

Living with a First Responder

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Public works employees are first responders, along with police officers, firefighters, and EMTs. Families of first responders often experience many of the same hardships. For example, public works employees often work long and odd hours and are required to work in sometimes dangerous conditions, such as plowing during winter operations or responding to other emergencies.

Here are some tips to help cope with the stress and worry of being a public works employee or a family member of an employee.

Communication

Strong communication skills are important for any relationship, especially if one person works a variable schedule. The long hours and stresses of the job can make communicating difficult, but it is important to make the effort to maintain communication with family. Even a short text message or phone call during a break can remind a spouse they are loved and needed.

Spouses should also address issues of loneliness and neglect together. If a significant other is feeling overshadowed by the public works employee's job, it is far better to discuss these problems together openly and honestly before they worsen.

Time Management

If problems with loneliness do occur, it is important to find strategies for improving the situation. Establishing a night each week to be together with family highlights the importance of these relationships and allows each person in the relationship to realize that importance.

It is also important to establish and maintain boundaries between work and family. While emergencies do occur, and public works employees are often called in to work at odd hours unexpectedly, there are times when family needs to be the priority. Scheduling events and activities (and keeping those plans whenever possible) allows for family members

and the employee to experience structure and stability, even with an unpredictable job schedule.

Significant others of the employee should also focus on themselves and their own social lives. It is best to stay busy during those long, stressful shifts when the employee may be gone for hours or days at a time. Many partners find it helpful to socialize and do activities without their partners, if necessary, just to have something to fill up lonely hours.

Finding Support

While family and partner relationships can be a great source of support and comfort, support can also be found in extended family, friends, and the families of other public works employees. In fact, other families can be particularly helpful, because they understand firsthand what it is like to live with a first responder. Sharing experiences and coping strategies for handling long hours and dangerous work conditions among other families and spouses can often be easier and less stressful than attempting to deal with these issues alone.

The effects of holding a job in the public sector can be felt by the employee and their family. Dangerous working conditions, long hours, and odd schedules, especially during the winter months and other emergency situations, are stressful for the employee and their family. Follow these suggestions and strategies to help ease some of the stress.

References

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