

# Supporting Officer Safety Through Family Wellness: Helping Your Young Child Understand Your Job

Children of law enforcement officers often face unique challenges when it comes to understanding their parent's job. Below are some suggestions to help navigate potentially tough conversations you may have with your child about what you do for a living. Be sure to tailor your conversation to your child's developmental understanding.

## What is your Job?

**When explaining your job, be sure to use age appropriate language.** Provide examples of how you do your best to keep the community safe and what a typical day looks like. Discuss how you help people, protect people, and stop people from hurting others. Help your child find examples in their own life of how s/he helps others.

[2-5 years old]

*"As a [police officer/trooper/sheriff, etc.] my job is to help people who need it. How do you help people in your life?"*



[6-10 years old]

*"In my job, I do a lot of different things, I help people in need, I try to make people feel safe, and enforce the law."*



## Why are you always gone?

**Your child may notice that your schedule means missing some events.** Be honest with your child about why and when you will have to miss things. Try some of these strategies:

- **Don't make promises you can't keep.** Sometimes things do come up unexpectedly, so be mindful of what you are committing to, as to not overpromise or disappoint your child.
- **Find a special activity or event to enhance special parent/child bonding time.** This will help your child feel more connected to you when you can't be there.
- **Explain why the work you are doing is so important.** Giving a purpose to the absence may bring your child some comfort.

## Is your job dangerous?

**Explain the safety precautions you take to stay safe:** wearing your seatbelt, wearing your protective vest, and using your training. Clarify there is no way to guarantee your safety, but you have all the tools you need to keep you safe.

### **Show your child your vest and duty belt.**

Explain to your child that you are part of a team and that your team is crucial to your safety. Tell them who your teammates are, what they do to keep you safe, and what you do to keep them safe.



# Helping Your Young Child Understand Your Job, continued...

## Signs of Anxiety

Your child may begin to exhibit signs of anxiety when you discuss the dangers of your job. Be mindful in addressing their concerns, assuring them of your safety. Remind them you are protecting the community s/he lives in.

Anxiety is a form of stress, typically focused on what could happen. Some common signs of anxiety include:

- excessive, persistent worrying
- trouble sleeping
- restlessness
- lack of concentration
- irritability.<sup>i</sup>



**Anxiety disorders affect one in eight children.<sup>ii</sup>**

**Model good coping skills to your child. Find healthy outlets for stress and anxiety.** Exercising, journaling, or openly discussing your emotions are all ways to cope with stress and anxiety.

If anxiety results in your child's refusal to go to school, fear of the outside world, or difficulty focusing, schedule an appointment with your child's doctor.

## Firearm Safety

*If you see a firearm, don't touch it, leave the room, and tell an adult.*

**Teach your child what to do if they ever come across a firearm >>>**

Help remove the mystery around your service weapons. Teaching basic gun safety removes some of the curiosity children may have.



In **39%** of gun-owning homes

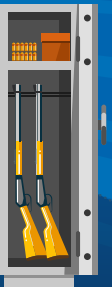
children ages 5-14 know the storage location of a parent's firearm without parental knowledge.



**36%** of children in gun-owning homes

reported handling the firearm, 22% of those parents were unaware.<sup>iii</sup>

**Safe storage is the number one way to prevent firearm accidents.** Weapons should be stored out of reach, in a safe with a lock, and unloaded. Consider adding a trigger lock and a specific gun lock box for storage when your firearm is not on your person.



<sup>i</sup> <http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/anxiety-disorders.html#> Updated March 2014.

<sup>ii</sup> <https://adaa.org/living-with-anxiety/children/treatment>

<sup>iii</sup> Baxley, F., & Miller, M. (2006). Parental misperceptions about children and firearms. *Archives of pediatrics & adolescent medicine*, 160(5), 542-547.



This publication is one in a series. For more family support resources please visit: [www.theiacp.org/ICPRlawenforcementfamily](http://www.theiacp.org/ICPRlawenforcementfamily)

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For more information, contact us at...

@ [ICPR@theIACP.org](mailto:ICPR@theIACP.org)

[theIACP.org/ICPR](http://theIACP.org/ICPR)

800.THE.IACP