

# IN HARM'S WAY

## Law Enforcement Suicide Prevention

*Dr. James D. Sewell*

*Assistant Commissioner (Ret.)*

*Florida Department of Law Enforcement*

*727-821-5014*

*jimdsewell@aol.com*

# IN HARM'S WAY Partners



U.S. Department of Justice  
Bureau of Justice Assistance



FL Regional Community Policing  
Institute at St. Petersburg College



United States Attorney's Office  
Middle District of Florida



# The First Issue: Acknowledging How Cops Die

- At the hands of bad guys
- In accidents, including car crashes
- By heart attacks
- By their own hand

# The Second Issue: Doing Something About It!



Our Mantra: It Takes Courage  
to Ask for Help...

Be Courageous

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## **Part 1. Providing Suicide Prevention Training for Law Enforcement Leaders**

# The key question we pose to law enforcement leaders:

How do we make sure our cops live.... and live better, more productive lives on and off the job???

# The Leadership Challenge: How Can Agency Leaders Better Help the Helper?

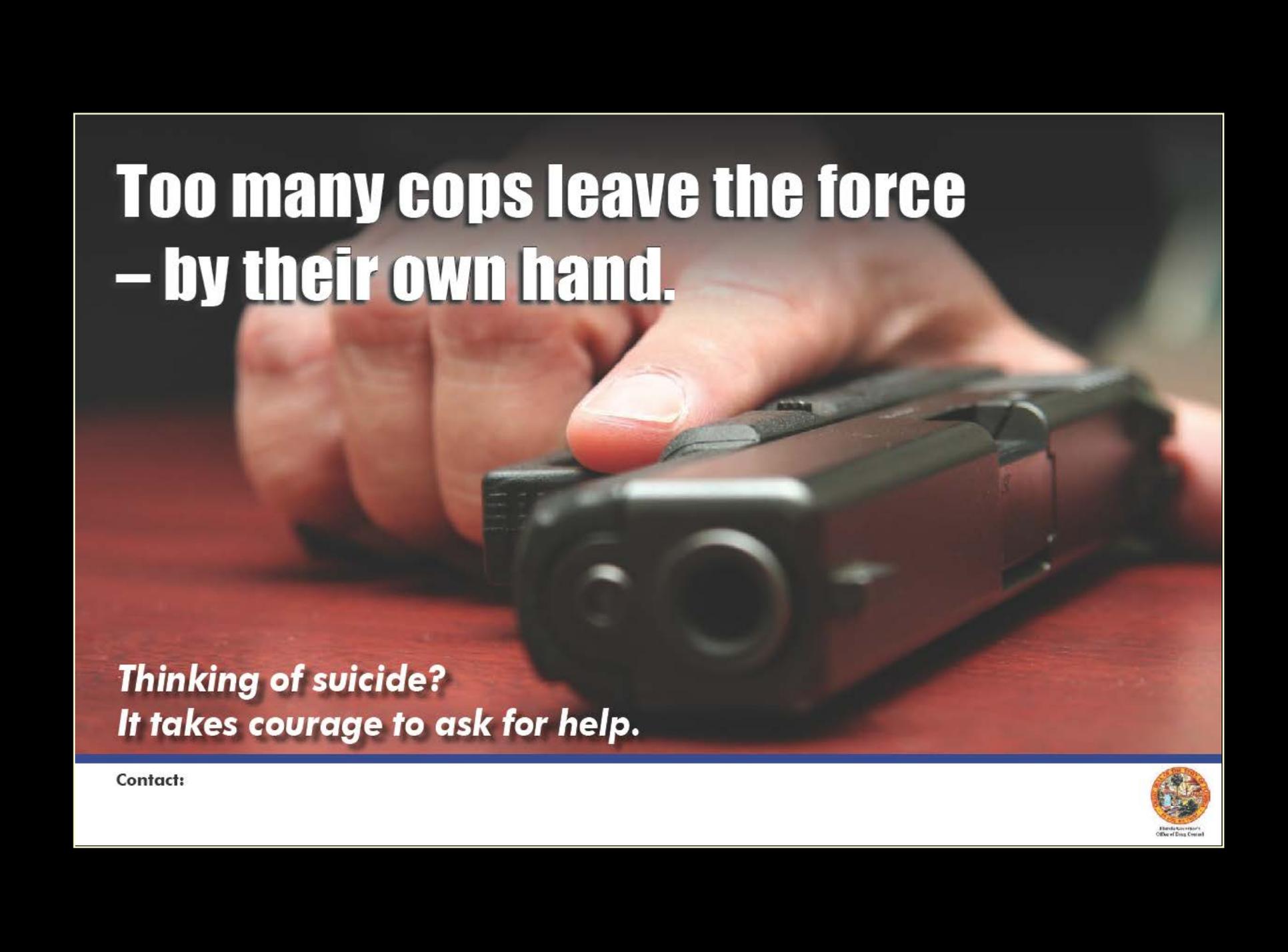
- Change the organizational culture of the agency
- Prepare leaders, managers, and supervisors
- Train and prepare personnel and their families
- Communicate
- Screen, select, and retain the most qualified personnel
- Institute a comprehensive program of stress management
- Develop a crisis intervention program for your personnel, including a law enforcement suicide protocol
  - Ensure suicide procedures are in place before one ever occurs

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## **Part 2. Providing Suicide Prevention Training for Law Enforcement Personnel and Their Families**

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**Part 3. Providing Suicide  
Prevention Support  
Materials That Law  
Enforcement Agencies Can  
Use/Customize**



**Too many cops leave the force  
– by their own hand.**

*Thinking of suicide?  
It takes courage to ask for help.*

Contact:





# Suicide prevention

A guide for supervisory staff

## Why should I be aware of suicide?

Statistics show that:

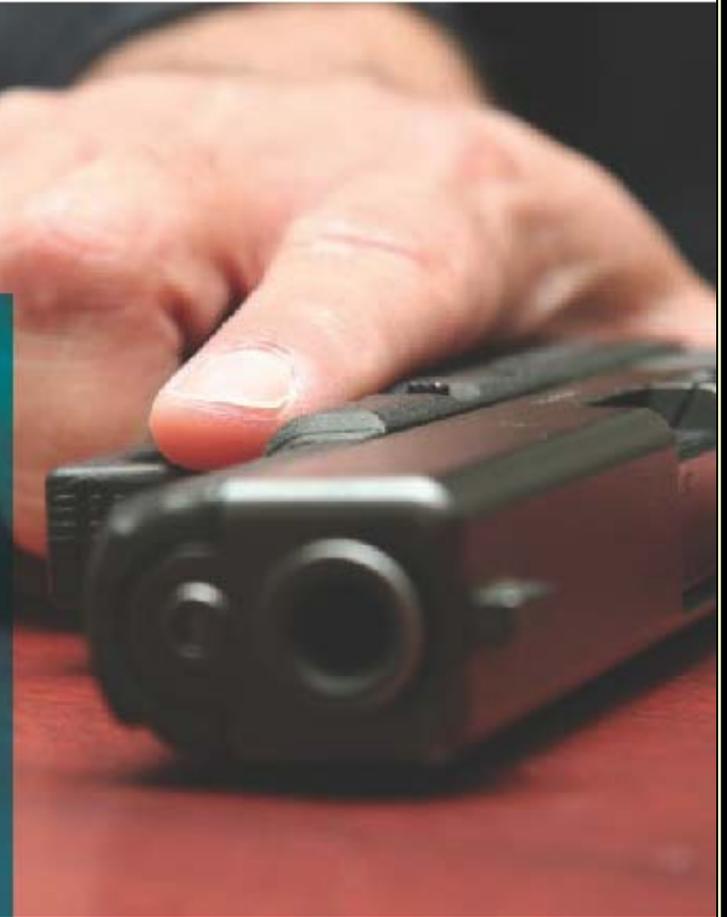
- More than twice as many peace officers die because of suicide than are killed in the line of duty.
- All police officers have firearms, and firearms are the most frequently used means of suicide.
- Law enforcement suicide significantly impacts partners, colleagues, supervisors, first responders, family, friends and the community at large.
- Eighty percent of people who attempt suicide tell somebody first via their actions or actual statements.

## Contact:



## Tips for coping

- Cherish your family.
- Congratulate yourself on victories.
- Create an outside hobby.
- Celebrate the good things in life.
- Eat healthy and exercise regularly.
- Remember your priorities in life. Your job should not be your first priority. It should not define who you are, but rather be something that you do.





## Looking out for your co-worker

*Cops do not hesitate to protect fellow officers when a suspect is threatening them – even if it puts their own lives at risk. But what if your colleague is threatening his/her own life?*

*If you think a co-worker is contemplating suicide, will you take action? Will you have the courage to “roll backup?”*



## Why is suicide among law enforcement officers a concern?

Law enforcement officers should be aware that:

- Most people who commit suicide communicate their intentions ahead of time.
- A peace officer is more likely to be a victim of suicide than homicide; more than twice as many deaths are by suicide than line-of-duty deaths.
- Ninety-seven percent of cops use a firearm to commit suicide.
- Alcohol increases the risk for suicide.
- Suicide has a devastating effect on family, friends and colleagues.



Police Officers' Union of Chicago

## Tips for coping

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Your job should not be your first priority. It should not define who you are, but rather be something that you do.

## Contact:

## AID LIFE

This acronym may help you remember what to do when assisting a person who is suicidal:

- A** - Ask. Do not be afraid to ask, “Are you thinking about hurting yourself?” or “Are you thinking about suicide?”
- I** - Intervene immediately. Take action. Listen and let the person know he or she is not alone.
- D** - Don't keep it a secret.
- L** - Locate help. Seek out a professional, peer support person, chaplain, friend, family member or supervisor.
- I** - Involve command. Supervisors can secure immediate and long-term assistance.
- F** - Find someone to stay with the person now. Don't leave the person alone.
- E** - Expedite. Get help now. An at-risk person needs immediate attention from professionals.

*Remember, suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem!*

# Officer needs assistance!

**Will you “roll backup?”**



# The Buddy Card

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**AID  
LIFE**

## Things to Do

Consider the following if you're with a suicidal individual (and not necessarily in this order):

1. Ask permission to secure weapon(s), including backup(s).
2. Immediately contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) representative.
3. Identify someone who can provide on-scene support.
4. Do not leave person alone.
5. Assess if your safety is in jeopardy.
6. Assist individual with meeting responsibilities until the situation is stabilized.

*When the crisis has stabilized, get debriefed for your own peace of mind!*

## EMERGENCY TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

*It takes courage to ask for help. Be courageous. Seek help.*

1. Threatens to harm self.
2. Prior suicide attempt(s).
3. Disturbance in sleep/appetite/weight.
4. Thinking is constricted - all or nothing, black or white.
5. Increased risk-taking behavior.
6. Has plan and means for suicide.
7. Emotionless/numb.
8. Angry/agitated.
9. Sad/depressed.
10. Hopeless, not future-oriented; giving away valued possessions.
11. Problems at work/home.
12. Recent loss (status, loved one).
13. Under investigation.
14. Socially isolated/withdrawn.
15. Increased consumption of alcohol/drugs.

**suicide  
risk  
factors**

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## Part 4. Providing a Point for Further Research and References

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## Resource Materials



ST. PETERSBURG COLLEGE

Florida Regional Community Policing Institute

[PoliceSuicide.SPCCollege.edu](http://PoliceSuicide.SPCCollege.edu)