



- Hopefully, you can have a conversation with your spouse before a bad call happens to discuss what he/she expects, what is most helpful & what is not.
- Develop a signal. Find a word, or a hug or an action that says "I've had a bad day" which indicates that there is something going on but he isn't ready to dive into right now.
- Agree on how much of the details are to be shared.
- Agree on the type of communication that is to take place. Your firefighter might feel more comfortable texting, talking on the phone, or maybe he will want an in-person conversation. Many times a male spouse will be able to respond better without face-to-face interaction. Even if it is in-person, he might find it easier to talk if you are driving down the road or engaged in some activity where you aren't making eye contact

- Talk about how long you are willing to give space before you call an audible or time-out.
- Learn your firefighter's signs. When he has had an unusually difficult shift, does he throw himself into a project? Does he withdraw? Does he sleep the day away? Is he ill-tempered with you or the kids?
- Remember to not take his responses personally. His brain is reeling. His body is flooded with chemicals that cause him to respond in ways that even he may not understand or predict and probably isn't pleased with.



- Understand that he may not want to talk about it. His goal isn't to make you feel disconnected or isolated, but most likely he is trying to protect you from the horrors he has experienced as he tries to understand what is going on within himself.
- Together you can choose to take a break. Escape from the routine of life. Do something low-key. Enjoying nature can be very grounding.
- Process with your community of like-minded people.
- Engage in healthy self-care. Both of you could potentially benefit from healthy hobbies.
- Pay attention to red flags.



If there has been a critical incident, it may take a few days for your firefighter to get back to “normal”. However, make a mental note if the symptoms are lasting over 7-10 days, and check in with him. Pay attention to your inner voice. If the symptoms start impacting your firefighter’s health, last over 3 weeks, or there are warning signs of suicidal ideation, seek help.