



Massachusetts State Peer Support Network

Suicide

Firefighters are routinely expected to deal with difficult and unique challenges, including death or serious injury of civilians at fires or motor vehicle crashes, deaths of co-workers on the job, as well as the physical and emotional stresses of firefighting, emergency medical responses, and rescue. At the same time, firefighters must deal with more routine challenges such as relationships, financial difficulties, legal matters, work related stressors and health concerns. While most firefighters deal effectively with these challenges, others may suffer from depression, isolation or other behavioral issues such as substance abuse or addictive behaviors. Unfortunately, some see suicide as the only option.

There has been an increase in suicide and suicidal behavior among firefighters in the United States over the past several years. As with safety on the fireground, the key to preventing firefighter suicide is awareness. To help prevent firefighter suicide fellow firefighters need to be aware of the risk factors of suicide, aware of the warning signs of suicide and to monitor each other's emotional well being.

Awareness of the Warning Signs

Someone may be at risk of suicide if they:

- Talk about committing suicide
- Have attempted suicide before
- Increase their use of alcohol or drugs
- Experience drastic changes in behavior
- Give away prized possessions
- Have had recent severe losses
- Lose of interest in personal appearance
- Lose of interest in hobbies, or work
- Take unnecessary risks
- Withdraw from friends or social activities

Awareness of What to Do

If you believe someone is at risk of suicide, be direct. Talk openly and matter-of-factly about suicide. Talking about suicide will not cause someone to attempt it; in fact talking about suicide can be the first step in preventing it. If you recognize the warning signs of suicide, ask the person directly if they are thinking about suicide. Suggested approaches include:

“Are you thinking about suicide?”

“Have you ever thought of hurting yourself?”

“Have you thought of how you could kill yourself?”

If someone answers yes to any of these questions they are at risk of suicide, take action; if possible remove any means, such as guns or pills. Do not leave the person alone. Don't be sworn to secrecy. Don't act shocked. Immediately escort the person to a care provider, and seek support from persons or agencies specializing in crisis intervention and suicide prevention. Never leave an at risk firefighter alone with the promise that he/she is not going to harm themselves, just as you wouldn't leave them on the fireground.

If you recognize the signs of suicidal behavior or you personally feel hopeless and sad, help is available.

The Mass State Peer Support Network and local CISM Teams are available to help. Crisis Interventionists are on call 24/7 through by calling the team contacts or MEMA at 508-820-2000.

*Samaritans Statewide Hotline: 1-877-870-HOPE (4673)
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255),
Press # 1 if you are a Veteran*