors identified by the person (remove firearms if necessary, reduce high-stress assignments)
3. Concrete and immediate actions (adapt schedules or responsibilities according to psychological state, allow temporary leave or adjustments)
4. Encourage peer support and the use of services (promote peer support and links between colleagues, raise awareness of the various psychological and financial support services available)
5. Validate suffering (avoid minimizing distress, do not put pressure on performance or career issues)



Useful resources

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CPSM Centre de prévention
du suicide de Montréal

 **McGill**

Douglas
CENTRE DE RECHERCHE
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Regroupement des Organismes
pour Hommes de l'île de Montréal

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