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Parenting as a Law Enforcement Officer

Unfortunately, some of the traits that make a good officer can interfere with your personal life because the qualities needed at work differ drastically from the qualities needed from you at home. Here are some of the differences, as well as some tips on how to leave the officer side of you at the station.

Emotionally Restrained vs. Emotionally Expressive

On the job, you are expected to remain very controlled and not let your emotions get the best of you. Expressions of intense emotion are rarely encouraged while on the job. At home, your children need to see a more emotional side of you- not only does it show them that you care, but also models appropriate release or discussion of feelings.

Firm vs. Empathic

On the streets, being too empathic makes you vulnerable or more likely to be taken advantage of. You must be firm and display command presence at all times. By nature, you are a problem solver. However, family members do not always need their problems solved; rather, they need someone who will listen and validate whatever troubles they are going through. This helps them develop confidence that they can find their own solutions

Suspicious vs. Tolerant

Day after day, many of the people you encounter while at work lie to you- of course you are suspicious. Your job is to question people. At home, interrogating your children or spouse will only set you back. If your 15-year-old son shoplifts and smokes a joint, it does not make him a gangbanger, and your spouse coming home ten minutes late from work does not necessarily mean they are having an affair.

Stubborn vs. Patient

As a police officer, having the mentality of “my way or the highway” works while you’re on the job- citizens must comply with your orders. At home, your family will not always comply the same way. Instead, you must be patient and flexible; your son may not clean his room to your standards and your daughter may not grasp Algebra concepts as quickly as you believe she should.

Tactics for Family Survival and Leaving the Officer at the Station

- ✓ Manage your time well: make room for important family events by reducing off-duty if necessary.
- ✓ Manage your stress: take time for yourself; use healthy coping strategies regularly to prevent burn-out; stay both physically and mentally fit
- ✓ Communicate with your family: if you had a rough day, call or send your spouse/partner a text on your way home letting them know you may need some decompressing time before you jump into family business mode. Proactively asking for what you need may help reduce frustration on both sides
- ✓ Inform your family about your job: have them attend a spouse or kids academy so they understand the stressors and demands. We also recommend the book *I Love a Cop* by Ellen Kirschman
- ✓ Remember you have multiple identities: a cop, parent, spouse, friend, churchmember, coach, etc. Expand your social circle so that you associate with people outside of law enforcement and set boundaries so that you do not always talk about work while not at work.
- ✓ Control what you can- let go of everything else
- ✓ When you leave work, have a routine while getting changed or driving home, such as listening to relaxing music or reciting a mantra- view this routine as your transition from cop to family member