

# Leadership Checklist – Starting the Conversation

## 6 Things Command Staff and Supervisors Can Say to an Officer Who has Experienced a Peer or Personal Suicide Loss

While there is no one “right” way to respond to someone who has experienced a suicide loss, research has established best practices for engaging someone who has been impacted. The following are starting points for having a supportive conversation with an officer who has lost someone to suicide. It’s important that officers have open, genuine support from their leadership. Leadership support contributes to officer trust and shows the agency embraces a culture of wellness.

**1. “I’m thinking of you during this difficult time and I’m here for you” or “You have my deepest sympathy.”**

Acknowledge their pain. It can be easy to forget the simple things we say to anyone who has experienced a loss.

**2. “The department is here to support you. Here is what we can do \_\_\_\_\_.”**

Be specific with the person about how the department can support him or her in using resources, taking time off, and accessing services that are available. This will help take pressure off the person to find resources for themselves.

**3. “Have you reached out to \_\_\_\_\_?” or “I’d like to have \_\_\_\_\_ reach out to you.”**

Naming specific, potential resources the person can reach out to may help reduce the burden of decision-making. You can also offer department resources, such as peer support, to reach out to the person. This also reduces the work they may need to do to get additional support. Ensure officers know you are making these suggestions to help them—there should be no concern about job ramifications or breaches of confidentiality.

**4. “How can we support you right now?” “What can I do for you?” “I’ll help however I can.”**

Sometimes people need an open question to talk about what they need. Asking this gives an officer the opportunity to ask for what they need or just talk about how they are feeling and how the department can assist. Having support

from leadership also normalizes and humanizes grief and shows you have their best interests in mind.

**5. “How are you handling this? Losing someone to suicide is traumatic. I want to make sure you’re working through this and have the support you need. Have you had any thoughts about suicide?”**

Losing a friend or family member to suicide can increase a person’s risk of suicide. It is important to check in with officers who were close with the deceased. Be compassionate but direct in your questioning if you are concerned about the officer’s well-being. To be clear, the only way to know if someone is suicidal is by asking them. Be sure to really listen. Officers may often mask their emotions— strive to create a relationship where they can feel comfortable talking to you. Ensure you are prepared should the answer to this question be ‘yes’. Know what resources are available and how to safely get the officer connected with them. National resources are included below. Engage with your wellness team to learn about local resources.

**6. “How have you been doing?”**

Following up a few days and weeks later shows you genuinely care and are not “just doing your job.” Avoid skipping this or minimizing the importance a follow-up can have. To avoid forgetting, set a reminder on your phone or calendar, if needed. It is important to continue to check in with people the further they get from a loss, especially around anniversaries, holidays, and other special days or occasions that may trigger thoughts or feelings about the loss.

Follow-up is also an important part of offering support. Asking these questions once is not enough. Continue to check in and make sure they know that the department is thinking of its personnel and has their back.

Asking these questions can help guide and inform you as a leader on how best to support your officers when they have been impacted by suicide. The following resources can further help you in these efforts to ensure the approach is supportive in an evidence-based and meaningful way.

If you are feeling suicidal, thinking about hurting yourself, or are concerned that someone you know may be in danger of hurting themselves, dial **9-8-8** or call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)**. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and is completely confidential. **Other 24/7 resources are included here:**

## Hotlines

**Suicide and Crisis Lifeline**  
9-8-8

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**  
1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)

**COP LINE**  
1-800-267-5463 (1-800-COPLINE)

**Crisis Text Line**  
Text HOME to 741741

**Safe Call Now**  
(206) 459-3020

**Cop 2 Cop**  
1-866-COP-2COP (1-866-267-2267)

## Resources

### IACP Officer Safety and Wellness Resources

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



- **The National Consortium on Preventing Law Enforcement Suicide Toolkit**
- **Grief and Loss in Law Enforcement: Helping Officers and Agencies Recover and Heal**

### National Consortium on Preventing Law Enforcement Suicide Resource Directory

<https://www.theiacp.org/resources/national-consortium-on-preventing-law-enforcement-suicide-resource-webpage>



### BJA VALOR Officer Safety and Suicide Prevention Resources

<https://bjaj.ojp.gov/program/law-enforcement-officer-safety-and-wellness/preventing-suicide-among-officers>

### Survivors of Blue Suicide

<https://www.survivorsofbluesuicide.org/>

### American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Suicide Loss Survivor Resources

<https://afsp.org/ive-lost-someone>

### National Suicide Awareness for Law Enforcement Officers Program

<https://safleo.org/>

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For more officer wellness resources visit: [www.theIACP.org/OSW](https://www.theIACP.org/OSW)

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