



Public Safety Personnel

Public Safety Personnel Family and Community Supports

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Mitigating Potential Bias

- The information presented in this program is based on recent information that is explicitly “evidence-based”.
- This Program and its material is peer reviewed and all the recommendations involving clinical medicine are based on evidence that is accepted within the profession; and all scientific research referred to, reported, or used in this CME/CPD activity in support or justification of patient care recommendations conforms to the generally accepted standards



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Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Identify the impacts that public safety personnel (PSP) service has on PSP family members.
2. Differentiate between the needs of support services for PSP members and that of PSP families.
3. Identify resources that are available for PSP and their families.



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Presentation Overview:

- Presenter Background
- Public Safety Personnel – Unique Careers, Unique Experiences
 - Trauma-Exposed Professionals (TExP)
 - Trauma-Exposed Families (TExFam)
- Common Experiences and Challenges in PSP Families
- Need for Culturally-Competent Supports
- Family Supports Available
- Q & A

Presenter Background

- Dr. Tim Black, R. Psych.
- Wounded Warriors Canada (WWC) National Clinical Director – January 2024
- 20+ years as pre-tenure, then tenured Associate Professor of Counselling Psychology: Teaching, Community-Engaged Research, and Scholarship
 - CACEP Accredited graduate counselling psychology program
- Specializing in Group Counselling approaches to PTSD
- Co-Developed multiple national programs with WWC

PSP – Unique Careers/Experiences

- Challenges include:
 - Shift-Work
 - Public-Facing
 - Physical and Psychological Risks
 - Organizational Demands – Identity and Commitment

- Benefits include:
 - Incredible Depth of Meaning
 - Camaraderie
 - Excitement
 - Societal Status?

PSP Families – Unique Experiences

- Challenges include:
 - Isolation
 - Perpetual Fear and Concern
 - Lack of Predictability
 - Feeling Excluded

- Benefits include:
 - Depth of Meaning and Pride
 - Membership in a Community
 - Societal Status?



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Trauma-Exposed Professionals (TExP)

- PSP are also what we call Trauma Exposed Professionals (TExP), defined as:
 - Individuals who, through their regular work duties, are chronically and repeatedly exposed* to actual or threatened: death, serious injury, sexual violence (Criterion A1, PTSD, DSM-5, APA, 2013)



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Trauma-Exposed Professionals (TExP)

- *Exposed means in one or more of the following ways:
 - Direct first-hand experience
 - Indirect through witnessing
 - Indirect through hearing about a close friend or loved one
 - Indirect through stories, images, details of traumatic events normally in the context of work



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Trauma-Exposed Families (TExFam)

- When you think about the definition of TExp, what fits from that definition for TExFam?
- How exactly are TExFam “exposed” to traumatic events?



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Trauma-Exposed Families (TExFam)

- TExFam are exposed in at least the following 3 ways:
 - Actual or threatened –death, serious injury, sexual violence
 - Hearing about a loved one being killed or injured on the job
 - Hearing disturbing details of events their loved one has experienced

Trauma-Exposed Families (TExFam)

- Actual or threatened: death, serious injury, sexual violence
 - When does the threat go away for TExFam?
- Hearing about a loved one
 - When does the spouse (or children) know for sure it isn't their loved one?
- Hearing disturbing details
 - When would TExFam hear about disturbing details?

“Alex” – TExFam Spouse, Parent

- Before every morning shift, Alex says goodbye to their police officer spouse, and then drops the kids at daycare, before going to work at their own small business.
- Before every evening shift, Alex, who is at work, texts their spouse with the message, “Have a good shift, stay safe, love you.”
- Before every graveyard (overnight shift), Alex and their spouse have dinner with kids, read them a story, and then Alex says, “See you in the morning, stay safe, love you.”

Alex – TExFam Spouse, Parent

- What do you think Alex thinks about every time they say goodbye to their spouse?
 - Which shifts do you think would be the most difficult for Alex? Why?
- What do you think Alex feels every time their spouse comes home from a shift?
- What do you think goes through Alex's mind, driving home and hearing a developing story on the radio of an armed robbery suspect engaged in a standoff with police downtown?



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Alex – TExP Spouse and Parent

- When does Alex feel relaxed?
 - When does it all stop?

Alex – TExFam Spouse, Parent

- Alex comes to you for help about their experience of coping with shift work, the lack of intimacy, and feeling disconnected from their spouse.
- Alex also feels intense guilt about complaining when their spouse is out there, “risking their lives every day to save other people and all I do is run my little business.”
- Alex also feel intense pride in being a police spouse and is fiercely loyal having come from a policing family themselves.

Common Experiences/Challenges for PSP Families

- Fear of physical and psychological injury or death to their spouse
- Changes in their spouse's personality over time
- Changes in their spouse's parenting style
- Unpredictability of scheduling and impact on family dynamics during weekends, vacations, holidays, birthdays, etc.

Common Experiences/Challenges for PSP Families

- Impact of unhelpful coping mechanisms on the family (e.g., alcohol, drugs, overwork, videogaming, dissociation)
- Loss of intimacy in the relationship and lack of regular schedule
- Loss of TExFam's identity due to the demands and status of TExp occupation

Need for Culturally-Competent Family Support

- Understanding the myth of the “supportive spouse” and the organization’s role in perpetuating it
- Understanding the organizational demands on TExP and, by extension, the demands on TExFam
- Understanding the difference between couple relationship issues that are not a result of TExP/TExFam issues but can be made worse by them

Need for Culturally-Competent Family Support

- Understanding that families matter, in their own right, not just because they are connected to the TExP (from Dr. Heidi Cramm, Garnet Families, Queen's University)
- Understanding the culture of loyalty in many of the TExP organizations and the impact on TExFam
- Understanding that TExFam members will have their own issues to deal with that may be made better, or worse, by the TExP member of the family



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Family Supports Available

- WWC TExFam programs:

Couples Overcoming PTSD Every Day (COPE) Program

<https://woundedwarriors.ca/our-programs/couples-overcoming-ptsd-everyday/>

Spousal Resiliency Program (SRP)

<https://woundedwarriors.ca/our-programs/spousal-resiliency-program/>

Surviving Family Program (SFP)

<https://woundedwarriors.ca/our-programs/surviving-family-program/>

Warrior Kids Camp

<https://woundedwarriors.ca/our-programs/warrior-kids-camp/>



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Online Family Supports Available

- Garnet Families - <https://garnetfamilies.com>
- PSPNet Families - <https://www.pspnet.ca/en/for-families-of-bsp>
- Family First Responder Program - <https://familyfirstresponder.ca>



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Key Take-Home Messages

1. Just because TExFam are not “out on the road” or in the public doing their jobs, it doesn’t mean they aren’t exposed to traumatic events.
2. TExFam have their own lives, their own identities, and their own struggles that may or may not have anything to do with the TExP family member.
3. TExFam do not exist only to support their TExP spouses, parents, siblings...but they may still want to support them regardless. Don’t assume TExFam feel it is a burden of which they want to rid themselves.



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Thank You

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