

# Families Guide

A resource for families of Victorian Emergency Service volunteers.





## Contents

1. Introduction
2. It's a job with a difference.
3. Why is mental fitness important?
4. Things to remember.
5. The role of families
6. Recognising the early warning signs
7. The mental health continuum model
8. Supporting emergency service workers
  - Initiating conversations
  - Building a support crew
  - Prescription for wellbeing
9. Taking care of yourself
10. Supporting children of emergency service workers
11. Help is available

## Acknowledgement

This resource has been developed with reference to:

Military and Emergency Services Health Australia

BC WorkSafe

Beyond Blue

Ambulance Victoria

The findings of ESFs studies, and the families of emergency service workers who provided valuable feedback on the content.

# Introduction

Families play a vital role in supporting emergency service workers to be mentally fit for the important work they do in serving our community.

This Guide is intended to help families of emergency service workers – especially families of volunteers.

It has been developed with input from partners, children and other relatives who have experience living with an emergency service worker. We listened to their stories and have tried to address their needs and concerns in a practical way.

No one is an island. We know the stress and strain from trying to integrate many roles can have a negative ripple effect into family life, yet volunteers often rely on their family to support them to do important emergency service work whether it be in preparing the community, responding to disaster, or supporting the recovery process.

ESF has spoken to many emergency service volunteers, and has learned that despite the challenges, most who serve as emergency service volunteers are totally committed to their community and their role as an emergency service volunteer.

Families share their commitment and are usually keen to support their family members who volunteer. They often feel a real sense of pride in the work their loved one does, and they generally want to know more about how they can support the wellbeing of their family member.

Like volunteers, families live with the unpredictability of emergency services work, call outs, deployments, and the fear of major incidents. There is growing recognition that what affects the volunteer invariably affects their relationships with partners, children, and other family members.

Families are often left to keep the domestic show on the road when the emergency service worker is absent on callouts, deployments, training or shift work, often with no advance notice – in this way, families serve too!

ESF's research showed that more needs to be done to support families and this is just the start.



This guide will help you to:

- 1 Understand how family can support emergency service volunteers.**
- 2 Recognise the signs of mental distress.**
- 3 Support and talk to the emergency service volunteer in your family about how they have been impacted by the work they do.**
- 4 Support and talk to your children about emergency services work.**
- 5 Know where to go for help if you or the emergency services volunteer in your family needs it.**

## It's a job with a difference.

In Victoria, almost 100,000 people are emergency volunteers. These volunteers effectively have two jobs in addition to their other important roles as parent, partner, carer, child, friend. It can be very demanding and potentially stressful at times juggling and trying to balance the demands of each role.

The nature of emergency service work means volunteers may be exposed to potentially traumatic events. They may also experience a range of common workplace stressors typical in any workplace, such as excessive workloads, inadequate support, interpersonal conflict, and bullying. All these things have the potential to impact the personal wellbeing of a volunteer and, through association, their family.

We all need to be mindful of the things in our daily lives which have the potential to negatively impact our wellbeing. We need to ensure mental fitness is a priority - take care of our minds, just as we take care of our bodies.



## Why is mental fitness important?

It is important to know the difference between **mental fitness** and **mental illness**.

**Mental fitness** recognises that our mental wellbeing fluctuates up and down even in one day. At times we feel great – welcoming the challenges of life and meeting them with vigour and strength. Yet there will also be times when we find ourselves feeling a bit down, sluggish, and impatient.

**Mental illness** on the other hand is how mental health professionals diagnose people whose mental fitness has fallen below a defined level. Some examples of mental illness are generalised anxiety disorder, major depressive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

People often self-diagnose as having PTSD, but it is an illness that must be diagnosed by a mental health professional. It refers to people who display a unique combination of significant symptoms one month after an incident.

Mental fitness as a sliding scale, often depicted using colour ranging from green to red, is a helpful way of supporting emergency services families to think about mental wellbeing.

The more mentally fit we are the more we can adapt to changes that naturally occur in life, such as moving to a new house, birth of a child, death of a parent, change of career. Ideally, over time our brains help us to cope with such stressors in our lives as we learn to think, feel, and act in more helpful ways in response to the challenges we face. Young children and even adolescent's brains are very early on this lifelong journey of learning how to respond to challenges in effective ways, so it can be particularly difficult for them.

Experiencing emotions such as sadness, worry, or anger is a normal part of good mental health. Feeling stressed does not mean you don't have good mental health. In fact, some level of stress is required for optimal performance in any aspect of life. It is normal

for an emergency service worker to react to a tough situation with emotion. Soon after dealing with a tough situation, one would expect to experience some difficulties with sleep, mood, concentration, frustration in others and general irritability. This does not mean they have poor mental health or PTSD.

### How will you know it is time to connect with outside help?

A key point to remember is that everyday distress does not require professional treatment. We can flourish amid this stress by drawing on healthy coping strategies such as exercise, relaxation techniques, time enjoying hobbies and the support of those around us like family and friends.

In times of significant, prolonged, or repeated stress, you can use your own coping mechanisms and add in extra professional help such as a support group or meeting individually with a professional. There are numerous evidence-informed options you and a professional can employ together to get you back on track.

Like physical fitness, mental fitness is not just important for our volunteering or paid work but benefits all aspects of our lives.

## Things to remember.

Often it is families or loved ones who are the first to notice concerning changes in behaviour or mood of their emergency service worker. The sooner you seek help the less support is needed and the more likely you are to recover quickly. Like physical health challenges, the sooner mental health challenges can be addressed the better and, as always, prevention is better than cure. We want to address a headache before it become a debilitating migraine.

### Three things to consider when thinking about connecting for support.

**1** Have you noticed a change in yourself or has someone you trust mentioned they've noticed changes in your behaviour or mood?

**2** Are things (signs and symptoms) getting worse or more persistent?

**3** Are these changes starting to interfere with daily living at home with your partner or parenting, socially or at work.

Individuals experiencing low mental fitness can turn this around with the appropriate support from family, friends, the workplace, and health care professionals. Families in particular, play a vital role in breaking down barriers and enhancing the likelihood of their emergency service loved one seeking support. There is undoubtedly stigma around mental health

amongst emergency service workers, but this need not be the case if mental health is thought of the same as physical health. We would have no hesitation in seeking help for a fractured limb or unexplained pain. And we should have no hesitation seeking help if we are feeling a decline in our mental health.

## Wellbeing challenges come in all shapes and sizes.





## The role of families

We like to think of home as a safe place – and in the case of an emergency services volunteer, a place to relax, process and recharge once the uniform comes off.

Supporting the emergency service worker in your family can be challenging at times. They can work long hours, unintentionally bringing work-related stress home, and can be more susceptible to reduced mental fitness. As someone who interacts with the emergency service worker daily, family members play a key role in supporting their mental wellbeing. This support involves recognising signs and symptoms of poor mental wellbeing, engaging in conversations about these challenges, encouraging healthy practices, understanding available resources, and prioritising your own well-being.

Communication can be difficult for emergency service families, especially when the volunteer is hesitant to discuss work-related matters. This lack of communication can contribute to their disconnection and isolation from primary support systems. While there's no one-size-fits-all approach to healthy communication, ideally families should discuss and establish boundaries and expectations together.

Each family needs to find the right balance between sharing all details associated with emergency services work and saying nothing about the emergency services work. Both these extremes are unhealthy, but the right balance will be different for each family and potentially change as children age.



## Recognising the early warning signs

Usually, emergency service workers go through a stressful encounter and have no problem bouncing back within a few days. Debriefs and reflective practice at the station/unit often help. However, every person and every stressful encounter are different, and individuals will react to each encounter differently. Some of the factors that impact the reactions a person might experience include:

- Current stress levels outside of the encounter including paid work pressures, health concerns, financial worries, and relationship challenges.
- The past operational experiences of the emergency services worker
- Unique characteristics of the encounter such as whether children were involved or whether the casualty was a person the worker knows – which is often the case for volunteers working close to home.

The key to recognising the early warning signs is CHANGE. Be aware of changes in usual mood and behaviour and be prepared to open the conversation based on what you have noticed. Keeping a diary may help identify patterns and triggers.

Encourage your loved one to consider seeking help if they are experiencing any of the following:

- **Difficulty sleeping, including frequent nightmares or night terrors.**
- **Unwanted thoughts or feelings that affect concentration.**
- **Flashbacks**
- **Persistent fatigue**
- **Loss of interest in usually enjoyable activities**
- **Irritability or impatience toward others**
- **Excessive substance use such as to alcohol, illicit drugs, or abuse of prescription drugs.**
- **Excessive engagement in 'distracting' behaviours such as gambling, pornography, or work**
- **Self-insolating behaviours, including a lack of interest in social connection.**
- **Misplaced feelings of hopelessness, shame, or guilt**
- **Not prioritising of important relationships**
- **Neglecting personal care and hygiene**



# The Mental Health Continuum Model

We all have good days and bad days and on any given day we can find our mental fitness goes up and down. It is impacted by internal changes to what we think or how we feel but also external changes such as news we might hear, people we interact with and situations we find ourselves in.

The Mental Health Continuum illustrates some variables of wellbeing including our mood, attitude, behaviours, and habits.

Although everyone's signs and symptoms are different, there are some common indicators that many people experience. Noticing some of the more concerning signs and symptoms in your loved one may be an indicator that it would be wise to have a conversation with them.

The Mental Health Continuum here as adapted by Ambulance Victoria is a helpful self-assessment tool that can be useful to evaluate mental fitness.

## AV Mental Health Continuum Support options and actions



### Five things to notice. Four colours to choose from. Two steps to follow.

#### Five things to notice

There are lots of things that can impact our mental health, so we need to pay attention to where we are in the current climate and to take a metaphoric temperature check of how we're feeling and responding to it.

We have identified five factors you should take notice of that will help you tune into what you're thinking, feeling, doing and seeing in yourself or in others.

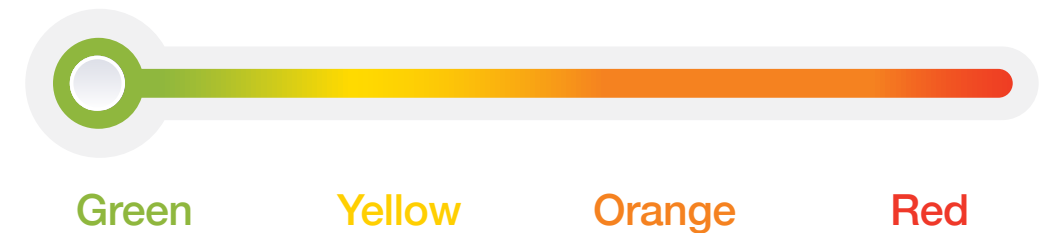


Look at the different factors and see which ones resonate with you so you can better understand where you're sitting on the continuum and to build insight and understanding of where others might be.

#### Four colours to choose from

Our mental health naturally fluctuates so understanding our changing needs means we can be better equipped to respond to it and to be more proactive in maintaining it.

The four colours correspond to the different factors and to the kinds of support services that are available to you.







Using the different colours is one way to communicate your mental health and wellbeing with others and to identify what you can do to positively impact it so you can stay in or get back to green.

#### Two steps to follow

1. Look at the AV Mental Health Continuum and notice what resonates today
2. Decide which colour category most of your responses are in, look at the suggested actions in that colour, choose what is right for you.

# AV Mental Health Continuum What to notice



	I'm doing what I need, and want, to do	I'm mainly doing what I need to do	It's harder, and taking me longer, to do what I need to do	I'm unable to do what I need to do
 <b>Moods &amp; Emotions</b>	Generally calm Confident Sense of purpose	Sometimes irritable Impatient Nervous A little flat	Regularly angry More anxious Often sad or low	Depressed Highly anxious Numb
 <b>Attitudes &amp; Thinking</b>	Positive outlook Sense of humour Easy to focus Generally decisive	Repetitive thoughts Forgetful Indecisive More frustrated by things	Easily annoyed Worrying constantly Difficulty making decisions	Defensive Not taking action, just letting things happen Often forgetful Can't think clearly May have suicidal thoughts
 <b>Behaviour &amp; Performance</b>	Usual levels of activity Sociable Consistent	Less active Less social Distracted Less organised Misplaced sarcasm	Lacking motivation Avoiding social situations At work but not productive Disorganised or late to things Snappy with people	Withdrawn Avoiding people Taking more sick leave Unable to complete tasks Regular arguments or disputes
 <b>Health &amp; Wellbeing</b>	Usual sleep patterns Usual appetite Energised Practicing self-care	Restless sleep Appetite changes Often tired	Trouble getting to or staying asleep Increased, or lack of, appetite Always tired Weight changes	Disrupted sleep pattern No appetite Prolonged exhaustion Unable to manage daily tasks
 <b>Habits &amp; Impulses</b> (eg shopping, eating, excessive exercise)	Usual patterns of coping and behaviour Responsive not reactive	Increased alcohol consumption and addictive behaviours More impulsive	Regular excessive drinking Struggle to control addictive behaviour More risk taking Actions have significant negative impacts	Uncontrollable addiction Regular risk taking Disregard for consequences



# AV Mental Health Continuum Support options and actions



	I want to maintain balance, work routines and connection with family and friends.	I want to take some time to focus on things that help me get back into the green.	I want extra support. I'm open to doing things differently to support my wellbeing.	I need extra support, to focus on my wellbeing, decrease distress, improve my ability to function.
<b>Support options to choose from</b>	Build knowledge and learn to protect or act early		Actively manage your wellbeing using your existing skills or seek extra support and professional care	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer support</li> <li>• Pastoral care</li> <li>• Psychology services</li> <li>• EAP confidential counselling</li> <li>• Specialised online programs</li> <li>• GP</li> <li>• Allied health</li> <li>• Gym</li> <li>• Community groups</li> <li>• Family and friends</li> <li>• Psychiatrists</li> <li>• Community health centres</li> <li>• Online forums</li> </ul>	<p>Keep your wellbeing in balance and use resources available when stress increases.</p> <p>Learn to recognise your signs of stress and the things that help you maintain balance e.g. talking to someone you trust, exercise, seeing your psychologist.</p> <p>Prepare a wellbeing plan to use when times get tough.</p> <p>Use Wellbeing and Support Services education programs to build your skills to protect and support your wellbeing in difficult times.</p>	<p>Start to act when you notice you're moving out of the Green.</p> <p>Put your wellbeing plan into action or get support to create one.</p> <p>Use strategies that have helped you in the past.</p> <p>Try something different, like an early appointment with a psychologist or call the 24/7 counselling line for a strategy to help you in the moment e.g. if your thoughts are stopping you sleeping.</p>	<p>Move your wellbeing to the top of the priority list.</p> <p>Activate your wellbeing plan, if you have one.</p> <p>Talk to someone you trust.</p> <p>Seek professional help to manage your mental health.</p> <p>Contact Wellbeing and Support Services for support and treatment options.</p>	<p>Immediate action is recommended.</p> <p>Tell someone you trust you're in the Red. Engage with your personal, and professional, support networks.</p> <p>Take notice when someone asks you if you're ok and offers support.</p> <p>Visit your GP or other health professionals for more options.</p>



# Supporting Emergency Service Workers

## Don't be afraid to say what you see!

Having a trusted person say that they have noticed a change in us can be what gets us thinking 'I need help' and the earlier that someone seeks help the less likely their condition will develop into something more serious.

## Initiating a Conversation

It's not uncommon to feel uncertain about discussing mental health and worry about saying the wrong things. Here are some constructive phrases, derived from the experiences of individuals who have experienced low mental fitness, which are particularly helpful during challenging times. These statements aim to create a conversation where someone feels heard, understood, and hopeful about the possibility of improvement."

**"I've noticed you don't seem yourself lately, are you doing OK" or "I've noticed this change in you..., are you alright?"**

Telling people, the change you've noticed shows them you care enough to pay attention. It may also help them think about changes they have been trying to 'fob-off' or minimise.

**"I'm here for you."**

Expressing explicit support and commitment during recovery can be immensely comforting to individuals dealing with anxiety and depression, who often feel isolated.

**"I can see this is a really hard time for you."**

Validating the difficulty of the experience is one of the most helpful things you can say. Avoiding statements that shut down the conversation, such as "I know how you feel" or "You'll be alright," is crucial.

**"Are you considering suicide or self-harm?"**

Don't hesitate to ask this question. If the answer is affirmative, express gratitude for their trust, reassure them of your love and support, and help in connecting immediately with crisis support.

**"What would be most helpful for you right now?"**

Encourage honesty about how you can provide support. Recognise that their needs may change throughout their recovery, so be flexible in your assistance.

**"I'm not sure what to do, but I'm sure we can figure it out together."**

Acknowledging that you may not have all the answers but are committed to staying and helping figure out a way forward is important.

**"It sounds like you are in a difficult period right now."**

Promote hope by reminding them that diminished mental fitness is normal and often seasonal, and with the right support, most people recover..

**"Have you thought about seeing your doctor or calling the employee assistance program?"**

Emphasise the significance of seeking professional support. While friends and family can offer substantial support, professionals play a crucial role in promoting mental fitness and fostering recovery.

**"Are there resources or people at (agency) I can contact for us?"**

Request permission to reach out on behalf of your family member, allowing you to discover available supports that may be in place.

*\*Derived in part from "What to say and why" by Beyond Blue*

Another good reference for speaking with people about mental health concerns is the [RUOK guide available here.](#)

**Typically, people say 'I'm fine' when you first show concern. Don't give up. Be sure to ask again.**

## Building a support crew

Everybody needs a team of people that are there for you in times of need. They are responsive to your different needs – practical and emotional - and work to keep you on the road or get you back on the road if needed.

Family is usually the key support crew of emergency service workers, but not the only ones. Encouraging your loved one to build a support crew and knowing who they are can be really helpful.

## Who are your support crew?

It is important to assemble and nurture your crew before you need them. Once you have identified who your support crew are, let them know how important their relationship is to you.

It could be a useful activity for each family member to identify and reflect on or list the individuals who provide support in their lives. For example:

- Who do you get practical support from – the person who mows the lawn, brings a casserole, or takes you to an appointment?
- Who do you get emotional support from – the person you feel comfortable talking openly and honestly with about your concerns and who you know will provide a non-judgemental response?
- Who do you go to for information – the person who can help you 'navigate the system' to get the answers you need?

Who builds your esteem – the person who makes you feel good about yourself?

## Prescription for wellbeing

Being mentally fit and staying that way takes effort. It is called self-care. We all need to do it but too often our busy lives get in the way. Prevention is the best medicine and helps build resilience to stress.

We are all unique and need different things to make us feel supported. You won't know if you don't ask, 'what do you need right now?'

Some examples of self-care may be:

- Having someone to talk with – professional or otherwise.
- Releasing emotions through creative expression
- Practicing relaxation – yoga, meditation, mindfulness
- Proper sleep
- Balanced and nutritious diet
- Having a support crew to call on.
- Taking a break – time away from work (physically AND digitally)
- Being physically active
- Making time for activities or hobbies you enjoy
- Getting out in nature – 'feeling blue - go green'.
- Nurturing your spirituality
- Bringing focus to positives in life no matter how small – reminding yourself on a daily basis what you are grateful for
- Not being afraid to seek professional help.

Remember, some individuals may need space to privately process their emergency services experiences, and some may want to protect their family from the details. Be patient and understanding. Remind them of their strengths and the important role they play in protecting the community.



## Taking care of yourself

The stress of the job doesn't affect only the emergency service worker, it can also impact families. Family members must prioritise self-care to effectively support their loved ones.

Seeking your own support, whether from trusted family or friends or a professional, can be beneficial. Mental fitness challenges in one family member can impact the entire family, making it wise to seek support for the family as a whole if required.

It's crucial to recognise that your own needs are equally important as those of your emergency services worker. If you're not well, supporting someone else becomes more challenging.

Know your boundaries. Decide what you are comfortable hearing about the job and make sure that is understood. Maybe have a code word to bring the conversation to a stop if you are feeling uncomfortable.



Consider the following tips.

### 1 Acknowledge your feelings and understand you're not alone

Experiencing a range of emotions when a loved one is struggling with their mental wellbeing is natural. Many people face similar challenges and navigate a complex mix of emotions. Allow yourself to feel whatever emotions arise.

### 2 Expand your knowledge

Invest time in learning more about wellbeing. This effort will enhance your understanding of your loved one's experiences and provide insight into what they might be going through.

### 3 Maintain Connections

It's essential to stay connected with friends and family. Open up to trusted individuals about your experiences and lean on your support crew when needed. If you're unsure where to turn for support, there are some resources listed at the end of this guidebook.

### 4 Prioritise Self-Care

Taking time for yourself is crucial. It allows you to recharge and gain a more balanced perspective on any challenges you may be facing. Schedule opportunities for relaxation, enjoyment, and personal time away, enabling you to return to your loved one with a healthier outlook. Remember, caring for others is only sustainable when you have taken care of yourself first.



# Supporting children of emergency service workers

You won't be the only one who may notice changes in your emergency services worker. Your kids will too, and they may need help to understand what is going on.

Children of emergency service workers grow up in a unique family environment. Some children may worry about their caregiver's safety when they are at work or not understand why their caregiver sometimes behaves in a different way when they return home from volunteering. When parents or caregivers miss big celebrations like birthdays, Christmas, or school events this can be upsetting and confusing. Concerns may be intensified by exposure to news reports and discussions with peers at school.

It's vital to recognise that children of emergency service workers may face additional struggles. Children might also mistakenly feel responsible for their parent's struggles. Communicate to your child that the changes they observe are not their fault. If your child is acting out or struggling, initiate a conversation to understand their experiences without passing judgement.

Having age-appropriate discussions with children will help them to understand what their parent or caregiver's emergency service role involves and what keeps them safe can ease worries. It may be helpful to take children on a tour of the unit or station and show them response vehicles being sure to highlight the safety equipment that lets the emergency services worker do a dangerous job but helps to protect them from getting hurt.

Make sure to choose an appropriate time to start a conversation and have several different conversations over time and not all at once. If your conversation is met with resistance, it may be best to keep the conversation short and come back to it later. Be as honest and open as you can be in an age-appropriate way.

Sometimes stories help to explain the work of an emergency service worker. Ask at the bookstore for such stories or look online. There are plenty available.

Help your child to understand that moods and feelings can fluctuate. Let them know it's important to ask for help if they are feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or upset. Encourage them to open up and listen without judgement.

ESFs Flourishing Families mood map for children can help kids identify how they feel without having to put it into words.



# Initiating a conversation and connection

## Provide reassurance

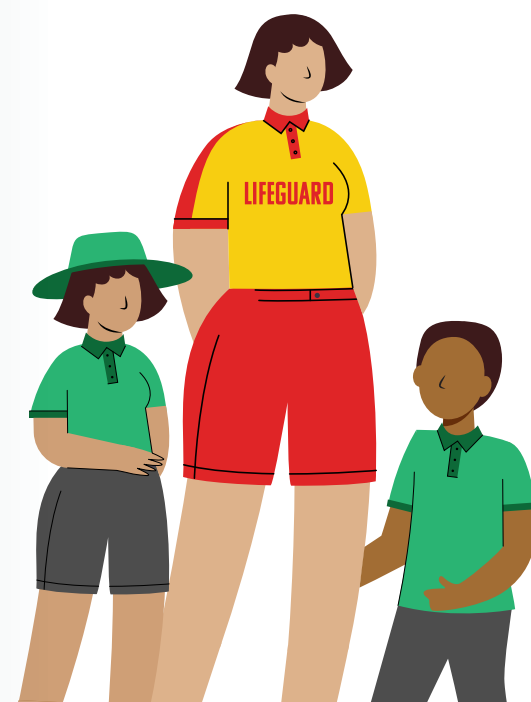
Explain why emergency services work is important and what emergency service workers do to protect the community and help people. Relate this back to their life and the things they do to help others.

Outline what a typical day at work looks like for an emergency services worker. It is not all dangerous.

Explain how the clothing and tools emergency service workers wear at work and the safety training they receive help to keep them safe at work. Show the child the uniform and any tools used at work. Explain how colleagues work together as a team and protect one another. It may even help if they meet some of the people you work closely with.

Talk about the media and how it often focuses on and repeats bad news, and this is not an accurate representation of the work you do. Share any good news stories from work.

Explain that sometimes your work is stressful and show them where you sit on the Mental Health Continuum sometimes after a stressful day. Helping children understand what you need when you get home from a hard day will help them to understand your behaviour is due to work and not them. Explain that sometimes I'm grumpy, sleepy, or quiet and just need some time to rest and recharge but it is not your fault.



## Provide connection

Explain why sometimes, mum or dad may miss big celebrations such as birthdays, Christmas, school events or other milestones. Help children understand the purpose of your absence. Try not to make promises you may not be able to keep, this could lead to disappointment. Reassure children that they are loved, and it makes you sad too that you miss events sometimes.

Prioritise spending quality time one on one when off duty. Choosing an activity that your child enjoys is a great way to connect. Maintaining a strong relationship will make your child feel more connected and more likely to express how they feel.

Make time to be truly off duty. -unable to be paged or turn out so that you can spend uninterrupted time with your family. It is good for you and your family to have brief times when your emergency services work does not come first.

Encourage discussion of their feelings and fears. Children often find it hard to put into words how they are feeling. Creative activities like art, storytelling and dance can be a powerful way for children to express themselves.

Try and seek out someone children can speak with who understand the challenges emergency services work can have on families.

## Support for young people and parents

With open communication and a balanced prioritising of emergency services work by the parent, most children of emergency services workers are just fine. In fact, many of them feel proud of the work their volunteering caregiver does for the community and it is a great way of modelling personal characteristics such as selflessness, care and community spirit.

However, there may be times when families of emergency services worker would benefit from external support and there are several services that may be helpful.



## Help is available

Family members should be aware of where to direct their loved ones for resources and support. Emergency service agencies typically have an array of resources available to support the mental well-being of workers and their families. Additionally, there are various community support options available to the public.



These often include:

- **Peer Support** – these are emergency services workers that have received additional training to help their colleagues.
- **Chaplains** – these are a variety of clergy that have been identified (and often trained) by the agency to provide support to their members.
- **Employee Assistance Program (EAP)** – this is a free counselling service available to emergency services workers and usually their families as well.

**CFA** Wellbeing support line 1800 959 232

**Ambulance Victoria** 1800 626 377

**SES** Peer support and wellbeing team  
1800 899 927

**Life Saving Victoria** EAP/Benestar 1300 360 364

**St John** Volunteer Peer Support 1300 853 515,  
EAP/ Converge 1300 687 327

**Victorian Council of Churches Emergency Ministry** EAP/ Mind Fit At Work 1800 862 042

**Wildlife Victoria** EAP/ Sonder 1800 234 560

**Red Cross** EAP/ Converge 1300 687 327

In addition, there are several community services available such as:

- Your GP
- School welfare department
- **Responder Assist** - a place of mental health information, resources and training for emergency workers, their families and the professionals who support them.
- **Lifeline** - a national charity providing all Australians experiencing emotional distress with access to 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention services. 13 11 14
- **Beyond Blue** - free mental health service that provides someone to talk with.
- **Fortem Australia** - free support for first responders and their families
- **Black Dog Institute** - for a free evidence based smart phone app 'Sleep Ninja' to help young people with sleep problems and general information about caring for friends and family who work in emergency services.
- **Relationships Victoria** offer a range of free specialised services including for those in disaster affected areas.
- **Mensline** – free 24/7 phone and online support specifically for men in relation to emotional, family and relationship issues. Call 1300 78 99 78
- **Headspace** – online mental health support for adolescents, young adults, and their parents
- **ReachOut** – online mental health support for young people and their parents
- **Kids Helpline** - free (even from a mobile), confidential, 24/7 online and phone counselling service for young people aged 5 – 25 call 1800 55 1800.



**Emergency Services Foundation**  
**PO Box 281, McCrae, VIC 3938**  
**ABN: 79 836 849 617**