00;00;00 - 00;00;16

Introduction

You are listening to Serve, Protect, Lead, a podcast from the International Association of Chiefs of Police, where you will hear from IACP leadership and police leaders across the globe sharing wisdom, insight, and perspective.

00;00;18 – 00;01;04

Cristina Fernandez

Hello, everyone. My name is Cristina Fernandez, and I am a program manager at the International Association of Chiefs of Police. Welcome to the IACP’s Family Support Training and Technical Assistance Program podcast funded by the Motorola Solutions Foundation. This program provides individualized assistance and support to agencies as they develop or enhance their family wellness programs. As we know, family wellness is critical for resilient and healthy officers. Our focus today will be on critical incidents, how they can impact law enforcement children, how to talk to children about these incidents and resources that can help. I'm very honored to be joined by Kimberly Jackson-Luzader, Law Enforcement family wellness consultant, and Joanna Black, chief marketing and communications officer with the First Responder Children's Foundation.

00;01;05 - 00;01;21

Cristina Fernandez

Welcome to you both and thank you for taking the time and your willingness to share your knowledge and experience with us today. Let's go ahead and dive right in. And I'd love for each of you to just take a moment and introduce yourselves and tell us a little bit about your work and your experience in this area. And Kimberly, I'm going to start with you.

00;01;23 - 00;01;53

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

Thank you for having us on this. And I feel really appreciated, appreciative for this opportunity. My name is Kimberly Jackson-Luzader, I am a consultant for IACP. I also am the trauma counselor for the Raleigh Police Department, and I facilitate our family wellness program, which is called Families Behind the Badge. My background clinically is I specialize in the treatment of trauma for children and have done that for about 10 to 12 years now.

00;01;53 - 00;01;58

Cristina Fernandez

Thank you for joining us today. And Joanna, tell us a little bit about yourself and about your organization.

00;01;58 – 00;02;18

Joanna Black

Thank you so much, Cristina, for having me. And thank you, Kimberly. And thank you IACP. You've been really wonderful partners to work with. First Responders Children's Foundation is a nonprofit organization that services families, First Responder Families that is on a national basis.

00;02;19 - 00;02;47

Joanna Black

We were founded 22 years ago after the tragic incidents of September 11th, when 800 children lost to first responder parents. And needless to say, through the years, we've seen many situations in which families have come to us for help. We provide programs and services which include scholarships for children of first responders. We have our Mental Health Resiliency program, which we're going to be speaking about today.

00;02;47 - 00;03;06

Joanna Black

We also have financial hardship grants, which include bereavement assistance to families. And we have an amazing community outreach program that is focused on bringing law enforcement and first responders closest, closer to their communities. So, I'm really excited about today. And thank you for having me.

00;03;07- 00;04;01

Cristina Fernandez

We are very grateful to get to work with both of you. And I'm very, very grateful for you taking the time today. It's a difficult, tough topic and I think critical incidents as we're seeing, especially incidents of mass violence. We're seeing so many more of these happening. You really can't get away from them there in the media. The images we have to sort of think about not only the first responders that are that are addressing these incidents and they're in the midst of it. But how their kids view them and how their kids might be affected by knowing that their parents are going into these situations and what that what that feels like or looks like to them. So, I'm going to start with Kimberly. If you could just talk a little bit about how kids how do you think kids’ kind of view these incidents and what kind of effect could their knowledge that their parents are involved in these incidents or maybe even just ongoing exposure in the media to them and being aware of them? What kind of effects are we thinking about for kids?

00;04;02 - 00;04;25

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

That is definitely a heavy question with I think a lot of information could be shared behind it. When you think about the incidents that children are exposed to, there's a lot of things that go on social media and the news that probably heightens some of that worry that they experience or even how they find out these things are going on in the community that they're officers responding to or their parent.

00;04;25 - 00;04;46

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

I think probably the younger kids are easier to shield from some of it. Right. They don't have as much access to social media. Probably what we let them watch is very slim as far as the news. But then I also see with the adolescents is they have so much more access to the things that are going on in the public. I even in know of a family where the teenager tracks their parent.

00;04;46 - 00;05;08

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

And so based on what's going on, they make that connection of, okay, you know, my parents probably are responding to this. And so, I think that probably adds in a level of anxiety based on how much, you know, of what your officer does. And so there's just such a large range of what children are adolescents will explain with their thoughts and feelings.

00;05;09 - 00;05;28

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

It also depends on how the other parent gets home or the caregiver that's home with them. Maybe a response to those critical incidents as well based on what they find out. Maybe an officer has called them or text them to let them know what's going on in their area and whether they're responding to it or whether they're not probably starts that the pulse for the family.

00;05;28 - 00;05;53

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

So I know a lot of families, if there is a critical incident going on in their office, there is an involved and they have the ability to text. That family's instantly relieved. Right. They don't have to worry. They don't feel like they have to follow that incident. But if they don't hear that from a parent as far as like, you know, I'm not involved in this, and then they assume that their parent is involved in that critical incident, I think that heightens the anxiety, if that makes sense.

00;05;53 - 00;06;06

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

Like them not knowing where their parent is can really maybe cause some different changes in their day to day. So definitely a lot of different thoughts and feelings that they experience

00;06;07 – 00;06;20

Cristina Fernandez

That makes- that makes a lot of sense. And certainly, it's easier to shield littler kids than it is to to shield adolescents or teenagers who are so involved in social media, so aware of everything that's happening, so much more so than even we are.

00;06;20 - 00;06;36

Cristina Fernandez

So that's a really, really important points. And I'm going to just turn it over to Joanna for just a second. What kind of resources are available for children to kind of help them get through these critical times, children of law enforcement or first responder families?

00;06;36 – 00;06;47

Joanna Black

Absolutely. You know, I will touch on something that Kimberly just mentioned, and that is the families response and how the children deal with knowing that their family might be going into an incident.

00;06;48 - 00;07;15

Joanna Black

And we've actually seen that firsthand with some of our scholarship recipients. You know, they're now young adults. They're going off to college and we hear their stories. And so many of those stories come back to exactly what Kimberly has to share, whether their parent is still alive or has deceased. And that is those very early memories, those early childhood memories that have made an impact on their lives.

00;07;15 - 00;07;36

Joanna Black

And they can recall each one of them specific incidents when their family member was called in and they were sitting at home worrying if they would come home or in some situations when there was school lockdowns or where the child knew that their parent was responding. And they we hear those stories over and over again. So it does stay with the child over time.

00;07;37 - 00;08;04

Joanna Black

And when it comes to the First Responders Children's Foundation and our Resiliency program, one of the reasons we actually launched this program pretty much in the middle of COVID, we started seeing when we launched our COVID 19 emergency response grant, we had over 20,000 applications that came in for that particular grant. The purpose of that grant was to provide financial support to families on the front lines.

00;08;04 - 00;08;33

Joanna

We were paying for hotel rooms, food stipends. A big portion of this first responder community, especially on fire services, are volunteer. So they were losing their job and they had no way of paying their bills. So there was many touchpoints that we had during COVID. And one of the things that we kept seeing reoccurring and again, this is just during COVID was the anxiety and the stress and the worry that the children had.

00;08;33 - 00;09;16

Joanna Black

And we knew that we had to do something. So we launched the the Resiliency program really as a beta, despite at the time, folks within both law enforcement and other areas of the first responder community saying, well, there's really not a need for this. We already have this covered with our internal resources. We went ahead and launched it as a beta and quite quickly came to see that there was a need and recognized with the initial data that we came through that some families really wanted to have an outside source for their children that was confidential.

00;09;16 - 00;09;54

Joanna Black

So it was culturally competent counselors that were also trauma informed and free. So we launched that program and now we're about a year and a half into the program, actually probably closer to a year and eight months into the program now. And we have now tracked real data which never existed until this time. So I'll just pause now because I'm sure, Kimberly, you might have something to add to what I just said about the stories that we see and and and then I can go into maybe a little bit about what these children are seeking services for.

00;09;54 - 00;10;14

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

I think it's great that you pointed out the change in things through COVID and the fact that you did the beta program, because we probably wouldn't have known this if not at some of the things you did touch on is, you know, during the middle of COVID, what were the worries? And some of those worries were like, you know, their parents have to be out front lines with people who are sick.

00;10;14 - 00;10;39

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

Obviously, law enforcement, you know, depending on what the situations are, you're going to have to be in close contact with other people. I remember somebody had their officers be sanitized before coming into the house. Did that worry that they might get sick and then caused the rest of the family to get sick or some of those things that we did have to worry about in addition to, you know, the daily dangers that are out there for law enforcement.

00;10;39 - 00;11;16

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

So I think it definitely compounded the stress that we're in families is afraid of them already being out responding to incidents. And then now you have this other threat that's impacting so many people. And we know the fatality rate was so high during COVID. So like I said, it just piles on for them. So I think those are things when you talk about COVID that really stand out to me is very unique that most people maybe didn't have that besides maybe medical professionals in law enforcement. I think those were the big people at the forefront of COVID.

00;11;16 – 00;11;37

Cristina Fernandez

I appreciate that you're both talking about COVID so much because originally, you know, we talked about this as being focusing on critical incidents, but COVID was a huge, huge impact on law enforcement and, you know, a critical incident is kind of a acute, maybe intense, fearful thing that happens that kids are responding to.

00;11;37 - 00;12;08

Cristina Fernandez

But COVID was over an extended period of time. And certainly, had different effects. But it's again, it kind of heightens that awareness for kids that my parents are going into the field, are going out and doing work that is even more dangerous than what typically they're already doing, which is already a dangerous profession. So I really appreciate that you're both kind of focusing on that. And Johanna, I know you wanted I wanted to get back to your comment about some of the requests that you're seeing or some of the need that arose as a result of that.

00;12;08 – 00;12;31

Joanna Black

Yeah, absolutely. I just ran some data before we had this call and, you know, to date. And so that's in a little over a year and a half, we provided over 1200 hours of free confidential services to children, first responders, and we've service close to 240 children, 236 to be exact.

00;12;32 - 00;12;57

Joanna Black

So we have some data now that we never had. And what was interesting as we were putting this program together, we realized that since 9/11 there has been no real study done specifically on the mental health challenges of children, of first responders. You know, they're a very unique group of individuals and themselves because they have a unique set of challenges unlike any others.

00;12;57 - 00;13;22

Joanna Black

So what we might see is just civilians and what our children are facing. You can actually layer on top of that so many additional stressors and worries that those children of first responders experience on a daily basis. Also, we recognize that their parents might have traumas and that trauma is then passed on to other members of the household, which we called secondary trauma.

00;13;22 - 00;13;55

Joanna Black

And I'm sure Kimberly can speak to that very well. And what we realized was that out of this initial group that we have been tracking, 34.8% of the children are suffering from anxiety. And then we also have that's almost cut in half, again, with depression. So we've got about 19, 19.8% of those children dealing with depression. And then from there we see coping skills is 11, one point 11.1%.

00;13;55 - 00;14;25

Joanna Black

And then trauma and grief both at around 6.6%. So we start seeing, you know, the numbers change also by the age group and the demographic. Now, what was really striking to me and shocking, I'm a mother with two young children, one being female, is that the numbers are almost double when it comes to girls and boys. So you're we're seeing almost double the amount of girls coming in for services, especially around anxiety and depression than boys.

00;14;25 - 00;14;47

Joanna Black

So that was really interesting for us to see And what this data is going to allow us to be able to do is actually help us and others within this field create additional resources specific to the services and the challenges that these children are facing, but also based on their gender, which is really exciting for us moving forward.

00;14;47;24 - 00;15;06

Cristina Fernandez

Fascinating. Thank you for pointing that out. And to know like, is it is it an indicator that female children are experiencing more stress or that they're better at reaching out when they need help?

00;15;06 – 00;15;40

Joanna Black

We don't know the answer yet. Kimberly might have that very answer, but we haven't dug deep enough yet to get the answer to that. But it's definitely something that we'd love to explore. And the other data point that I failed to mention and is very specific to the audience today, is that we are seeing double the amount of children from police officers coming in for services, and that's double with all the other groups combined, meaning fire paramedic dispatchers. We're seeing double the amount of children from police showing up for help.

00;15;43 - 00;16;02

Cristina Fernandez

So that's another one where I think is that that they are getting better at reaching out when they need help, which I think is I'm going to look at it that way just to make myself feel better. But I think that's really interesting. Those numbers are really fascinating. And I think that's a lot for you all to delve into.

00;16;02 - 00;16;22

Cristina Fernandez

That's a great foundation for more research and more and more just more knowledge about sort of what the landscape is looking like and how it's changing. So, Joanna talked about some of some of her organization's resources and what they can bring to bear in the aftermath of a critical incident. And then just day to day.

00;16;22;20 - 00;16;42;22

Cristina Fernandez

But, Kimberly, can you talk a little bit about what law enforcement agencies right now can do to sort of better support families and children in the aftermath of a critical incident and taking into mind what you both said, which I thought was really important, is that the child's reaction is going to be based a lot on what the parent that's at home is experiencing.

00;16;42 - 00;16;49

Cristina Fernandez

So better supporting them as well for sort of a better a better support system overall. So, Kimberly, what are your thoughts on that?

00;16;49 – 00;17;01

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

Yeah, I think that's a great question. As far as what they can start doing now, I'm big one kind of assessing what's going on, even like Joanna is talking about, is having the data is helpful.

00;17;01 - 00;17;21

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

And so when it comes to law enforcement families for a specific agency, it's really helpful to get a barometer versus assuming what those families need. And so that's the first place I feel like agents, agencies can do and start is, you know, let's ask the families in some way, you know, what are they feeling were the thoughts that they have right now.

00;17;21 - 00;17;42

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

And if they could have resources, what would that look like? I know I did that several years ago after my agency had a critical incident. And I remember the chief at the time goes, we have this going on. We have support for our officers. You know, we have all of these things, but what is the family need? And I really appreciate that she took the time to think about that and so from there, we did kind of like a focus group.

00;17;42 - 00;18;06

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

It was like, you know, come out, let's talk about what you're experiencing. Let's give you some coping tools right off the gate. So you have something to take home with you and then give me some feedback afterwards. And some of that feedback was, we need a network, we need to know other people. So when things like this happen, we have people to turn to just they want a communication from the department, which for me is like, That's easy.

00;18;06 - 00;18;27

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

Start giving me your email and then I'll figure out what we can send to you and when we can send it. And so I think without having those conversations, you really don't know. And it's like playing darts with your with the blinders on. How good are you going to be if you can't see? And that's where we need to start with is your family is going to tell you what they need and they'll be the best advocate for themselves as well.

00;18;27 - 00;18;48

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

And I think, cristina, you kind of maybe pointed to the physical help, but there's trainings that could be put in place that would help parents, which then can go trickle down to that family and really help support their children. When we think about, like trauma focused interventions, a lot of that is on the parent. And that's just because we hope that they've had life experiences that have started to develop their own coping tools.

00;18;48 - 00;19;08

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

But we also want to make sure that they're developing healthy coping skills that they can pass on to their children, that they have enough psychoeducation to know what's going on and when they see certain behaviors, what can they do? So I feel like agencies could definitely partner with mental health agencies and experts in the field to start offering that.

00;19;08 - 00;19;27

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

I know in this area we have a lot of universities with people that specialize in trauma and they love coming out and doing webinars based on what they've learned in their interactions with working with children. So I think really tapping into those community resources that are very valuable, like Joanna mentioned, that are, you know, culturally competent, have that background.

00;19;27 - 00;19;52

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

Working with traumatic incidents is a great resource. I also feel like some of it is just bringing families together and to know that in your department there are people that care. There's relationships you can build that give you just a little bit more comfort when things are going on. You just know like, okay, at the end of the day, I know the chief puts me first because, you know, she's made me feel this way or I know she cares about my officer.

00;19;53 - 00;20;08

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

Sorry, I say she as a chief, but also we know males. But yeah I think that starts with the culture to you is what foundation can an agency put out there that shows families that they're significant and that you can also support them?

00;20;08 – 00;21;04

Joanna Black

Kimberly, I think that's a really good point and it brings something to mind immediately. And that was actually recently we spoke on a panel at the IACP conference in San Diego, and we invited some chiefs to join us on that panel. We had Chief Michael Moore from LAPD. We also had Chief Booker Hadges and we had retired Chief Renee Hall, and all of them had very specific personal examples of how these critical incidents have impacted not just their own families, but also those within their agencies. And what's essential, whether you're a small agency or a large agency like the LAPD, is that leadership really takes charge in having an open conversation about the mental resiliency of their officers as well as the families in this situation.

00;21;05 - 00;21;35

Joanna Black

Chief Michael Moore actually went as far as recording a video for our foundation around the weight of the badge and what the weight of the badge means to not only his officers but to the families, and really imploring his officers to utilize these services and endorsing that these services have been recommended by the Department for the families. Because what we have found is often when we'll go into an agency there, there could be a little bit of uncertainty is what's the catch?

00;21;35 - 00;22;03

Joanna Black

I often say, you know, people kind of raise their eyebrows and say, well, it's free, it's confidential, no questions asked. What's the catch? And the reality is there is no catch. We as a foundation are here to service the families. The other point that I'd like to make is like mental health should be top of mind, no pun intended, year round, not just during the month of May, when it's National Mental Health Awareness Month.

00;22;03 - 00;22;36

Joanna Black

There should be an ongoing dialog, as Kimberly had said, within the agencies, and bringing resources to the table on an ongoing basis to really start to destigmatize the topic of mental health. Because let's face it, there is still a stigma that exists and it's getting better and just going back to COVID, I think because of COVID, it has become better because more people are talking in the media and everywhere you look, we're talking and hearing about the national mental health crisis.

00;22;36 - 00;23;00

Joanna Black

So we're not alone. A police officer and their family is no longer alone talking about these challenges. Their challenges might be more unique or are exaggerated because of their job, but they're not alone because every family is dealing with some sort of mental health situation as a result of it didn't exist before, certainly as a result of COVID.

00;23;00 - 00;23;20

Cristina Fernandez

Such good information you both are sharing. Thank you so much. One thing I wanted to kind of loop back around to is we talk about family wellness a lot more now and in terms of law enforcement. And that was not a conversation that was as front of mind many years ago as it is now, which is a wonderful trend to see.

00;23;20;21 - 00;23;48;26

Cristina Fernandez

And I think in some cases, you know, law enforcement, they want to shield their families as much as possible. They don't want to give them too much information or sort of scare them in a way that that could traumatize them further. So I wanted to kind of talk to you both about sort of where do we how do we find that line and especially as it pertains to talking to children about what their parents do about critical incidents, about things that are happening?

00;23;48;28 - 00;24;06

Cristina Fernandez

How do we know if it's too much like where do we stop and sort of say, let them ask questions if they want to know, but at the same time, make sure they're aware of what's happening and they're not sort of blindsided by things. Kimberly, I want to start with you.

00;24;06 – 00;24;07

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

You're asking some great questions today.

00;24;08 – 00;24;10

Cristina Fernandez

I’m asking too many questions and I know I'm sorry.

00;24;10 – 00;24;46

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

No, we want that. We've learned. Yes, we learned so much of my questions. I was just thinking last night at dinner, my daughter asked 100 questions about everything at this age. And she's so inquisitive that you have to think like, okay, one, I love that she's answering questions, but really, how do I answer those questions? That's going to be beneficial for her, but also not traumatizing. And so she's not necessarily a law enforcement child, but she sees what's going on in it. So some of the example she had last night was there was a critical incident that happened in our community that resulted in a fatality of a child. And she started asking a lot of questions about it.

00;24;47 - 00;25;07

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

So it's one thing to figure out you're giving thoughtful answers versus just throwing it out there and realizing later like, maybe that was too much. So one of the advice I give to parents is, yeah, you want to answer questions as honest and appropriate as you can based on their developmental status, but it's okay to buy yourself some time.

00;25;07 - 00;25;32

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

And I've had to do that too. It's like, you know, I don't really know the answer to that. Can I think about that for a little bit so that I have time to process to give back a better response? And so that's something that probably don't think that they have to they can do, but it's better to buy yourself time first, reacting in the moment and not being able to think about your own thoughts and feelings in the situation because those could be biased or not helpful.

00;25;32 - 00;25;55

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

So yeah, that's a big thing. The communication keeping the door open with them so that they know whether the asking questions or whether they just want to talk about what they're feeling. I think it's giving them that space and then obviously keeping out gory details. But enough that their mind doesn't start to wander. That's another thing that I like to talk to parents about is the way our brains work.

00;25;55 - 00;26;22

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

We're going to fill in the gaps. And with my children or the other children, I care about them like I rather them coming to me as a source first, listening to the other people that are around, that are around them. And so really establishing, you know, come to me. Even if I can't answer the question, I'd rather talk about it and then figure it out together versus you listening to some kid that you met at school that doesn't know what they're talking about, but they're just talking about what they've heard other people say.

00;26;22 - 00;26;40

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

So once you have those lines of communication, I think you probably know better what to share with your kids then maybe what not to share with them. And if in doubt, reach out to a professional that can help you. There's so many culturally competent therapist educators that you know will always give them tidbits.

00;26;40 - 00;26;50

Cristina Fernandez

Thank you. I think that's a great lead in. So, Joanna, I'm going to ask you that question and talk a little bit about culturally competent support and why it's so important.

00;26;50 – 00;27;25

Joanna Black

Well, thank you. Absolutely. When we worked on this program, we interviewed many psychologists from across the country and also professionals in law enforcement and firefighting. And one of the areas that prevented some of them on seeking counseling for their children or not returning to counseling was because the therapist that they were seeing just did not understand the specific and unique needs of that family and what they're dealing with.

00;27;25 - 00;27;52

Joanna Black

So they were just not connected with the right person who could listen and understand. So we knew that when we created this program that the counselors that would be working alongside us would need to have that level of expertise. And what we do when we're working with counselors, we obviously vet them, make sure that they do have that training when it comes to culturally competent.

00;27;52 - 00;28;36

Joanna Black

But we also provide them additional training so that everyone is on the same level. So we know that we have ourselves a baseline that anyone who comes through or comes to one of our counselors for support, that those counselor lawyers have gone through the specific training with us. And then they every quarter we have additional resources and additional trainings for those counselors to participate in, and we go as far as encouraging them to partner with their local police departments to do ride alongs, to actually go and meet with some of the families just in a very community events and just get familiar with what it's like to walk in the shoes of that first responder families.

00;28;36 - 00;29;03

Joanna Black

So, you know, there's the training and then there's the hands on work, too, that we really encourage them to do. And as part of our training, there's also opportunities for them to share experiences and to talk about trends. And there are trends. There's trends when it comes to what's happening in this world. When you turn on the TV, the different types of reactions that the children will have are different from month to month, from year to year.

00;29;03 - 00;29;31

Joanna Black

So we really do encourage that. They talk amongst themselves, they share experiences, and that we also have an open line of dialog between our organization and our professional counselors and psychologists to to reach out to us and to share and to ask questions. But it's essential. I mean, culturally competent. And the other thing that we found is not every shoe always fits.

00;29;31 - 00;29;56

Joanna Black

And we let families know that you will have a match with a counselor. But if it doesn't fit, we will find somebody that fits and that works for your family. So no two families are unique and no two counselors are unique. So I you know, we typically find a pretty good match right away. But there has been situations where a family might have wanted to change out just because of difference in personalities or just didn't feel right.

00;29;56 - 00;30;02

Joanna Black

And that's okay, too. It doesn't mean you should just walk away and leave it as is.

00;30;02 – 00;30;15

Cristina Fernandez

Absolutely. I think that's such an important point that it's okay to say this isn't the right fit for me, but that doesn't mean that I no longer need the support and counseling. It's just this wasn't the right the right combination of personalities or experience.

00;30;15 - 00;30;55

Cristina Fernandez

And that's so key. And I want to kind of loop back around a little bit because I think we are because we are seeing so much more conversation around family wellness and officer mental health, which is wonderful and what we want. But I think it also brings forth perhaps a lot more professionals who want to help and maybe have the best of intentions, but may not be culturally, competent. To your point, Joanna, and may not be a fit for that agency or for that type of work. So, Kimberly, I'm going to turn it to you for just a second and just ask you, you know, what are some things that maybe agencies can kind of keep in mind as they're trying to look for a good a good counselor or someone who can work with them?

00;30;55 - 00;31;08

Cristina Fernandez

And if that doesn't approach isn't taken, sort of what's the harm that could happen if it's not a good match or if it's if it's a professional that just may not be suited for that type of work or have the right experience.

00;31;00 – 00;31;36

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

Definitely. It's such a big challenge because for me, it's like I remember when I was a therapist, you know, they I said green out of school and you don't have all that experience. Like your graduate education is going to give you a foundation, but it's going to always be trauma informed. You might get that course on trauma-informed counseling, but then it has to be that professional that seeks out. And so, I think for young professionals that would want to work with one or they have a little bit of time to be able to develop those skills, but we still want to give them opportunities.

00;31;37 - 00;32;04

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

So, I feel like one, just in general agencies giving more thought to maybe internships so those therapists can begin to have those life experiences. But even if they don't have the right fit like your as Joanna has talked about, programs that will help prepare them and then that might be as you're vetting to say, hey, you know, I see you're building your resumé, you have some great work here, but you know, you might not be a good fit right now, but I would like to enroll you in one of these programs.

00;32;04 - 00;32;21

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

And so, I think we want to develop that profession, especially as law enforcement is growing. We're going to need more therapists that understand law enforcement. So, I think that from a development standpoint is, you know, we want to give therapists a chance to grow and learn so that they can give back to law enforcement in a way that's competent.

00;32;22 - 00;32;30

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

And hopefully that if there's one part of the question, I think there was another piece that I might have been on a tangent on.

00;32;30 – 00;32;40

Cristina Fernandez

The question was really just about what kind of harm could happen or, you know, what is the downside, I guess, of maybe involving accounts for a therapist that doesn't have that background, that doesn't have that experience?

00;32;40 - 00;33;01

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

Yeah. So, I think some of the harm that I've seen in those situations is therapists wanting to help. And like you said, they don't have maybe the best background to it. And so, it's that first shot to show someone what counseling can be like. And if you apply that with people that are already hesitant, then you might not be able to get them back in the door.

00;33;01 - 00;33;22

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

And so we do see that. I've had people who said my first session with a therapist, she started crying uncontrollably. We can't have that in our profession. Like, yes, you're going to have some level of emotion and you want to have that to be empathetic and validate people. But if you can't have your emotions in a healthy way doing those sessions, it's not going to be effective.

00;33;22 - 00;33;37

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

And so we don't want to burn that relationship before it even has the chance to grow. So yeah, that would be one of the things is after that, to not likely to seek help because of maybe a negative first reaction.

00;33;37 – 00;33; 25

Joanna Black

Yeah, and definitely to that point, Kimberly, what we've seen and heard stories of when a counselor is not culturally competent, they just don't understand the pressures of the job and the long hours that police officers have. They often have to do double shifts. The agencies are already stressed out just with people resources, that there's more pressure on their staff to work longer hours. And I've heard a few now in which the counselor and one of the reasons these families may not have gone on to get additional counseling was that the counselor recommended, Well, why don't you just have a date night or why don't you just have a family day every Saturday, put it on the calendar just to be with the family?

00;34;25 - 00;34;51

Joanna Black

But they're completely unfamiliar with the job and the pressures of the job and the hours because police officers work ships, they work nights, they work days, they work weekends, they work birthday parties, they work Christmases, they work Thanksgivings, and they just don't understand that. So that actually gets in the way of them being able to provide real solutions or recommendations to help that family.

00;34;51 - 00;35;22

Cristina Fernandez

Really important considerations. And it's yeah, absolutely. It's a unique it's a unique job. And not everybody understands all those nuances. And that's why this is so very important. So we're going to start wrapping up. So I'm going to ask each of you two questions. And the first question is what is the one thing that you would like law enforcement agencies to understand as it pertains to the needs of law enforcement children, especially around traumatic incidents?

00;35;22 - 00;35;35

Cristina Fernandez

And the second question is, what is one thing that law enforcement agencies can do right now to prepare for these incidents and support the children and families? That's what I take away from today's session. So, Joanna, I want to start with you.

00;35;35 – 00;35;31

Joanna Black

Right. Well, I think we've touched on both of these questions already, so I'll just re-emphasize that number one, officers are part of a community. They're not alone. Their families are not alone. So definitely tap into your brothers and sisters within law enforcement for support. And if a dialog is not already happening within your agency, start having that dialog. Bring the resources that I'm going to talk about now to those within your agency. So your chief or other folks within the agency who can support getting the word out and be an advocate for the that mental health of your children.

00;36;31 - 00;36;57

Joanna Black

We're advocates for so many other things in their lives, whether it be around school or sports. Mental health is just as important. And they are. Children need a cheerleader and a person to advocate for them. So, it's no different within your own agency as it would be to any other thing that you do for your child in the daily basis.

00;36;57 - 00;37;25

Joanna Black

Number two, when it comes to resources, I would encourage everyone listening to check out our website, which is one the number one, S-T R-C-F dot org. So that's 1-S-T, R-C-F dot org. Or you can just google us First Responders Children's Foundation and under programs you will see the resiliency program. The program, as I said, is free confidential, trauma informed.

00;37;25 - 00;37;51

Joanna Black

There's a really short questionnaire that you can fill out to get more information and we will have something contact you within 48 hours guaranteed. So that is number one, even if you're just considering utilizing the services just to take the first step, that's the most important step, is taking that first step. And then you can determine from there the program is a fit for your family.

00;37;51 - 00;38;02

Joanna Black

And we are growing this program. So we really do invite- and we have resources designated for this program. So we really do encourage you to partake in it.

00;38;03 – 00;38;07

Cristina Fernandez

It's so helpful. Thank you so much for sharing that. Kimberly, I want to ask you the same two questions.

00;38;10 – 00;38;49

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

Thank you. I like to say what Joanna was saying is, you know, finding the resources and I think that's a great takeaway is making sure you research and use those resources and have them readily, readily accessible things I want agencies to understand about children is their needs are so unique. Not only are they singled in to this law enforcement piece, but they're going to each have different needs within being a law enforcement family. So, again, don't assume take the time to figure out best practices in your area for children and have those things kind of in a resource. I don't even know what to say. Like maybe not necessary booklet because you want to give them a booklet, but just have those tools in your back pocket so when they're needed you can provide those.

00;38;50 - 00;39;07

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

I think one thing I would like families to really consider as their take away and maybe not even the families. It's taking it back to the agency is begin to establish that family network. Now before you have a crisis, it's that there's nothing worse than having to scurry together just to be able to figure out what those families need.

00;39;07 - 00;39;21

Kimberly Jackson-Luzader

Like what my agency experienced many, many years ago is now today. It's like you have the foundation there and then you can respond so much quicker to the needs of families. So I hope agencies will consider getting that network in place sooner rather than later.

00;39;23 – 00;39;52

Cristina Fernandez

Thank you. So as we close out today's podcast, I would like to thank our guests, Kimberly Jackson later and Joanna Black. I want to thank you both for your honesty and your insight and the resources that you share. This is such an important conversation, and I'm so grateful that we had that conversation with you both. I wanted to thank the Motorola Solutions Foundations and the International Association of Chiefs of Police, Family Support Training and Technical Assistance Program for the opportunity to have this very important discussion today.

00;39;52 - 00;40;06

Cristina Fernandez

For more information about the IACP’s Officer and Safety wellness resources, please visit our web page at the IACP dot org slash O.S.W. or email us at O.S.W. at the IACP dot org. Thank you and be well.

00;40;06 – 00;40;53

Cristina Fernandez

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