

OSCAR KILO
Family Life

A quick guide to Better Communication in Police Families

Learn how to further develop strong, positive communication skills with your loved one.

Introduction

Good communication lies at the heart of all relationships, and it's no different in police families. However, having a loved one in the police service can pose a unique set of challenges – whether that be balancing shift-work patterns, dealing with lack of sleep, or in some cases managing consequences of the very real demands of the job.

The big emotional and physical toll that police work can have, will be felt outside of work, by loved ones and family members. This is why it's so important that everyone in your household makes time to communicate properly. You might feel like your wants, needs and worries are insignificant in comparison to your partner, but that is not true and it's vital you have regular opportunities to speak about them.

In this guide, we'll share several practical tips and resources to help your family stay connected in a positive way.



Overcoming barriers to communication

Every day is different in policing. The demands of the job can impact your loved one, which can then have a knock-on effect on other family members.

Watch out for:

- › **Communication style and tone of voice** – it's not always easy for someone to separate how they talk to people at work and when they're off duty.
- › **Emotional barriers** – because police officers have to deal with many upsetting and traumatic incidents, it's common for them to develop emotional 'armour' and shut themselves off at home too.
- › **Heightened stress** – being in a job with so many unknowns and challenging situations can result in increased ongoing stress levels and the inability to switch off from potential danger.

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The communication barriers above might present themselves in different ways at different times. The key to overcoming them starts with awareness. Everyone has their own coping strategies, so it's important to have an open and honest line of communication between you and your partner.

Communication is a two-way street. So, while it's vital for your loved one to have an outlet for how they're feeling, it's also crucial you can share your thoughts and emotions with them too. You shouldn't feel like any issues or concerns you have about your job or family life are somehow less important than what your partner is facing at work.

55% of communication is non-verbal, according to Albert Mehrabian, a body language researcher

If you notice any changes in their behaviour (such as withdrawal, general lack of interest and unhealthy coping mechanisms), you should speak up and let them know. Your feelings and worries about your loved one are valid.

When you bring up a potentially uncomfortable issue with your partner, there are easy things you can do to make things less difficult to broach.

Try and have a conversation without distractions. Active listening is critical in communication. With distractions such as TV and social media, setting time aside for proper conversations can be a real game-changer. Studies have found that around **55% of communication comes from body language**, so it's essential to focus on what the other person is saying: without distracting devices in sight. That way, you can let them see you're listening fully and responding appropriately.



How to set boundaries and find the right balance

Putting healthy boundaries in place around communication also needs to be mutual. For example, your loved one may want to talk when they return home from a night shift, but that might be when you're about to leave for work and can't listen properly.

Here are a few things to consider to help with this:



Timing

Grabbing a few words here and there isn't going to cut the mustard. Consider a time and place that works for both you and your partner to be fully present. For example, doing this at home may not always be suitable if you have young children.

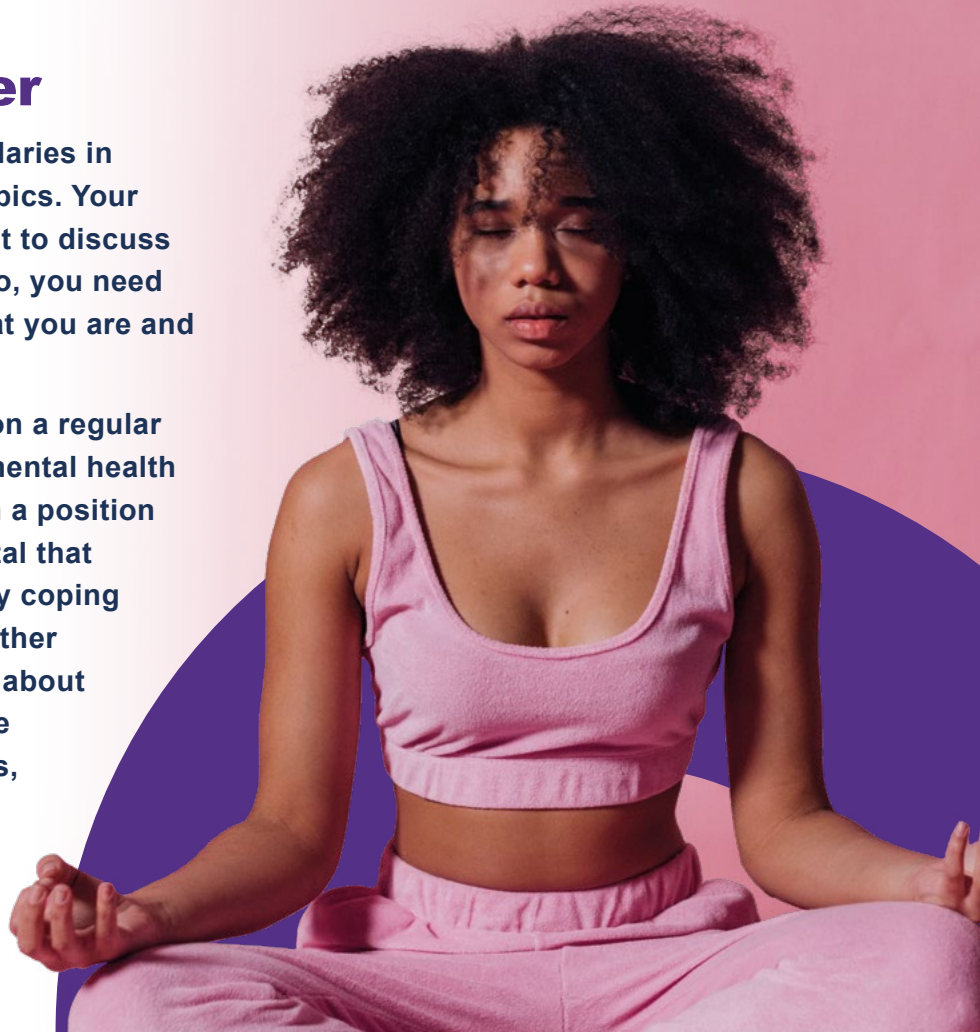




Subject Matter

You should also have clear boundaries in place for stressful or sensitive topics. Your partner or loved one may not want to discuss these at home, and even if they do, you need to be honest with them about what you are and aren't happy to hear about.

Hearing about serious incidents on a regular basis could take its toll on your mental health too, especially when you're not in a position to do anything about them. It's vital that you and your partner have healthy coping mechanisms in place and that neither party feels uncomfortable talking about the stresses of police work. These might include any of your hobbies, exercising, getting out in nature or mindful practices such as meditating or yoga, for example.





Socialising

Friends and family members may be curious about your partner's work, but it's crucial they get a break from thinking and talking about it. Setting clear boundaries in social situations is essential. For example, it may be that you agree not to speak about work at all.

You may have heard a story a few times already, so going over it again can impact your enjoyment of a night out with friends or a family meal. But, while policing plays a critical role in society, it shouldn't become your loved one's entire identity.

Research from Statista found that, on average, people in the UK spent 4 hours and 14 minutes per day on their mobile devices in 2022



Tips for positive connections and communication

Of course, communication shouldn't just focus on your loved one's job or yours, for that matter. There are many ways you can deepen a sense of connection at home for a happier life, including the following:

- › Enjoying relaxing experiences as a couple or family – these don't have to cost a lot of money and can be as simple as a trip to the local park or having a picnic on a sunny day.
- › Focusing on quality time without distractions – engaging and interactive activities like visiting the zoo or a museum, for example, will encourage more chat than seeing a film together.
- › Scheduling non-negotiable time in your diary – everyone seems busier than ever

these days, so it's crucial to get dates in your calendar for hobbies, friends and family. It's easy to let these connections drift if you don't plan ahead. If your partner works shifts, a shared calendar either in your home or online (such as **Pocket Informant** or **TimeTree**) can make this easier.

Having a variety of experiences in different environments ensures life doesn't feel like you're only ever working or sleeping. These will give you and your family more shared memories to talk about, too.

With technology playing such a big role in our lives, prioritising face-to-face family time is more important than ever.



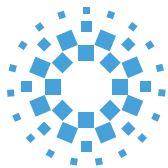
Communication in police families covers many aspects of life and relationships

We've highlighted some helpful resources below.

- › **Communicating with your kids** – a five-point checklist
- › **Supporting officer safety through family wellness** – this guidance from the International Association of Chiefs of Police is packed with useful communication tips
- › **Craving better sleep?** 11 tips for shift workers and their families
- › **Mission Nutrition:** Building healthier diets for officers, staff and their families

- › **Advice on mental health**, an Oscar Kilo guide to help family members support loved ones working in policing
- › **Relate** has a wealth of information, courses and self-help tools on relationship issues for those in England and Wales.





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**The National Police
Wellbeing Service**

If you have a family member or close friend who works in the police,
we're here for you too. It's a role that throws up unique challenges
and this can have a wider impact on the wellbeing of families.

You'll find more resources and support
for families and friends on our website:



www.oscarkilo.org.uk/family-life