

The Aftermath.... (again!)

Anyone else feel like you were kicked in the gut this afternoon? Maybe you felt your heart skip a beat, or your breath was taken away, or your stomach twisted momentarily as you gasped “oh no... not again”? Mine did and then some. We all share the unexpected, unwanted, unnatural, and unnerving loss of a spouse, significant other, partner, father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, friend, neighbor, co-worker, or fellow sister or brother in blue due to a line of duty death. In some manner, shape or form, we share today’s tragic loss of Mendota Heights Police Officer Scott Patrick. We have all been there and it can feel like it is happening all over again – and we ask why.

Grief, loss, and mourning are by nature cyclical. Constant reminders invade our lives every day – either sensorially or experientially. Sometimes a simple smell reminds us of our loved one, we hear a favorite tune on the radio that we shared, we see something that reminds us of a place we visited, and we occasionally can be walloped by the eerily similar nature of another line-of-duty death. Each day we process those reminders - some having greater impact and needing more time, focus and effort to put in their proper place in the niches of our heart. Today, in the face of this overwhelming loss, it is important to understand that all of these reactions and thoughts are normal even though we sometimes can think “I’ve already dealt with that, I thought that was behind me or I was over that part of the loss”. Therein lies the cyclical nature I mentioned earlier; we progress down this path of life thinking it is linear and mostly it is, but then an incident like today brings all the past (thoughts, feelings, emotions, and behaviors) back full circle.

At times like to today, tomorrow, and through the funeral, there will be constant news updates and we will see funeral planning and an enormous outpouring of community support that can remind us of those times when we lost our special person, and it also reminds us of our very public loss and we can understand the public mourning that the family of Officer Patrick will experience. In certain respects we see ourselves re-experiencing this spectacle – the pomp, circumstance, disbelief, pain, and possibly a deep sense of powerlessness. But it remains important for us to acknowledge our pain and the memories they emanate from because interwoven amongst those painful memories lies the bountiful plethora of good memories, thoughts and experiences we share with our missing officer. I know the triggers of today take the breath from us just as that terrible telephone call or the horrific knock on the door at zero-dark-thirty. The triggers of today and the today’s to come must be given space, acknowledged, and processed to ensure we take care of ourselves. It is in this acknowledgment we respect the sacrifice of our fallen officer and honor those wonderful times we shared with them.

The International Critical Incident Stress Foundation encourages emergency service personnel to employ self-care techniques such as: Try not to fight the reactions and responses that your body and mind are experiencing – understand they are normal reactions to terrible (abnormal) events; give yourself time and space remembering to be gentle on yourself and less judgmental; refrain from stimulants and alcohol (anything that interferes with restorative

sleep); and finally it is important to maintain a routine and to try to add or continue exercise that focuses on cardio in an effort to flush the stress toxins that begin to flood our systems. The ICISF guidelines are written specifically for police officers, firefighters and paramedics, but I think they apply to all us - we fall into the family of emergency service after a line-of-duty death and following the same advice can help us maintain a more even keel during these most difficult times.

Research has proven that it doesn't take someone with a psychology degree and a bunch of letters behind their name to help you – all it takes is a kind and gentle ear that will listen without offering solutions or fixes – emergency service chaplains, clergy and spiritual leaders that understand grief, loss, and emergency service, peer counselors for those officers and family members that have access to these valuable employer-based support programs, employee assistance programs (EAPs), and most importantly is the half-dozen critical incident stress management (CISM) teams throughout the state of Minnesota. They offer 24 hour a day direct individual and/or group support to those working in emergency service and are a simple telephone call away.

| | | | |
|------------------|--------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Metro Region | 612-347-5710 | Central Region | 800-556-4911 |
| Southeast Region | 800-237-6822 | South Central Region | 507-345-9767 |
| Southwest Region | 507-537-7666 | Northeast Region | 218-727-8770 |

In addition, these groups can offer assistance:

- 1) Concerns of Police Survivors (COPS) (www.mncops.org),
- 2) Law Enforcement Family Support Network (LEFSN) (www.lawenforcementfamilysupport.org)
- 3) Wives behind the Badge
(www.wivesbehindthebadge.org/our-work/auxiliary-committee/minnesota-auxiliary-committee/)
- 4) Minnesota Association of Injured Police Officers (MAIPO) (www.officerneedshelp.com)

All of these organizations can serve as a great support resource for those impacted by the devastating effects of a line-of-duty-death or injury.

Take care of yourself, take care of your family and take care of your colleagues (in that order!) everyday-- but especially as the next few days and weeks unfold.