

FREE WORKBOOK

# How to Cope

The Teen's Guide to Coping with the  
Stresses of Being in a Law Enforcement  
Family





# Who am I?

My name is Serena Garza and I am the daughter, niece, and granddaughter of police officers. I am a Girl Scout Ambassador and a junior in high school and I care a lot about my family and friends in law enforcement.



# Why am I doing this?

Growing up, I had a dad who worked nights as a police officer. This was hard for the whole family, especially my mom. Every day before he left for work she would tell me to say, "I love you, be careful." I was young so I didn't know much, but now I realize how dangerous my dad's job is. He could be harmed anytime. Ever since the riots that took place in 2020, my anxiety for my dad has gotten worse. I knew that I wasn't the only one feeling this way, which is why I decided to do this project. I am here to help other teens cope with their stresses of being in a law enforcement family as well as to build a community of people who care for each other.

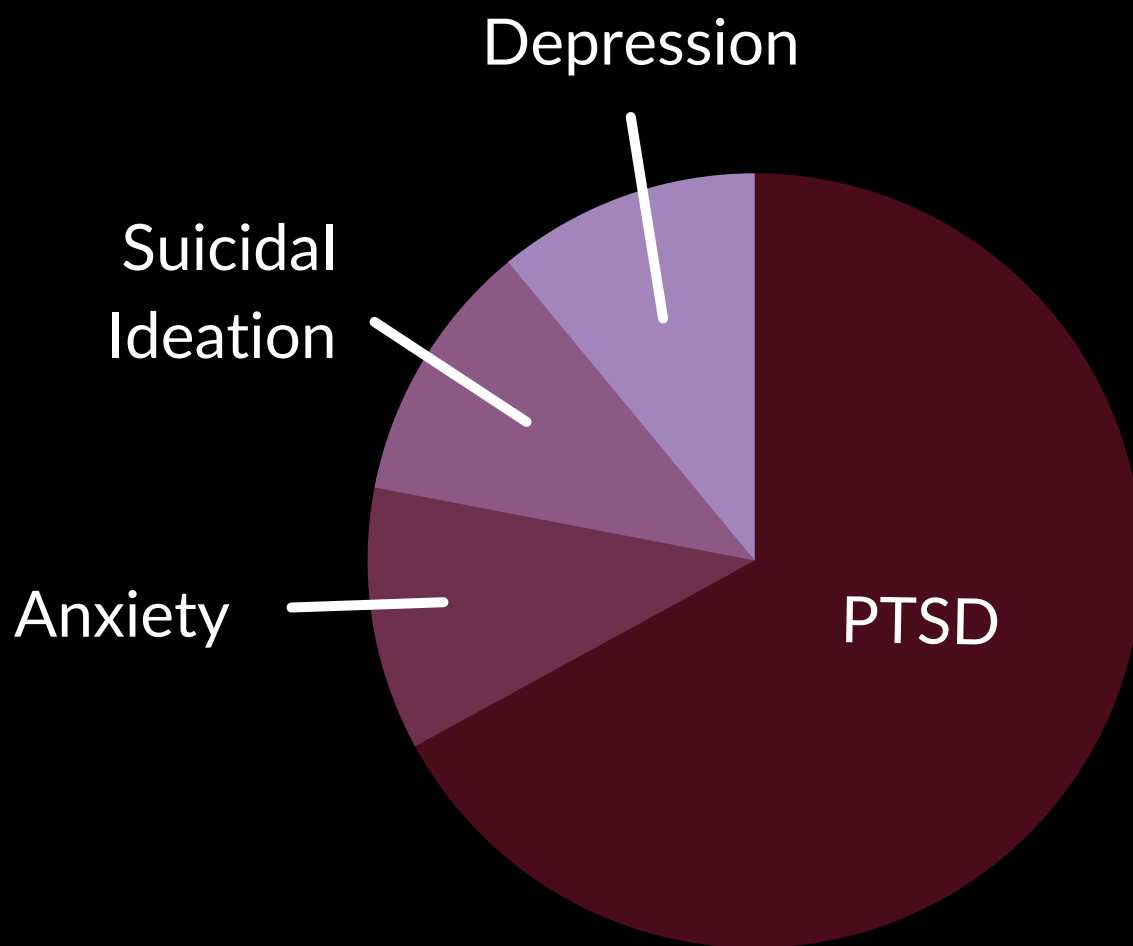
# Let's start with some basic facts about stress in officers...

The biggest warning signs of being over stressed include: “sudden changes in behavior, erratic work habits, increased sick time due to minor problems, inability to maintain a train of thought, excessive worrying “ (Territo, Vetter 1981). Police department officials reported that there have been as many as 25% of the officers in their departments with serious alcohol problems.



What classifies as a serious alcohol problem you may ask? For males, drinking more than 14 drinks per week or more than 4 drinks per occasion. (One drink counts as 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine or 1.5 ounces of drinks like whiskey, rum, or tequila). For females, drinking 7 drinks per week or more than 3 drinks per occasion counts as alcohol abuse.

In one test that focused on addressing the high rates of mental illness among police officers, 26% of officers screened positive for symptoms of depression, PTSD, anxiety, or suicidal ideation (thoughts of suicide). Out of this 26%, the most common was PTSD (61%).



Among those who screened positive for symptoms of these illnesses, fewer than 1 in 5 of them sought help (therapy, mental health services) for their symptoms in the previous year. One thing to note from this study is that officers with previous military experiences had higher rates of PTSD than those without.

# Why don't officers just seek help? It's literally available everywhere!

I understand where this frustration comes from. We are growing up in an age where mental health is now being taken into top priority. We know that mental health impacts so many aspects of our lives, but it's different for officers. One of the barriers to seeking mental health help is that many officers don't even realize that what they are experiencing is a mental illness. Oftentimes, they think that it's just part of the job and that others feel the same way. Another reason is that many doubt that psychologists or therapists can relate to them, which is why many just opt to talk to friends, family, co-workers, or no one at all.

We will talk about the importance of communication in the next section.

# What does stress look like in teens?

There are many common signs that are manifestations of stress in teens. These signs include negative changes in behaviors, avoiding parents, and certain physical changes. Negative changes in behavior include acting more irritable and moody, withdrawing from activities that used to bring pleasure and joy, consistently expressing worries, crying more often, displaying surprisingly fearful reactions to certain situations, clinging to a parent or teacher, sleeping too much or too little, and eating too much or too little. Things like avoiding parents or abandoning long time friends for new ones are also symptoms.

Physical manifestations of stress are also key telltale factors. Your body and mind are connected and when there is a problem in one of the two, it can often show up in the other. Some physical signs of stress include stomach aches (like nausea or bubbiness) and headaches. Picking up on habits such as eating more unhealthy foods, vaping or doing drugs, and drinking alcohol can also be warning signs of stress. Keep in mind that vaping, doing drugs, and drinking alcohol as a minor (under 21) are all illegal. If you are doing this and find it is a problem, seek professional help.



# Checklist!

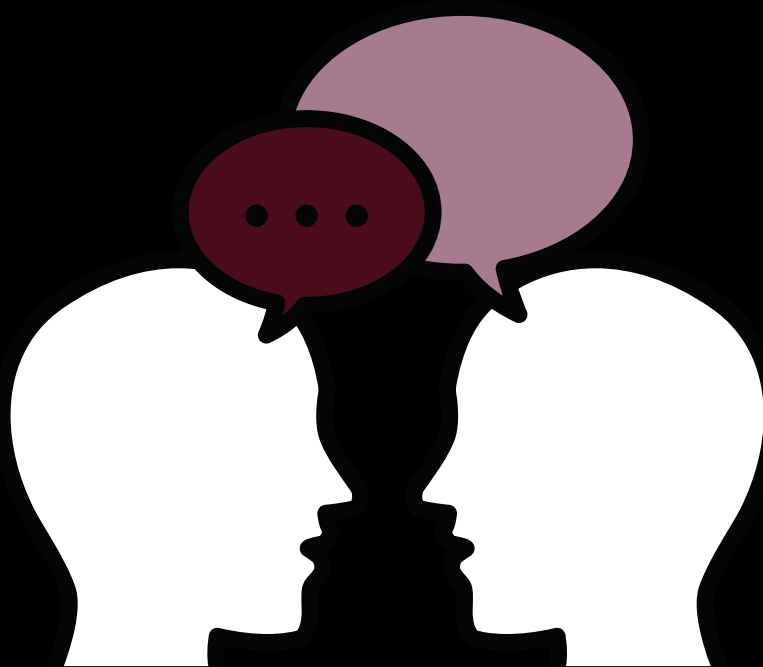
Use this check list to check of any of the symptoms of stress listed on the previous page. If you check off any of these, you may want to reach out for guidance.

- Acting irritable or moody
- Withdrawing from activities you used to enjoy
- Routinely expressing worries in any situation
- Complaining more than usual about school
- Crying more often
- Displaying surprisingly fearful reactions
- Clinging to a parent or a teacher
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Avoiding parents or expressing hostility towards family
- Experiencing stomach aches or headaches often
- Developing habits such as vaping, doing drugs, or drinking





In situations where you feel confused, unsafe, scared, or worried, it is especially important to have someone to voice your feelings to. This is why I am going to help you gather some communication skills and teach you how to establish a better, more communicative relationship with your law enforcement family member.

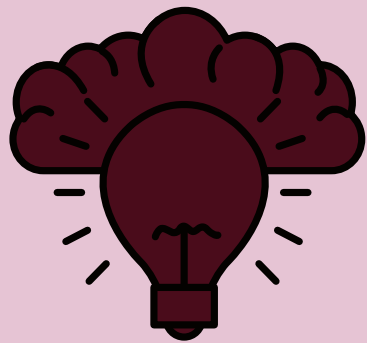




My first tip for you is to ask questions. If you are confused about something that's going on, or if you are curious about what your parent/family member even does for their job, ask them! It is important to have as much knowledge as you can about a situation, especially one where you feel scared or anxious.

**If you could ask your parent/family member three questions about their job or about any of your worries for them, what would they be?  
Write them down!**

Going along with asking questions, it is important that you voice your worries. It is your parents job to help you and make sure that you are comfortable, so make sure to tell them whenever you feel anxious or worried. If you don't feel too comfortable talking directly to your parents about worries, talk to a school counselor, another trusted adult, or even a friend.

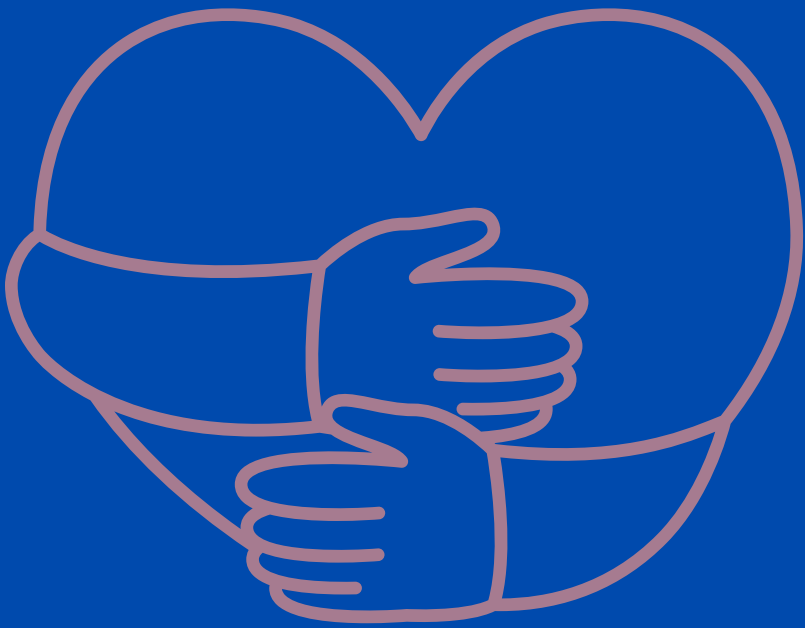


### Brain Dump!

Scribble down a bunch of words to describe the feelings that you feel regarding their job or anything surrounding it.

# Know that it's normal....

Your family member is a part of a high risk job, so being worried for them is normal. It's okay to worry about their safety because it just shows that you care about them!





# Build a community

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

Do you know any people around your age who have law enforcement parents? List them and maybe shoot them a text. Become friends!

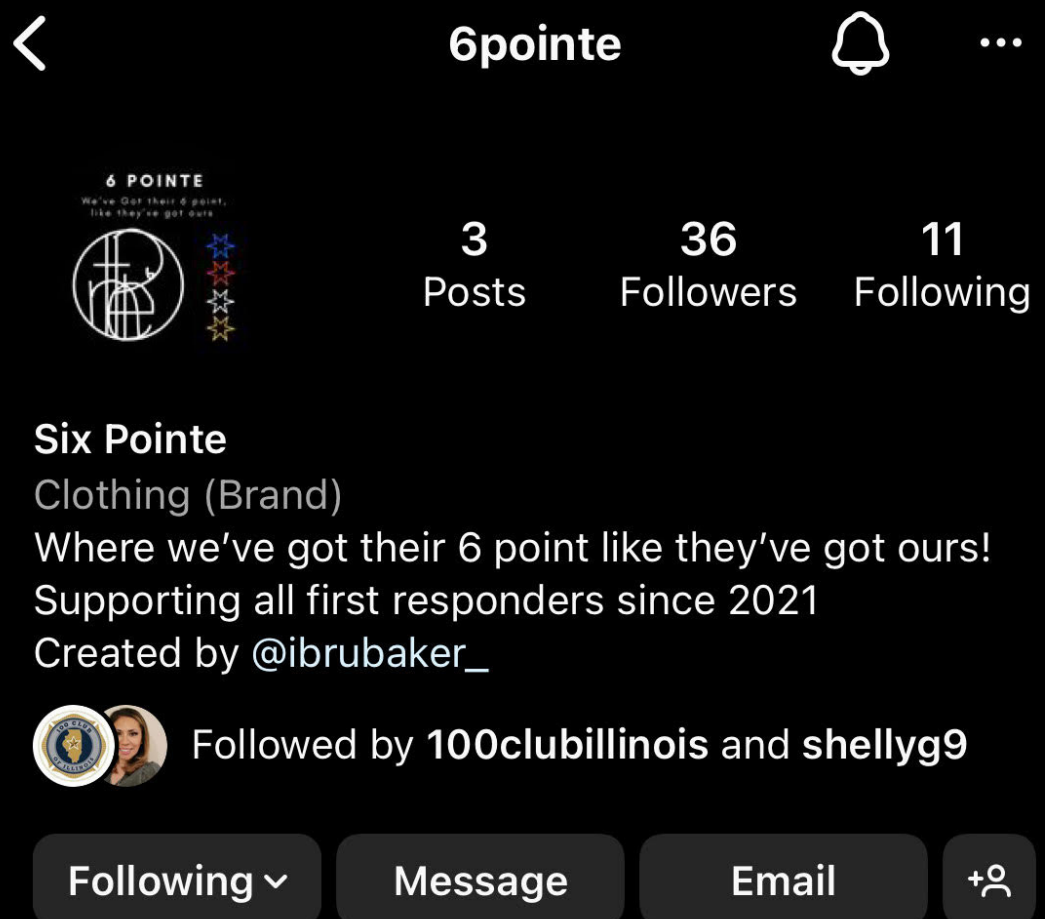
One method that I am currently trying to do is finding other people within the law enforcement community that I can form a bond with through shared emotions and experiences. The chances of finding other teens your age in the law enforcement community who feel a similar way are very high! Knowing that you can have a support group who knows what it's like to have a parent in law enforcement will allow for them to be more empathetic and helpful when you feel scared or down. It has been shown that having an emotional support group can help to greatly improve mental health!

# Featuring: Isabella

## A teen who's making a difference

Isabella is a teen who decided to take a school project and turn it into something that is beneficial to officers and their supporters. She was able to begin producing and selling shirts for a brand called Six Pointe. The purpose of this brand is the support the 100 Club of Illinois, which is a non-profit organization that provides resources for first responder families of active or fallen officers. Currently, she sells both long and short sleeved shirts and she was able to raise \$1000 by selling them! Below is her brand's Instagram page, be sure to give them a follow to support a fellow teen!

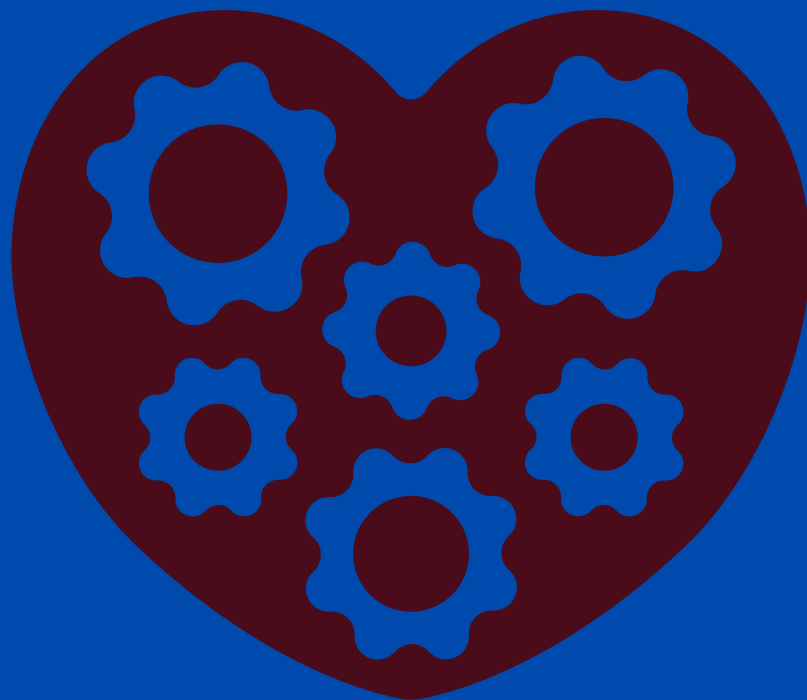
  
Follow  
Isabelle's  
account!



The screenshot shows the Instagram profile for '6pointe'. At the top, there is a back arrow, the username '6pointe', a notification bell, and a menu icon. Below this is the profile picture, which features the text '6 POINTE' and 'We've Got their 6 point, like they've got ours' above a circular logo with a cross and stars. To the right of the profile picture, it shows '3 Posts', '36 Followers', and '11 Following'. The bio reads: 'Six Pointe Clothing (Brand) Where we've got their 6 point like they've got ours! Supporting all first responders since 2021 Created by @ibrubaker\_'. Below the bio, it says 'Followed by 100clubillinois and shellyg9'. At the bottom, there are four buttons: 'Following' with a dropdown arrow, 'Message', 'Email', and a plus icon for more options.

# Finally, let's talk about some coping methods for stress

Healthy coping mechanisms are important to have especially in times where anxiety can seem quite overwhelming. In this section, I will provide some healthy coping mechanisms. Many of these I use myself and recommend from personal experience!





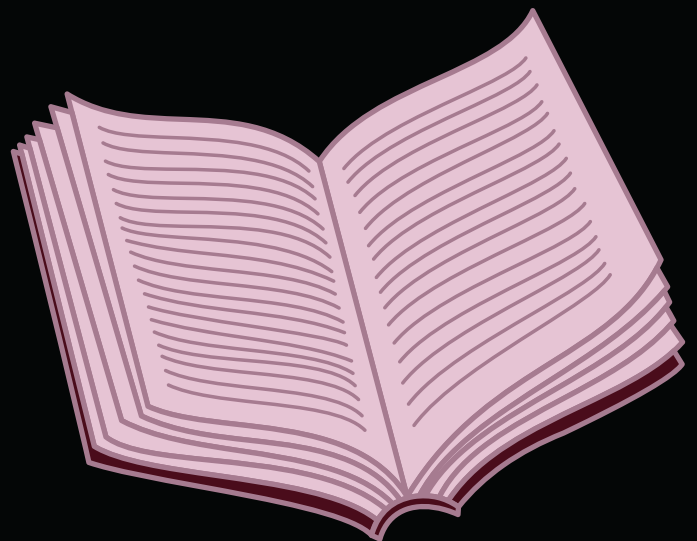
# 1. Talk with those in your community

Refer back to the list you made in the previous section and reach out! Talk about your worries or distract yourself by talking about other things. Either way, talking to someone can help you take your mind off of things and sort through what's making you upset.



## 2. Journal!

I know it seems as though everyone says to journal and you'll feel better, but it's true! Writing down your feelings out on paper or on your phone can help your brain to process them better and maybe even come up with ways to solve them! Go grab a notebook and get to writing!



# 3. Music



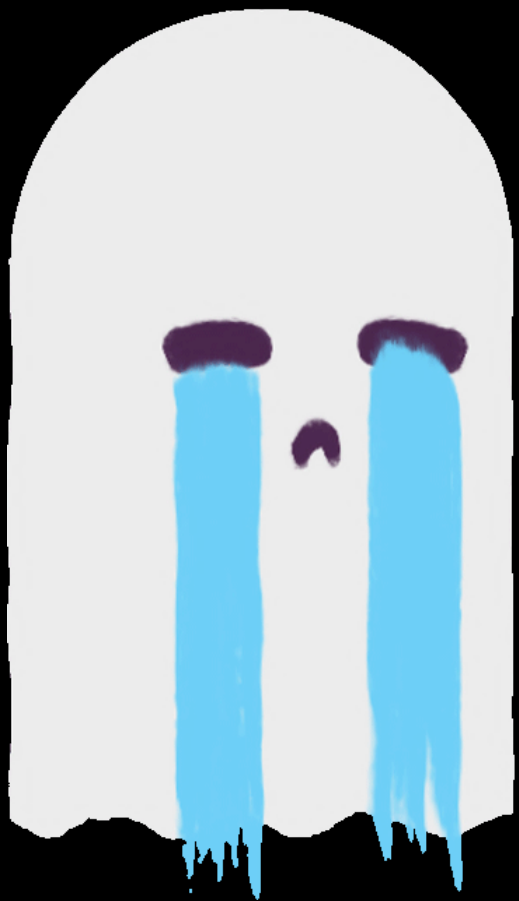
This is a big one for me! Music can help us feel the emotions that our brain needs to let out or it can help to distract us from those emotions. I recommend having different types of music that do both. It's good to maintain a balance between coping mechanisms that distract us and ones that allow us to process.

Put together two playlists: one to distract yourself from your feelings and one to help you feel them and maybe even have a cry.

A large, empty rectangular box with a dark red border, intended for writing the name of a playlist to distract oneself from feelings.A large, empty rectangular box with a dark red border, intended for writing the name of a playlist to help one feel their feelings.

## 4. Cry!

Everyone cries! It's totally normal and super important for you. Crying helps the brain let out and process emotions when it becomes too overwhelmed. Did you know that different tears from different emotions have different chemicals in them?



## 5. Fidget

Sometimes people get annoyed by fidgeting or think that it's too distracting, but everyone does it! It is a way for our bodies to let out and express emotions that are overwhelming for our brain. I am a big fidgeter and I find that fidget toys are a big stress reliever for me.



# Apps and Meditation

Meditation or prayer (if you're religious) is a huge stress reliever. It helps to balance your mind and helps you to fully process emotions. Grounding yourself helps you to gain perspective on a situation and be present with your mind.

Some good apps (free) for meditation include:

- Insight Timer
- Smiling Mind
- Mylife Meditation

Here is a link to more apps!

<https://www.mindful.org/free-mindfulness-apps-worthy-of-your-attention/>



# To conclude...

My goal with this workbook is to help you cope with certain stresses that not everyone can relate to. Hopefully you learned some good coping methods—ones that you think you can implement into your own life. I also hope that you were able to establish a good community of supportive friends who were in similar situations as you. Remember that even if you think you are alone, you're not because I'm here too and I understand what you feel.

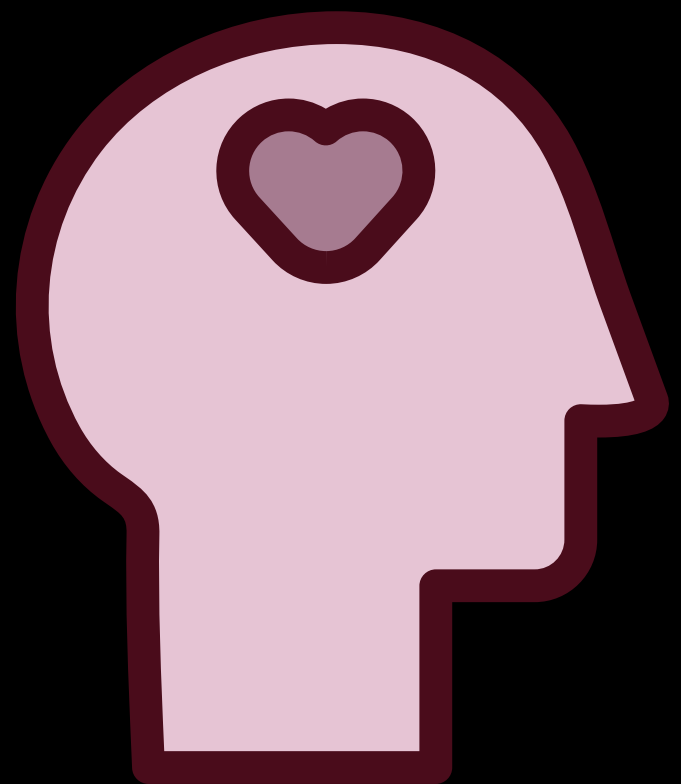
**If you ever need emergency help reach out to:**

National Suicide Prevention  
Lifeline: 800-273-8255

NAMI (National Alliance on  
Mental Illness - Chicago): 833-  
626-4244

Serve & Protect (Family Hotline)  
615-373-8000

Copline (For Officers)  
732-577-8300



# Works Cited

“Alcohol Abuse Treatment - What Is Alcohol Abuse?”  
Familydoctor.org, 8 Apr. 2022,  
[familydoctor.org/condition/alcohol-abuse/](https://familydoctor.org/condition/alcohol-abuse/).

“From Taboo to Treatment: Addressing High Rates of  
Mental Illness among Officers.” Police1, 22 Nov.  
2020, [www.police1.com/health  
wellness/articles/from-taboo-to-treatment  
addressing-high-rates-of-mental-illness-among  
officers-n74cdFQPWaKCJ9t4/](https://www.police1.com/health-wellness/articles/from-taboo-to-treatment-addressing-high-rates-of-mental-illness-among-officers-n74cdFQPWaKCJ9t4/).

“Help Your Teen Cope with Stress: Medlineplus Medical  
Encyclopedia.” Edited by Vorvick J. Linda,  
MedlinePlus, U.S. National Library of Medicine,  
[medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000814  
.htm](https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000814.htm).

“Identifying Signs of Stress in Your Children and Teens.”  
American Psychological Association, American  
Psychological Association,  
[www.apa.org/topics/stress/children](https://www.apa.org/topics/stress/children).

Territo, L., and Vetter, H. J.. “Stress and Police  
Personnel.” Stress and Police Personnel | Office of  
Justice Programs, [www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual  
library/abstracts/stress-and-police-personnel-0](https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/stress-and-police-personnel-0).