



It's Up to Us[®]

to Create a Healthy & Supportive San Diego

A bulletin regarding the behavioral health of first responders and their families



Edition 34

About the Campaign

Today, like all Americans, San Diegans are navigating a new way of living due to COVID-19, including its impact on mental health.

First responders are particularly vulnerable to behavioral health challenges, more so than their peers in the general population.¹ Their repeated exposure to trauma on the job puts them at greater risk of challenges such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Seven out of ten first responders also report that they rarely or never reach out to behavioral health services, and more than half avoid seeking help for fear of repercussions at their job.^{2,3} But many workplaces and programs, like the San Diego Fire Captain Ryan J. Mitchell's First Responders Behavioral Health Support Program, are working to change that.

By raising awareness, encouraging dialogue, and providing access to local resources, the It's Up to Us campaign aims to inspire wellness, reduce stigma, and prevent suicide in all San Diegans, with a particular emphasis on San Diego's most at-risk populations.

This campaign is developed through the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency and supports the County's *Live Well San Diego* vision to promote a community that is healthy,

Up2SD.org[®]
LINK UP FOR INFORMATION AND MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

Access & Crisis Line
(888) 724-7240

COMMUNITY RESOURCES 2-1-1



Shine a Light On: First Responder Behavioral Health

First responders work at all hours of the day to make sure we are safe. The nature of their job requires that they put the needs of others before their own while they are working which can result in compassion fatigue and burnout.

Compassion fatigue is the exhaustion experienced from caring for sick or traumatized people. Symptoms may include difficulty sleeping, irritability, feeling emotionally numb, and self-blame. Burnout is complete mental, emotional, and physical depletion after exposure to prolonged stress. Signs of burnout include sadness, feelings of isolation, indifference, and hopelessness.⁴ Burnout and compassion fatigue can have a profound effect on overall health if not addressed. But there is hope in offering support and seeking help.

If you know a first responder, consider checking in, showing appreciation with a caring gesture, or providing support. If you are part of the first responder community, there are actions you can take to protect your behavioral health, build resilience, and nurture your well-being.

Nurturing Your Emotional and Social Well-Being

Being a first responder means putting the health and safety of others first while on the job, and it can be easy to put yourself on the back burner. Don't forget to practice self-care if you need to recharge.

Try These Self-Care Activities

Emotional: Bringing peace to our inner thoughts can reduce stress and anxiety, lead to a better understanding of ourselves, and create greater compassion.

- Say "no" to set healthy boundaries; like by taking the time you need to be alone
- It is OK to not be OK. Navigating stress and trauma is challenging, and giving yourself grace is an important part of the process.
- Reach out for support through family, friends, or support programs; you are not alone

Social: Staying connected with friends and loved ones is more important than ever and key to improving overall well-being.

- Keep open lines of communication with friends or loved ones
- Make an effort to set aside quality time, whether it's in person or virtual
- Join a community such as a social group, support group, or sports team



¹Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2018) First Responders: Behavioral Health Concerns, Emergency Response, and Trauma. <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/dtac/supplementalresearchbulletin-firstresponders-may2018.pdf>

²University of Phoenix. (2017, April 20) University of Phoenix Survey Finds Majority of First Responders Have Experienced Symptoms Related to Mental Health Issues [Press Release]. <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20170420006384/en/University-of-Phoenix-Survey-Finds-Majority-of-First-Responders-Have-Experienced-Symptoms-Related-to-Mental-Health-Issues>

³University of Phoenix. (2019, September 11) University of Phoenix Survey Finds More Than Half of First Responders Feel There Are Job Repercussions For Seeking Professional Mental Health Counseling [Press Release]. <https://www.phoenix.edu/media-center/press-release/university-of-phoenix-survey-finds-more-than-half-of-first-responders-feel-there-are-job-repercussions-for-seeking-professional-mental-health-counseling.html>

⁴Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2018) Emergency Responders: Tips for Taking Care of Yourself. <https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/responders.asp>

Read Up: Families of First Responders

Tools and tips to help first responders and their families find ways to cope with the challenges, support each other, and enjoy time together.



Quality Family Time: Working as a first responder means sometimes working nontraditional hours, which can result in limited family time.

- **For the family:** Try to enjoy family quality time when you can, even if it means creating a schedule or a standing event to look forward to.
- **For the first responder:** Whether it's breakfast, lunch, or dinner, having meals together is a great way to connect. If you can't make it for dinner, a morning coffee or breakfast can be a nice way to catch up.

Communication and Support: It can be challenging to experience stressful situations at work and leave it all behind.

- **For the family:** It could be helpful to develop cues that work for the family, such as code words, notes, or gestures, so your first responder family member can clue you in on how they are feeling without going into detail if it is too much.
- **For the first responder:** Experiencing repeated trauma is exhausting, and shouldn't be something anyone has to deal with alone. Consider reaching out to peers and support groups to share experiences and find comfort.

Connect with Each Other: With busy and changing schedules, it's not always easy but it is possible to know how everyone's doing.

- **For the family:** Take regular temperature checks to see how the family is feeling so challenges and concerns can be addressed. Keeping a watchful eye can help in deciding when additional outside support may be needed.
- **For the first responder:** Keep it light when you can. Making time for fun activities like game nights or cooking together can be a nice change of pace and create something to look forward to.

The Fire Captain Ryan J. Mitchell's First Responders Behavioral Health Support Program

First responders are at a greater risk for experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress, depression, substance use disorders and suicidal ideation. Many first responders are reluctant to seek behavioral health services due to the stigma and shame associated with mental illness.

The Fire Captain Ryan J. Mitchell's First Responders Behavioral Health Support Program was created to provide first responders in San Diego County a free and confidential space to seek behavioral health services 24/7 - 365 days a year.

This program aims to increase awareness about local behavioral health resources and decrease the stigma and barriers associated with first responders seeking behavioral health support services.



NEED TO TALK TO SOMEONE?

Unsure of where to go for help? Chat online or call a counselor today!

..... *You are there for us, we are here for you.*

SAN DIEGO FIRST RESPONDER'S PROGRAM

- Free, confidential helpline
- 24 hours a day, 365 days a year
- Staffed by active and retired first responders
- Get connected to local behavioral health and substance use resources

WHO WE SERVE:

First responders in San Diego County

- Emergency Medical Services/Paramedics
- Firefighters
- Law Enforcements
- Lifeguards
- Probation Officers
- 911 Dispatchers

24/7 HELPLINE:

1 (833)-YU-FIRST / 1 (833)-983-4778

Visit: SDFirstRespondersProgram.org

SAN DIEGO ACCESS & CRISIS LINE

- Free confidential support
- Crisis intervention and suicide prevention
- Referrals for mental health and drug and alcohol needs
- All languages
- 7 days a week / 24 hours a day

(888) 724-7240

LIVE CHAT:

- Chat with a counselor today!
- Available Mon-Fri 4-10 p.m.

Visit: OptumHealthSanDiego.com

COMMUNITY RESOURCES:

DIAL 2-1-1

