Many moons ago, when many of us decided to become police officers, we had different ideas in mind.

Most wanted to help others, some hoped to make a difference, while others wanted to catch the bad guy. Do you ever stop and look back at your reasoning for joining the ranks of law enforcement?

Over the last several months, our resolve has been tested in many ways. I often hear, “I didn’t sign up for this” from fellow officers. Many of us have been subjected to taunts and criticism of our profession. Some have labeled all of us as the cause of this problem or that injustice. It’s hard not to take it personally, even though the critique is not aimed at you alone.

I think one of the ways we can help strengthen our peace of mind is to focus on the many positive aspects of our job. Ask yourself why you became an officer and whether or not you feel you’ve fulfilled those aspirations. How many of you have been a part of these situations:

- Helping a motorist who has car problems with a ride or a phone call for help, regardless of the weather conditions
- Giving someone a few bucks to help with a ride or a meal
- Assisting with directions to someone who is lost
- Unlocking a car for a motorist who left the keys in the car

All of these situations, while seemingly simple, bring immediate happiness to those affected.

While it may not seem like a big deal to us, it is to the person with the problem.

How many times have you been a part of more serious cases? Residential burglary, domestic assault, traffic accident with fatality or serious injury. In those instances, you often go above and beyond your normal duties while building the case. Interviews, evidence collection, tracking down leads, making an arrest. All very time-consuming, but in the end, when it falls into place and a successful resolution is the result, you feel a great deal of satisfaction in a job well done.

This is why we are police officers. We make a difference in people’s lives. We improve their way of life. We step in and do what needs to be done, no matter the circumstances. We do the little things, and the big things, to get the job done.

How many times in the last few months have complete strangers walked up to you and said “Thanks”? How many have offered to buy your meal or cup of coffee? How many times have...
they honked, with a thumbs up? Most people get it. They know we have a tough job. They see that our profession is maligned by various causes and groups. They know that most of us are trying to do our best in a very challenging environment. They believe in us.

It can be hard to focus on the positive aspects of our job when we are inundated with a barrage of negative pundits and “experts”. Many successful coaches and players in professional sports claim they never read or listen to what the media has to say about their teams. Those people seem to have a confidence in what they are doing. They rely on credible feedback from fellow coaches and players, rather than those who are not involved with the team. They believe in themselves and they trust their instincts to do what needs to be done to be successful. They can tune out the boo birds when they are giving their best effort and they bask in the cheers when they succeed. You can develop that same mindset. Tune out the negative. Listen to your fellow comrades who have your safety and well-being front and center.

Today sit down for some quiet time. Take out a pen and paper. Write down the top five reasons you feel it is important to be a police officer. Put that reminder in your shirt pocket each day when you go to work. Some days, you will need to look at that piece of paper to jumpstart your resolve. We all need a reminder, now and then, of the reasons why we are police officers. Law enforcement is an honorable profession. We should be proud to be police officers. We are peacemakers. We are blessed.

Dan Fitzgerald is the Chief of Police for the City of Brentwood, and he currently chairs the Street Talk Advisory Committee.

AT YOUR SERVICE: ADDRESS FIRST RESPONDER STRESS

By Chief Mike Laws

The ongoing events of strife and unrest that have unfolded in the past few months in the St. Louis metro area are beyond tragic and their effects on many fronts will be long-lasting. Making improvements to our communities and healing those involved will take time and will take work. There is not a single solution to correct the problems precipitating or brought about by these events. These issues will need to be separated and addressed individually.

One of these concerns is the psychological stress on first responders stemming from the exposure to violence and abuse on a daily basis.
The Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Association is working to address that specific concern. While there is not a “one size fits all” solution for the emotional stress of these events, the CISM team is working with local agencies to reduce the effects of that exposure.

The CISM Team
The CISM Association is an organization created to provide assistance to emergency responders after particularly critical incidents. “Critical incidents” are those occurrences that are more traumatic or severe than what first responders generally experience in day-to-day operations. Examples include multi-casualty incidents, child fatalities or a line-of-duty death. Even a veteran emergency worker may need help coping in these situations.

Staffed entirely by volunteers, the CISM Association is made up of police officers, firefighters, EMS workers, mental health professionals and chaplains dedicated and trained to provide assistance to fellow emergency workers. The organization has been doing so for over 20 years.

CISM Goals
The goals of the organization are three-fold: education, crisis intervention, support.

Education
CISM provides education about the symptoms of stress and ways to mitigate those effects. CISM presenters outline the possible physical and psychological effects stress may produce. They want their audience to realize that when they experience some of these symptoms they are not alone and that a “normal” stress response could be many things.

Crisis Intervention
Another focus of the CISM team is a specific type of crisis intervention designed to help emergency responders better care for themselves and their co-workers during and after a crisis. The intervention used most often is a critical incident stress debriefing. This involves a CISM team, made up of mental health and peer support members, meeting with those most directly involved with the traumatic situation. The purpose of debriefings is to provide a structured way to discuss the events and the effects on those who responded.

Support
The crisis intervention and support goals are actually intertwined in that the CISM team responds, upon request, during or after a crisis to support the emergency workers. While this procedure is not therapy, strategies are discussed during the debriefing to help those involved recognize and cope with the symptoms they may be experiencing. It can also be useful in helping responders recognize issues that might be affecting their co-workers. Another important part of the support role is helping workers recognize that ongoing assistance is available. They are encouraged to talk with their families, friends, spiritual leaders, and of course, to “be there” for each other.

Free and Confidential
Two key features of the CISM team are that assistance is free of charge and strictly confidential.

How the Team Is Helping
Although the recent community unrest is not a single critical “incident”, it certainly may result in symptoms typically related to stress. Since early August, officers have had to endure long hours and extended periods of time without days off. During those hours, they have been exposed to direct violent behavior, verbal abuse and threats to their families from the protestors, and disparaging remarks from some politicians and media outlets.

This extended anti-social behavior is beyond what officers are typically accustomed to in this region. It is something perceived in larger cities like New York or Los Angeles. Addressing these circumstances has involved a learning curve for police commanders handling the crowds and for the CISM team mitigating the stress factors. Both groups have reached out
to counterparts in these mega-cities for guidance and recommendations.

After conferring with CISM associates in other areas, the local team modified its approach to the present situation. In a debriefing, participants discuss what happened in the past incident. Currently, the CISM Team has been hosting post-incident groups during which what has happened, as well as what is still happening, and/or what still could happen are discussed. Team members also discuss the general nature of stress, negative outcomes participants could experience, and steps they can take to help reduce or even avoid those negative outcomes.

Discussion groups offer opportunities to learn more about stress reactions, provide a safe environment to “vent” and to discuss symptoms affecting that particular group, rather than providing a one-sided presentation about generalities. Each group is different and may range from those experiencing face-to-face confrontations to responders with no direct contact with protestors at all. Even without direct exposure to the unrest, officers and their families have expressed stress reactions to the negative media coverage, threats to law enforcement, and the tragic murder of police officers in the name of “protest”. Some officers, even those not directly involved, have voiced thoughts of leaving the profession because of this situation. One strong recommendation made by the CISM team in every meeting is that decisions of this magnitude should not be made hastily.

Conclusion
The unprecedented chain of events experienced over the past several months is certainly not something anyone wants to see continue. Officers have faced inordinate amounts of abuse publically to their profession and to themselves personally. While no one wants to see a “repeat” of recent events, if something similar were to occur, agencies certainly want to be better prepared if it does. Organizations should study tactics that worked and those that did not in all facets of the situation. This includes how responding officers are supported psychologically.

The CISM team believes it is healthy to get issues out in the open in a safe environment through confidential discussion. From awareness comes improvement, and from improvement, healing. The CISM team has been supporting first responders since 1991 and will continue to strive for improvements to protect the mental health of our peers.

Mike Laws is Chief of Police for the City of Overland and is President of the CISM Association. He is also a former board member of Street Talk.

BEHIND THE BADGE: SLPWA SUPPORTS POLICE FAMILIES

By Hope Jones

As I sit here to write this article, I should already be fast asleep, but for many of us, sleepless nights have become the norm. August 9, 2014 changed so many things for police families across the Greater St. Louis area and the United States. We all know the story, but only one of us was there that day.

I am a police wife and I am proud to be a part of this great police family. I am also a member of the St. Louis Police Wives’ Association and have come to find comfort from the other wives during this time. I share a gift with many of these amazing women, and that is the ability to excel in times of crisis. Having the aptitude to stay calm, organize, and mobilize resources to support our officers during this time has been a form of therapy for me. It has allowed me to feel helpful in a time when many of us feel helpless. We all handle situations differently, and where we or our spouses are integrated in this crisis can play a large role in how we are coping.
But all of this is what makes this sisterhood such an essential part of the police life.

I was asked to write this article describing how the families are holding up during this crisis. What I have found is that emotions and stress amongst our families during this time span the full spectrum, from good to the worst imaginable. Some police families have been fortunate in the sense that their loved ones have not had to report to the front lines of Ferguson or protests and have been, for the most part, spared the inhumanity and hate that are being hurled at officers on a daily basis.

Some wives do not feel any new threats or fears, and even at times feel like others are overreacting. Yet, at the same time, other police families have been all but ripped apart. People have marched to these families’ personal homes, stolen their identities, threatened their wives and children and left these families with an undeniable fear of violation and mistrust. The wives of these families are even more fearful now when their spouses leave, not only for their safety, but their family’s safety as well.

Wives are telling us of their spouses’ emotions and stress ranging from unchanged to distant, to in some cases, volatile. Some officers have thrived being home with loved ones, and relish the moment they walk in the door and are surrounded by their wife and children. Others have been affected with shorter tempers, the burden of too many questions, and the overall toll the stress and exhaustion have taken on them emotionally and physically.

Our children, unfortunately, have not been immune to the stress of this crisis and are also feeling the effects. Older children understand what is happening and are more fearful for their police parent while on duty. Some have been bullied at school, and one young teen was fired from her beloved job when she requested time off to leave town with her family because of safety concerns. Young children are suffering from the absence of not only one, but sometimes both parents, during long mandatory shifts, and they can sense tension and fear.

Many police families have had discussions with their children about not advertising the fact that their parent is a police officer, fearing the child might become a target. A few police families have faced off with schools which say it is appropriate to portray pro-protestors posters, citing freedom of speech for their students. Yet they deny officers’ children the right to express their freedom by placing pro-police posters in the same school.

The hardest part, at least for me, has been how to have this conversation with such a young child. When I picked my son up from school in early November, we were driving home and passed a cemetery. He looked at me and asked me if that was where Michael Brown was buried. I had no idea he had heard anything about the crisis. Although with the media and attention the case has drawn, I guess I should not have been surprised. The conversation was difficult. Finding the right words to explain the situation to a five-year-old was uncomfortable.

Yet, I realized that even through all this negativity and discomfort, there are opportunities for all of us to rise above and hopefully not only prepare our children for their future, but also provide them with tools to continue driving positive change in this world.

The St. Louis Police Wives’ Association has been proud to extend its membership to surrounding municipalities and truly become a regional association that supports officers and their families in a time of need and crisis.

During this crisis, some of our members have been counselors, babysitters, shoulders to cry on, fundraisers, cooks, command post organizers, and more while other
members have needed the support and benefits that come from this sisterhood of police wives. This is what we
are here for; it is what we do. Although every wife, spouse or family is handling this situation differently, one
thing is certain: this crisis has deepened the bond that is the thin blue line and brought our officers and their
families across the Greater St. Louis Area closer together.

The St. Louis Police Wives’ Association (SLPWA) is composed of wives, mothers, sisters and widows of active
and retired St. Louis area Police Officers, who have bonded together to assist injured officers and police fami-
lies in times of need and family crisis. SLPWA services include financial assistance, scholarships, memorial
gifts, family support, family activities and volunteer service at fundraisers. Members also help connect families
to counselors, provide babysitting services for one another and offer much needed emotional support. To
learn more about SLPWA, call 314-625-3504, visit www.stlpolicewives.org, find us on Facebook or follow us
on Twitter @stlpolicewives.

CURRENT ISSUES: A CALLING TO SERVE AND
FERGUSON RESPONSES

By Rabbi Mark L. Shook

“Then I heard the voice
of the Lord saying,
“Whom shall I send? And
who will go for us?” And
I said, “Here am I. Send
me!” (Isaiah 6:8)

Law enforcement leadership rou-
tinely refers to police work as a
calling. Police officers see them-
selves as fulfilling a number of
religious tasks: saving lives,
standing for justice, protecting
the weak. Their motivation for
undergoing rigorous training, en-
during long hours for little pay,
and daily putting their lives in
mortal danger is, in part, due to
their spiritual identity.

Spiritual identity and a law en-
forcement calling often result in
seminarians becoming cops and
cops becoming seminarians in
surprising numbers. But what
happens when that sense of ful-
filled with a divine calling is shat-
tered? This is one of the questions
posed by the civil disturbances in
Ferguson, MO.

In Ferguson, night after night, in
August, continuing for three days
in October and ten days in No-

vember, St. Louis County Police
Officers and State Highway Pa-
trol Troopers stood their assigned
posts. They were rewarded for
their dedication to their calling by
hearing demonstrators graphically
describe how they were going to
rape their spouses and murder
their children.

Officers on the front lines un-
stood, above all, that a violent
response was precisely what the
demonstrators were trying to pro-
voke. What these officers were
not prepared for was local and
national clergy standing within
earshot of the vile threats and not
doing or saying anything to the
demonstrators who shouted them.

On Saturday, October 11, I per-
sonally witnessed this dynamic. I
stood behind officers from sever-
al jurisdictions who were formed
in a line outside the Ferguson Po-
lice Station. The epithets and
threats were flying. Young chil-

dren, clinging to their obscenity-
shouting parents were being giv-

en a real life lesson in neigh-

borhood policing. The body lan-
guage of the clergy intermingled
with the demonstrators was clear.
As long as the demonstrators re-
mained non-violent, they were
not going to intervene. It mattered
not that the verbal attacks were
meant to be as personal and as
threatening as possible.

From that moment on, officers
and their families began a reas-
essment of how they would re-

gard members of the clergy and
the religious communities that
sponsored them. In a recent Criti-
cal Incident Stress Debriefing of
law enforcement family mem-
bbers, this failure on the part of
demonstrating clergy to stand up
for respectful speech directed to-
ward police officers was tanta-

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mount to the breaking of a sacred covenant. Their faith had not been broken. But something fundamental had changed. The bond of trust had been broken.

There was also a theological breach of trust. In the very beginning of the Ferguson phenomenon, several members of the clergy shouted at the officers on the line that they “needed to repent, atone, and ask forgiveness for their actions.” Every person with a badge was considered guilty of police brutality. Officers could not stand the idea of being painted with the broad and uncritical brush of collective guilt. They believed in Ezekiel’s conviction that each person would be judged based on their own sins and no one else’s.

Rabbi Mark Leslie Shook has been a Department Chaplain with the St. Louis County Police, a volunteer position, since 1973. In 2010, he was appointed to the position of Chaplain Coordinator, responsible for the training and administration of the Chaplaincy program. That same year, he retired after 23 years as the Senior Rabbi of Congregation Temple Israel in Creve Coeur. He currently teaches Jewish Philosophy at St. Louis University and writes historical fiction. His first novel, The Ezra Scroll, was published in 2013.

POLICE FAMILY LIFE: TALKING WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

By Sarah Buehner, LCSW

As a police wife, I am keenly aware how stressful the past few months have been, and how recent community unrest has affected not only police officers, but also their families and friends. I also know that even before the events in Ferguson, the life of a police family is constantly hectic, stressful and unpredictable.

As a therapist, I counsel many families going through stressful situations, and I have learned over the years that communication is the key to “making it through.” Couples and families that are able to “talk it out” are better able to cope with stress and find productive solutions. This article provides you with a few tips on talking with family and friends about Ferguson and recent violence in our community, how to help calm family and friends’ fears, as well as how to respond when family or friends are harassed because they are related to a police officer. Each section includes recommendations specific to talking with kids.

Tips for Talking with Family and Friends About Ferguson and Other Recent Events

There is no “right thing” to say; everyone is different and your perspective depends on your thoughts, feelings and experiences. What is most important is learning how to talk, and how to listen to others who may or may not share the same perspective as you.

One key to communication is self-awareness and doing an internal self-reflection. Here are a few questions to help you with self-awareness:

- Am I ready to talk about what happened?
- Are there specific topics/events I don’t want to talk about?
- Are there certain people I don’t want to talk to about these topics?

Talking with your family and friends is as helpful for them as it is for you. Think about when something

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intense happens at work—afterwards, you probably talk with your other officers to ‘debrief’ and it helps you de-stress and process the events that occurred. Talking with your partner, parents, close family or friends can be just as helpful.

Here are some tips for a productive conversation:

- **Be aware of your emotions as you talk.** If you feel yourself getting angry or frustrated, it’s OK to take a break or end the conversation. When we are angry or upset, we are reacting to the situation, not responding in a thoughtful, calm and helpful way.

- **Practice Active Listening.** There are tons of books and articles about active listening. Active listening is a skill that can help you understand the other person’s perspective while also being able to share your own.

- **Talk with your kids.** Even my three-year-old knows something has been different the past few months; her dad is gone more, he is more stressed out, and she inevitably hears others talk about the recent unrest. Many parents don’t know what to say to their kids when something traumatic or stressful happens, and choose not to say anything at all. I encourage you to talk with your kids, be age-appropriate, and allow them to share what they know and ask their questions. You don’t have to know the answers to all their questions. What’s important is that they feel heard, and that they know you are safe. You can also help give a more realistic perspective of what is going on. This will help calm your kiddo’s anxieties and process the situation a little better.

**Tips for Helping Calm Family and Friends’ Fears**

As you are well aware, family and friends can at times be on-edge about your line of work and express their concerns for your safety. Here are a few tips to help calm and reassure your loved ones:

- **Sometimes all family members need is your reassurance.** You can help calm fears by reminding family and friends about the countless hours of training you have gone through—and still go through—to complete your job as safely as possible. You can also remind them of the many precautions you take on a daily basis to protect yourself and your fellow officers.

- **Sometimes people just want their feelings to be heard.** Acknowledging your family and friends’ fears can also help them calm down a bit. (How simple is that!)

- **Remember, though, it is not your job to “fix” their fears.** Police officers are natural helpers; they want to fix and make everything right. One of the first things I teach couples in counseling is how to listen to each other’s fears, frustrations or struggles without having to “fix” them.

- **Encourage family members to rely on (or build) other supports to help them through.** Police wives can join the local Police Wives Association or build relationships with other police families for support. Encouraging family members to take care of themselves is one of the most helpful things you can do. If family members continue to struggle, encourage them to go to counseling. I know many police families that seek counseling from time to time to help deal with the countless stresses of being a police family. Counseling can also give family and friends a safe space to “vent” and seek support and additional guidance on how to cope with their fears or extreme anxiety regarding your safety when you are behind that badge and vest.

- **When talking with kids:** Remind your kids of the safety precautions you take to keep yourself safe, like your vest, the way you have been trained, etc. Don’t dismiss their anxiety or fear; acknowledge it and reassure them that you do what you need to keep yourself safe. It is also important to watch what you talk about around
your kids. Younger kids often can’t process complicated or abstract topics, and the more you talk about dangerous encounters around your child, the more they will respond anxiously. If your child’s anxieties or fears become severe enough that they impact sleep, school, social life, home life or mood, I encourage you to seek counseling for your child. There are many excellent no-cost counseling services in the St. Louis area, thanks to the Children’s Service Fund and other non-profit programs.

Dealing with Harassment
As you know, some children, nieces/nephews or grandchildren of officers have been harassed recently due to their parent or relative being a police officer. There have also been stories of adult family members experiencing harassment due to their connection with the police community. Here are some tips to help you help families if they experience harassment.

- **Remind family and friends** that when someone else is verbally or physically aggressive, the person really isn’t there to “listen” or engage in a productive conversation. Things can escalate quickly and family members can easily find themselves in dangerous situations if they choose to respond. They may feel the desire to stand up for you and provide their perspective. But again, if the person is behaving aggressively, talking won’t help. The best thing family members can do is not respond and leave the situation safely. If the family member is an adult and feels unsafe or threatened, encourage him/her to seek safety and contact the police for additional support.

- **When it comes to kids**, encourage them to report to the school authorities or whoever is in charge at their present location. I suggest having a conversation afterward with your child about what happened. Allow your child to process the situation aloud and to ask questions. You can help your child understand that people don’t always react in healthy ways when they are angry. This is a great time to share some tips from the field on how to de-escalate a conversation and respond calmly to someone who isn’t so calm.

And finally, I’m sure you have heard this before, but we cannot be there to support others if we are not taking care of ourselves. As police families, healthy communication and self-care are the keys to resilience during these challenging times.

Sarah Buehner holds a Masters in Social Work and is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. She is the wife of a police officer, who is also a former military police officer. Mrs. Buehner provides school-based counseling services to teens at Lutheran Family & Children’s Services of Missouri.

### IN THE LIMELIGHT: CIT AWARDEES

This fall, three CIT Councils in the metropolitan area hosted their Annual Awards Dinners. These celebrations honor CIT officers who made a significant and positive impact on persons in psychiatric crisis or who were struggling with an ongoing mental health issue. Two officers received specially-named awards for their dedication in helping a young person.

Officers intervened in a variety of circumstances, including substance abuse, active suicide attempts, critical psychiatric crisis and homeless individuals who needed mental health and social services to restore them to independence and a safe environment.

In St. Louis County, the Council also recognized the **Community Mental Health Liaisons** for their contributions of after-crisis follow-up and linkage to mental health and other social services for individuals identified by CIT responders. St. Louis County’s **Chief Jon Belmar** and **Lt. Col. Terry Robards** (retired) were presented with the Missouri CIT Council Leadership Award.
In addition to honoring officers, the CIT Council for St. Charles, Lincoln and Warren Counties also presented Outstanding Service Awards to Dr. Karl Wilson (Crider Health Center) and Sandy Miller (Fox 2 News) for their contributions to and support of CIT.

Congratulations and Thank You to all awardees for your efforts on behalf of persons with mental illness.

St. Louis County and Municipalities
- Officer Timothy Anderer, St. Louis County
- Officer James Borzillo, St. Louis County
- Sgt. Tim Heimann, St. John
- Sgt. Terry Kenniston, Maryland Heights
- Officer Penny Kimes, Bridgeton
- Officer Mark Kolinski, St. Louis County
- Officer Vadim Kritinsky, St. Louis County
- Officer Andrew Lucca, Maryland Heights
- Officer Tony Perry, Florissant
- Sgt. Aaron Roediger, St. Louis County
- Officer Robert Schandler, Maryland Heights
- Officer Sanda Smajlovic, Chesterfield
- Officer Terry Wiedner, Maryland Heights
- Officer Grace Fico, Creve Coeur
  - Sean Gollubske Award

St. Charles, Lincoln, Warren Counties
- Corporal Gary Bradshaw, St. Charles County Sheriff
- Lt. Dale Dothage, Wentzville
- Officer John Greenley, St. Charles
- Chaplain Ken McDonald, Lake St. Louis
- Officer Sidney McDonald, O’Fallon
- Depute Joseph McKinney, St. Charles County Sheriff
- Officer Brianna Vunesky, St. Peters
- Officer Tim Wagner, O’Fallon
- Sgt. Derek Meyers, O’Fallon
  - Ryan Kendall Outstanding Service Award

Franklin County
- Officer Casey Hill, Washington
- Officer Michael Joyce, Union
- Officer Paul Pfeiffer, Washington
- Officer Eric Saavedra, Washington
- Officer Betsey Schulze, Washington