

12 STEPS For Creating a Behavioral Health Program At Your Agency

As developed by the Firefighter Behavioral Health Alliance

Educating those at the agency (from new recruits all the way up to the Fire Chief), and their families, regarding issues like anxiety, depression, addiction, suicidal ideations, etc.



2 Creating a Peer Support Team (PST), which is a vital piece of a behavioral health program.

3 Developing a working relationship with department/employee assistance programs.

While these counselors aren't always trained in the fire service, they can learn. Teach them what this world is all about.

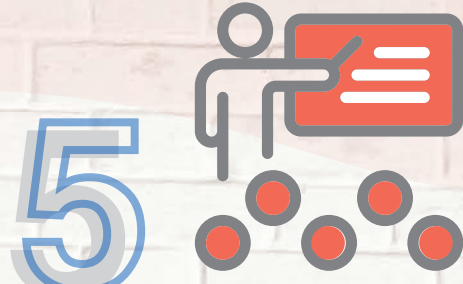


4 Develop standard operating guidelines/policies, that are shared with employees, that outline steps when handling behavioral health issues. Transparency around these steps, and the resources that members can request, can save lives.

In collaboration with officers in charge of training, the PST and/or the health & safety officer will

develop classes on behavioral health.

This training should be required on a yearly basis and be included in academies. This is also beneficial for PST members, who often experience additional stress as part of their duties in the PST.



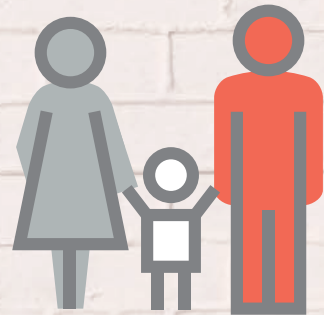
6 Develop local community counselor resources to offer assistance to members who are uncomfortable working with fire department counselors.

Culturally-competent counselors, especially those that aren't connected to the fire department, are hugely important for behavioral health programs.

7 Develop and sustain relationships with local religious leaders for those members who take comfort in their faith.



8 Create programs and classes for family members. The number one known reason for suicides within the fire service is difficulties with marital or family relationships, Jeff said. Promoting healthy and happy familial relationships for those in the fire service is incredibly important.



Fire department leaders should create an **atmosphere that promotes learning and openness around mental health issues.** Any initiative starts from the top and getting buy-in from members of the fire department is a major priority when starting a behavioral health program.



10 Create a policy that allows PST members to respond to fire/EMS/police calls when needed. In doing so, they are available specifically to support their colleagues and observe behaviors that result from the incident.

11 Develop relationships with PST or similar groups at other local agencies, including fire departments, police departments, or other organizations, to promote working relationships throughout the community.



12 Create a program offering support to retirees (or any employee leaves the agency). Through this program, offer support for issues such as a lack of purpose, a loss of identity, a loss of belonging, and other challenges come as a result leaving the agency that can also raise the risk of suicide.

