



Firefighter Mental Illness/Suicide

Firefighter Health & First Aid Category

Mental health is an often neglected part of firefighter safety, even as the number of reported firefighter deaths by suicide has been on the rise. Suicidal thoughts and other symptoms of depression, post-traumatic stress, and other mood disorders are not signs of weakness; rather, they are indicators of a medical condition that requires attention and treatment. Awareness, knowledge, and action can mitigate emotional suffering and reduce the risk of suicide among firefighters. One life lost is too many.

Risk Factors

- Sleep deprivation
- Heavy alcohol or drug use
- Witnessing traumatic event(s)
- Major physical illness or injury
- Loss of a close relationship
- Isolation or lack of social support (*e.g. off-season, retirement*)
- Knowing others who have died by suicide

Warning Signs

- Sudden withdrawal from social contact
- Persistent feeling of hopelessness
- Increasingly reckless behavior
- Mood swings/Change in behavior
- Having a suicide plan (time, place, method)

What You Can Do

- **TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND OTHERS.** Monitor and manage mental health, just as you would physical health. Do not be afraid to ask for help and seek medical treatment. Thoughts of suicide can occur in anyone, it is not their fault but rather a need to treat a mental health issue.
- **TALK OPENLY AND ACTIVELY LISTEN.** Peer support goes a long way to protecting mental health. *Open communication is especially important for the survivors after a firefighter suicide occurs.* Listen actively, let someone who is seeking your help talk at their own pace and ask them open-ended questions.
- **SHOW COMPASSION:** Psychological risk is an undeniable part of the job. Be patient and supportive; do not judge or stigmatize firefighters experiencing a mental health challenge.
- **BE DIRECT.** If someone seems at risk or shows warning signs, ask “Are you thinking of suicide?” and “Do you have a plan?” Recognizing a potential suicide is critical to preventing it.
- **BE PROACTIVE:** If someone you know has a suicide plan, do not leave them alone. Remove any firearms or implements that could cause harm. Call 9-1-1 immediately

Resources

[Everyone Goes Home](#) National Fallen Firefighters Foundation
[Online Behavioral Health Program](#) International Association of Fire Fighters
[Firefighter Behavioral Health Alliance](#) Tracks firefighter suicides and offers prevention workshops.
<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/> National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Call: Suicide Hotline 1-800-273-TALK (8255) 24/7

Have an idea? Have feedback? Share it.

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