

“I Love a Cop”

Discussion guide:

Meeting with other law enforcement family members to discuss *I Love a Cop* is a great way to build support and reduce isolation. The following questions are suggested prompts to stimulate group discussion, promote learning, and enhance connection between participants so they may become resources for each other. It is not necessary to use each one. Some questions touch on personal issues and require self-disclosure. For this reason, I recommend discussion groups be facilitated by a professional counselor. If no counselor is available, agreeing to the following ground rules will help create an atmosphere of safety and comfort for all participants.

1. A discussion group is not therapy. Members should not engage in psychological exploration nor encourage the expression of intense emotions. Some issues, such as domestic abuse or addictions, may not be appropriate for a group discussion.
2. There is no way to guarantee confidentiality in a group. Ask members to respect each other's privacy and agree that what gets said in the room, stays in the room. (Some participants would prefer to ask questions anonymously by writing them down on a 3x5 card.)
3. Have a back-up plan, a trusted therapist who is familiar with the police culture and is immediately available to assist any individual whose needs exceed what the group can provide or whose issues require confidentiality.
4. Focus on solutions. Avoid gossip, complaining or veering too far from the discussion guide.
5. Treat each other with respect, compassion, and acceptance of individual differences.
6. Be gentle and respectful of each other's feelings when asking questions or seeking clarification. Participation is voluntary. Never force anyone to speak.
7. Avoid giving advice, everyone is different. Instead, share what did or did not work for you.
8. Add to the value of group discussion by having a list of helpful resources available such as confidential counseling, peer support, police chaplains, self-help groups for addictions, and resources for victims of domestic abuse.
9. Make sure everyone who wants to speak gets the opportunity and no one monopolizes the conversation. (Some groups agree to use a timer or other method to fairly share the available time.)
10. Practice open communication. Start each meeting by asking if anyone has something they want to discuss from the previous meeting. Take time at the end of the current meeting to check-in with each other. Make certain no one goes home upset, angry or feeling uncomfortable for any reason.

Chapter 1: Living Through Troubled Times

What type of support do you and your family need during high stress times for law enforcement? How do you deal with negative media or negative community reactions?

How concerned are you for your loved one's safety? What could you do to cope? What could your significant other do to help you?

Have you tried any of the ten suggestions in Chapter 1? What worked? What didn't work? Why?

Chapter 2: Married to the Job

What personality traits in your significant other are important to you?

What qualities in your relationship do you value and enjoy?

When do you feel closest to your partner?

When do you feel most understood?

Working as a team is important for first responders, how do you create "team" in your relationship? What improvements would you like to make?

What do you think your partner wants you to understand about him or her?

What do you think your partner wants you to understand about his or her job?

What do you most want your partner to understand about you?

What do you most want your partner to understand about how his or her job affects you?

Does work related stress affect your relationship with your significant other? How?

What could be improved in the communication between you and your significant other?

What are ways to restore a "lost friendship" with your significant other? Why is friendship to preserve or restore?

Do you identify as being co-dependent? What can you do about it?

Chapter 3: The Way it Is

What adaptive coping skills have been useful when navigating your significant other's work schedule and unexpected events?

What support systems do you have in place for dealing with the unpredictable absences or changes related to your first responder's schedule?

How has loneliness affected you? How? What can you do to cope?

Do you experience public scrutiny? How do you deal with unwelcome comments? How do you help your children deal with unwelcome comments?

First responders have two families (home and work), how do you preserve your family environment? How do you keep from feeling like you are playing second-fiddle to your loved one's job?

Chapter 4: The Police Officer's Paradox

Do you find yourself compensating for your first responder's habitual work habits both at home and socially?

Do your loved one's work-related behaviors (command presence, emotional control, hypervigilance, etc.) spillover into your relationship? How do you cope?

How do you preserve your sense of safety in the world versus your partner's hypervigilance?

Chapter 5: Growing Old in a Young Person's Profession

| As you navigate different phases of your partner's career over time, what changes have you and your family needed to make?

| All relationships change over time. What are the ways you can renew your relationship?

What social support do you find most beneficial to ease the stress of navigating these changes?

Knowing the different phases of a law enforcement career, what advice or suggestions would you offer to others?

Chapter 6: Organizational Stress

In what ways has organizational stress impacted your relationship and the family?

During times of organizational betrayal (e.g. poor leadership decisions, not getting promoted, department politics etc.), what support have you needed? What coping skills have you found useful?

Chapter 7: Critical Incidents, Stress and Trauma

After a critical incident, what changes have you noticed in your partner? Have they been short-term or long lasting?

Have you been a target for displaced feelings after your partner experienced heightened stress or trauma at work?

What do you and your family need to help you cope with the aftermath of your significant other's traumatic incident? Do you know where to get help?

Chapter 8: From Victim to Survivor

Do you see changes towards posttraumatic growth in your partner?

In what ways do you notice recovery in your partner?

What expectations do you have for participation in family activities? Are your expectations reasonable?

Chapter 9: From Battlefield to Homefront

After a work-related trauma, how do you restore safety and a sense of normalcy at home?

How do you resolve tensions that may surface after experiencing trauma?

If you experience emotional distancing from your law-enforcement partner after a traumatic event, what are effective ways to close this distance?

After a traumatic incident, your significant other may be receiving a lot of support at work. What support do you need to avoid isolation? Where would you go to get it?

Chapter 10: Kids and Trauma

Law enforcement families are at risk of exposure to unwanted attention. For children, this can happen at school, with friends, or on social media. How can you help your children deal with this unwanted attention?

In the event of a major disaster, such as an earthquake, your significant other may be called into work. Do you have contingency plans for the family?

What ideas do you have for preparing children for unexpected events or crises? How do you calm their fears after such an event?

Chapter 11: Domestic Abuse

How do you define domestic abuse (also known as intimate partner violence)?

The decision to report domestic abuse is an individual choice as is the decision to leave an abusive relationship. There is danger in either decision. What resources are available to keep a victim and his or her family safe?

What does an effective “emergency plan” look like?

Chapter 12: Alcoholism, Suicide and Addiction

If you need to plan an intervention for a loved one, who would you contact?

Are you familiar with department and community resources for yourself and your loved one? What 12-Step programs might be helpful to each of you?

If you or your loved one are struggling with suicidality, alcoholism or addiction, what do you need for support and safety? What are your resources?

Chapter 13: Getting the Help you need when you need it

Law Enforcement Officers are generally resistant to getting outside help when they are in despair. What is the appropriate balance between handling things on their own and reaching out for help from outside resources?

If your loved one refuses to get outside help, should you reach out and ask for help for yourself?

What are some signs you or your family members need professional assistance?

Chapter 14: Swimming Upstream

In what ways are ethnic minorities, women, and LGBTQ officers an asset to the law enforcement profession? What unique attributes do they contribute to community policing?

If your law enforcement partner is experiencing harassment or discrimination in the workplace, how can you support them? What support do you need for yourself?

Chapter 15: Cop Couples

Law enforcement couples face many additional challenges both at work and home. If you are a law enforcement couple, what do you think is useful and important to preserve your relationship?

During off-duty time, what types of activities might be helpful to strengthen your connection with each other?

How can you create a home culture that is separate and distinct from the law enforcement culture?

Chapter 16: Success Stories

How did the law enforcement officers profiled in this book successfully overcome their challenges? Were there any similarities? Patterns of behavior?

What are ideas that you would like to explore further for your own circumstances?

How will you proceed in protecting your relationship and family against the stressors associated with the law enforcement profession? What do you need your partner to stop, start or begin doing? What do you think your partner wants you to stop, start or continue doing?

After reading "I Love a Cop", do you have a different opinion or perspective on the first responder culture and the impact it has on significant others and family members?

Summing Up (Last session)

In what ways has this discussion group been of benefit to you?

What would you like to see changed or improved?

For those who want to stay in touch, what is the most effective way to do this?