



First Responder Kids Film



Family Facilitation Guide



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Private Family Facilitation



Goals:

The goal of the film and this guide is to encourage open discussion among First Responder family members in order to:

1. Help children and family members understand how they can best provide support for their First Responder parent and one another
2. Allow children to discuss how having a First Responder parent has affected them and discuss how they can find support
3. Encourage healthy communication among family members regarding the job of the First Responder and how it affects family life
4. Recognize how changes in behavior from work stress can impact family life.

Note: This film and the accompanying discussion guide are recommended for children ages of 11 - 18.

Family Audience:

(If necessary: Hello, I am/we are_____). We are going to watch a short film about First Responder kids and how *(my job may affect our family)* your mom/dad's job may affect you and your family. The film includes the stories and testimonies of First Responder kids talking about their experiences and concerns as members of a First Responder family. The purpose of the film is to encourage *(you to talk with me if you have questions or concerns)* you to talk with your parents if you need something or have questions or concerns. Hopefully that will help us to support each other better.

7 Minutes: View Children of First Responders Film

Optional Discussion Questions:

1. **What parts of the video did you think were the most important? What did you like about the video? What did you not like about the video?**

Possible Talking Points:

Open conversation between parents and kids

(For kids):

The importance of spending as much time with your parent as you can

Knowing when your parent has had a challenging day at work

2. **What do you like about me being a First Responder?**

Allow for responses - ask "Why?" if applicable

3. **What is the hardest part for you about me being a First Responder?**

Allow for responses

4. **What things do you like that we do as a family? What do you wish we did differently?**

Allow for responses

5. What do you see your friends who do not have a First Responder mom/dad doing differently from our family?

Allow for responses - Ask them (or explain) why they think that is the case

6. Have we been able to do something as a family in the last 6 months? Why or why not?

Discuss the family activities you have participated in recently, and discuss how you could increase the time that you spend together or plan ahead if necessary (See “Bulletproof Spirit” listed in resources).

7. How has me being a First Responder affected how we celebrate special events or holidays? How does this make you feel?

Often parents may be unable to attend special events or holidays; listen to how this affects the kids. Discuss possible solutions or ways to navigate this such as celebrating in advance, calling before or after a shift, or planning in advance if possible. Establish that it is okay for kids to tell their parents if it hurt/bothered them that their mom/dad could not make a special event.

8. What do you wish you knew about me as a First Responder?

Allow for responses

9. Does it ever worry you when I leave for work?

Allow for responses

10. Can you tell when I have had a difficult day at work or when I seem tired, sad, quiet, frustrated, or angry? How can you tell? What do you usually do?

Allow kids to explain what they do when their mom/dad comes home after a challenging or stressful day at work.

Allow parents to explain why they act/feel this way.

Allow parents to explain what their kids and significant other can do to support them and help them, especially after they have been on a difficult call.

11. Have you ever felt that I have been angry toward you for no apparent reason? Why do you feel this way? Can you give me a specific example?

Parents may take this opportunity to explain that anger may be a result of work stress. If this is the case, establish that it is not directed toward the family members. Establish that it is okay for children to talk to their mom/dad if they are concerned about their mom/dad being increasingly frustrated, angry, or sad.

12. How can we/I support you better/more?

Discuss possible options which could include: Reading a book together at bedtime; Additional help with homework; Eating dinner together; Scheduling a time for a future playdate; Mom/dad calling home when they are off of a shift

Suggested Discussion Wrap Up

Ask children/family members if they have any questions or additional topics that they want to talk about. End the discussion on a positive note - you may have a last story to tell or you may let them know that you are open to talk or have another discussion if necessary. Consider proposing setting up of family night discussions or activities on a regular basis to check-in and commit to maintaining an open atmosphere for conversation.

Child/Family Handout:

Advice:

Take time to build a positive relationship with your mom/dad by:

- Spending as much time with them as possible
 - Talking about school or extracurricular activities
 - Asking them if they would like to do something with you (play catch, ride bikes, draw, bake). If they are uninterested at the time, consider suggesting a different activity, allowing them some time to rest, or asking them later at a different time.
- Communicate with them when you have questions or concerns
- Be supportive of your family members on a regular basis, particularly when your First Responder Parent may be unavailable
 - Ask family members if they need anything or what you can do to help them
 - Ask if you think that something may be bothering them and listen
 - Spend time with your family members (playing games, light conversations, etc.)
 - Help out around the house (this could include cleaning your room, doing yard work, vacuuming, making dinner, etc.)

How to Open a Discussion with Your Parent(s):

Question Starters:

1. “The other day I noticed that you weren’t really yourself. Has anything been bothering you?”
2. “Do you want to _____ (get some coffee, go on a bike ride, take a walk, play catch, etc.) to talk/catch up? It seems like something has been bothering you over the past few weeks.”
3. “I would really like to talk to you, is now a good time?” or “I would really like to talk to you, when is a good time to do that?”
4. “I am concerned about you - how are you doing?”
5. “What is the hardest part about your job?”
6. “Is there anything in particular at home that bothers you that I could help make better?”
7. “What do you enjoy most when it comes to spending time with me/us?”
8. Consider asking your parents questions about a specific hobby or activity that they do. For example:
“When did you last (do/work on) _____?”
“What was the last (thing that you made, place that you went) _____?”
9. Let your parent(s) know if something is bothering you. For example, if they missed a school event or birthday, or if they were angry and you didn’t know why:
“I was sad that you missed my (birthday/school performance/other). Do you think that you would be able to attend an important event in the future?”
“Are you angry with me?”



Discussion Tips:

- Your mom/dad may not want to talk right away when they get home from work. Wait for a time when they appear to be more relaxed and freer.
- If you want to have a conversation with your mom/dad, consider beginning by asking to do something with them. For example, go on a walk, a bike ride, to get coffee, etc. If your parent(s) do not want to do any of these, consider asking them what they would like to do or if there is a better time to talk to them.
- When your mom/dad comes home from work, leaves for work, or goes to bed, give them a hug and tell them “Hello”/ “Good-bye”/ “Good Night”
- If possible, talk to others who have parents that are First Responders and ask them about their experiences or if they have any advice.

Child/Family Handout



Food for Thought:

What do you like about your mom/dad being a First Responder?

What is the hardest part about your mom/dad being a First Responder?

What things do you like to do as a family?

What do you wish you knew about your First Responder mom/dad?

What do you wish your friends knew about what it is like to be a kid with a First Responder parent?

What is one thing that your parents could do differently to help support you?

What are one or two challenges you have faced as a child of a First Responder? How did you work through them?

Thoughts from Others:

Here are some comments from other kids after viewing the Children of First Responders Film:

- “[You] should always try to make a good relationship with your parents”
- The kids in the video were brave “to express their feelings in public”
- “[I would tell other kids] to be grateful that...they [Mom/Dad] come home”

Child/Family Handout



Try This:

Family Activities:

- Plan a family outing
- Go on a ride-along
- Plant a family garden
- Plan a weekend movie day once a month
- Watch a movie, go on a hike, play a game
- Organize a scavenger hunt or skit
- Plan a trip to the park

Seeking Social Support:

Options:

- Trusted family member
- If a parent is unavailable to talk at the time, look for other supportive adults/friends
- Close friend
- Priest, Rabbi, or other clergy
- Doctor/nurse
- Counselor
- Support group

Do...

- Decide carefully whom to talk to
- Decide ahead of time what you want to discuss
- Choose the right time and place
- Start by talking about practical things
- Let others know you need to talk or just to be with them
- Talk about painful thoughts and feelings when you're ready
- Ask others if it is a good time to talk
- Tell others you appreciate them listening
- Tell others what you need or how they could help - one main thing that would help you right now

Don't...

- Keep quiet because you don't want to upset others
- Keep quiet because you're worried about being a burden
- Assume that others won't want to listen

Resources for Children to Access:

- EAP program services
- WWW.PTSD.GOV
- Consider accessing counseling help at school (school counselors or social workers)
- Other resources for children experiencing anxiety or depression: 1-844-493-8255; text TALK to 38255
- Safe to Tell
- kidshealth.org <https://kidshealth.org/en/kids/feeling/?WT.ac=k-nav-feeling#cathome-family>

Information from National Center for PTSD and Bulletproof Spirit: See Citations (pg. 13)

Adult Handout:

Main Film Takeaways:



- Remember that your family is a priority
- Develop a good family support system
- Listen to concerns, opinions, and questions presented by your children
- Develop a plan for addressing missed holidays and birthdays (celebrate in advance, long term planning, etc.),
- Spend time with your family and encourage open communication

Questions:

In what ways can your family help you/support you as a First Responder?

Do you struggle to spend time with your family or to make long term plans? Why?

What about your job makes it difficult for your family?

What can you do to support your family?

What is your favorite activity to do with your kids in your free time? Do they know that?

What can your agency/department do to support family members?

Adult Handout

Thoughts from Others:

Here are some comments from other parents after viewing the Children of First Responders Film:

“One of the reasons I brought my daughter is so she can see other first responder kids. She’s not alone in this role. She’s not in a rare position. She’s in a unique family. I am of the opinion there is strength in numbers. It’s important for them not to feel alone.”

One parent viewer of the film said that “I have to open myself up first before I can be with my child.” He sits down at the table and talks with his kids, and said that “I’m stronger when I’m open.” He likes to make his kids part of his life and bring them along with his experience.

“Great to have kids talking about things. It’s helpful for other kids. It’s important to address everyone. Liked that the kids could just [be] that out loud. Kids go through a lot and you don’t really think about it. It’s good to let them talk about it and to show other kids that it’s ok to talk about how they feel.”

“Really good. Good to have kids talking about that stuff. They are kind of the forgotten ones.”

Recognizing Signs of Anxiety in Children:

Anxiety in children tends to manifest as negative behaviors that you may have glimpsed briefly in the past, but that are becoming consistent and intense.

Some Indications of Anxiety in Children May Include:

- Clinging, crying and/or tantrums when you separate, avoidance
- Excessive shyness, avoiding social situations
- Constant worry
- Avoiding situations or places because of fears
- Complaints of frequent stomach aches, headaches, muscle aches, or other unexplained pains
- Difficulties with transitions within school and between school and an activity/sport
- Refusing to go to school; meltdowns before and/or after school
- Difficulty settling down for bed
- Experiencing sudden and frequent panic attacks
- Agitation, restlessness, inattention, poor focus, irritability

Information from Anxiety Canada and Anxiety.org: See Citations (pg. 13)

Recommended Resources:

- Counselling and Educational Services Provided by Status: Code 4, Inc. (Individual and Group Therapy, Mental Wellness and Resilience, etc.) www.sc4i.org
- EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) International Association website: www.emdria.org
- Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us>
- American Psychological Association: <https://locator.apa.org/> or <https://www.apa.org/>
- Novel: *Bulletproof Spirit* by Captain Dan Willis
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) <https://www.nami.org/#> Colorado Springs at <https://namicoloradosprings.org/>

Additional information and resources regarding PTSD:

- Parent Tips for Helping Adolescents After Disasters https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/type/PFA/PFA_Parent_Tips_Adolescents.pdf
- National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: www.ptsd.va.gov/index.asp
https://www.ptsd.va.gov/gethelp/find_therapist.asp
- Counseling Team International www.thecounselingteam.com

Additional information and resources regarding anxiety:

- <https://www.anxietycanada.com/>
- <https://www.anxiety.org/>
- <https://www.anxiety.org/causes-and-symptoms-of-anxiety-in-children>
- Anxiety and Depression Association of America <https://adaa.org/>

Citations:

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Willis, Dan. *Bulletproof Spirit*. New World Library, 2014.