

Behavioral Health Program

Introduction: Most of us are aware of the physical demands that firefighters and EMS providers undergo through their career. Fire service leaders and behavior health professionals now recognize they face many of the following behavioral challenges because of their work such as anxiety, depression, burnout, stress disorders, and addiction. Clinical research and the claims experience of SDIS demonstrates that firefighter longevity and overall health are tied directly to strong behavioral health practices on both personal and agency-wide levels. The goal of creating a program is not to diagnose and cure individuals, but simply create an environment where tools and assistance are readily available, promoted, and utilized by everyone including family members. To that end, SDAO and SDIS have partnered with several professional organizations to provide mental health resources. SDAO Risk Management can assist you with accessing these resources. One such resource is: <http://www.everyonegoeshome.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/12/behavioral-health-mgmt-guide-122017.pdf>

Board and Management Duties

- The district has policies and guidelines in place that define the behavioral health program, such as:
 - Appropriate confidentiality and necessary disclosure (intention of self-harm, suicide, etc.)
 - Confidential tracking of usage
 - Minimum and preferred qualifications of peer support personnel
 - Wellness of peer supporters
 - Expectations for leadership support of the program
 - Financial support and funding of resources
- The district works with culturally competent and trained mental health professionals (i.e., EAP, local clinicians and clergy with a practice focused on or specialized training for public safety personnel).
- The district actively promotes behavioral health resources to members and their family (EAP, local clinicians, chaplains, etc.).
 - SDIS provides low-cost access to www.PublicSafetyEAP.com for all fire district members.
- The district has trained members actively involved in peer-support roles.
 - SDAO has partnered with www.nwpeersupport.org to assist in implementing peer-support.
- The district provides regular training on the following subjects to all members:
 - General understanding of behavioral health and the available resources
 - How to perform self-care
 - How to utilize an after-action report (AAR)
 - How to recognize individuals in crisis and connecting them to resources
- The district provides appropriate and regular behavioral health training to **supervisory personnel**.
- The district provides appropriate and regular behavioral health training to **peer support personnel**.

Sample Mental Health Self-assessment for personnel

This self-assessment was adapted from the Firefighter Behavioral Health Alliance self-assessment tool.

<https://www.ffbha.org/resources/suicide-questionnaire/> If you answer yes to 3 or more questions, we recommend that you seek care from a local chaplain, peer support team member, the Public Safety EAP, or a mental health clinician who has expertise in providing care to public safety professionals. **If you answered yes to the last two bolded questions, please seek support immediately from 911, calling the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-8255 or calling the Share the Load Program 1-888-731-3473.** Once you receive help from one of these make contact with a trusted family member, friend, local chaplain, or counselor.

- Do you feel like a burden to your family, friends, or your agency?
- Do you feel the world would be better without you in it?
- Do you isolate yourself from others at work or at home?
- Do you find yourself turning to alcohol or other mood-altering drugs to make yourself feel better?
- Do you find yourself turning to other addictive behaviors to make yourself feel better?
- Have you or someone close to you noticed that your sleeping patterns have changed?
- Do you think “what’s the use” when responding to emergency calls?
- Do you find yourself thinking about or performing unnecessarily risky activities while on an emergency scene?
- Have you found an increased or new interest in risky activities outside of work?
- Do you find yourself displaying unexpected angry emotions or been talked to about unprofessional behavior toward others within the past two months?
- Have family, friends, or co-workers told you that “you have changed” recently?
- Does your family have a history of suicide?
- Does your family have a history of feeling depressed?
- Do you have feelings of hopelessness?
- Do you feel like killing or harming yourself?
- Have you created a plan to kill yourself? ***
- Have you recently attempted to kill yourself? ***