

FAMILY MATTERS

Strategies for Enhancing Wellness



Dr. Rachelle Zemlok

www.FirstResponderFamilyPsychology.com



***Provide them with the
tools necessary to go
home safely...***

***...and continue to
come back as the best
version of themselves.***

"I TRY NOT TO BRING WORK HOME."

-Almost every firefighter I've talked to



The Mental Health and Wellbeing of Spouses, Partners, and Children of Emergency Responders

- 43 papers on mental health and wellbeing of Emergency Responder (ER) families.

Sharp, M. L., Solomon, N., Harrison, V., Gribble, R., Cramm, H., Pike, G., & Fear, N. T. (2022). The mental health and wellbeing of spouses, partners and children of emergency responders: A systematic review. *PloS one*, 17(6), e0269659. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0269659>



The Mental Health and Wellbeing of Spouses, Partners, and Children of Emergency Responders

Work-related stress can spill over to personal lives negatively affecting...

- Partners' well-being
- Couples' relationship
- Increase the risk of domestic violence



The Mental Health and Wellbeing of Spouses, Partners, and Children of Emergency Responders

Protective Factors

- **Social support/ social networks**
 - Coping strategy
 - Reduce impacts of stress from the occupation
 - Bolster resilience in trauma-exposed groups.





“MISSION READY”

www.FirstResponderFamilyPsychology.com

“Military family well-being is incredibly important to military readiness,” said Perkins. “Families provide support to service members while they serve, but challenges within the family can interfere with service members’ ability to focus on the mission as well as influence service members’ choice in continuing to serve.”



DoD INSTRUCTION 1342.22 MILITARY FAMILY READINESS

Originating Component: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness
Effective: August 5, 2021
Releasability: Cleared for public release. Available on the Directives Division Website at <https://www.esd.whs.mil/DD/>.
Reissues and Cancels: DoD Instruction amended
Approved by: Virginia S. Pen Readiness

Purpose: In accordance with the authority in

- Establishes policy, assigns responsibilities, supporting military family readiness (MFR) programs and services that promotes MFR, the Readiness System (MFRS).
- Identifies requirements for:
 - MFR services.
 - MFR service providers.
 - Performance Management.
 - Local governance and coordination.
- Establishes the Military Family Readiness Coordinating Committee (MFRCC).

- ✓ Career
- ✓ Social
- ✓ Financial
- ✓ Health
- ✓ Community

FAMILY SUPPORT

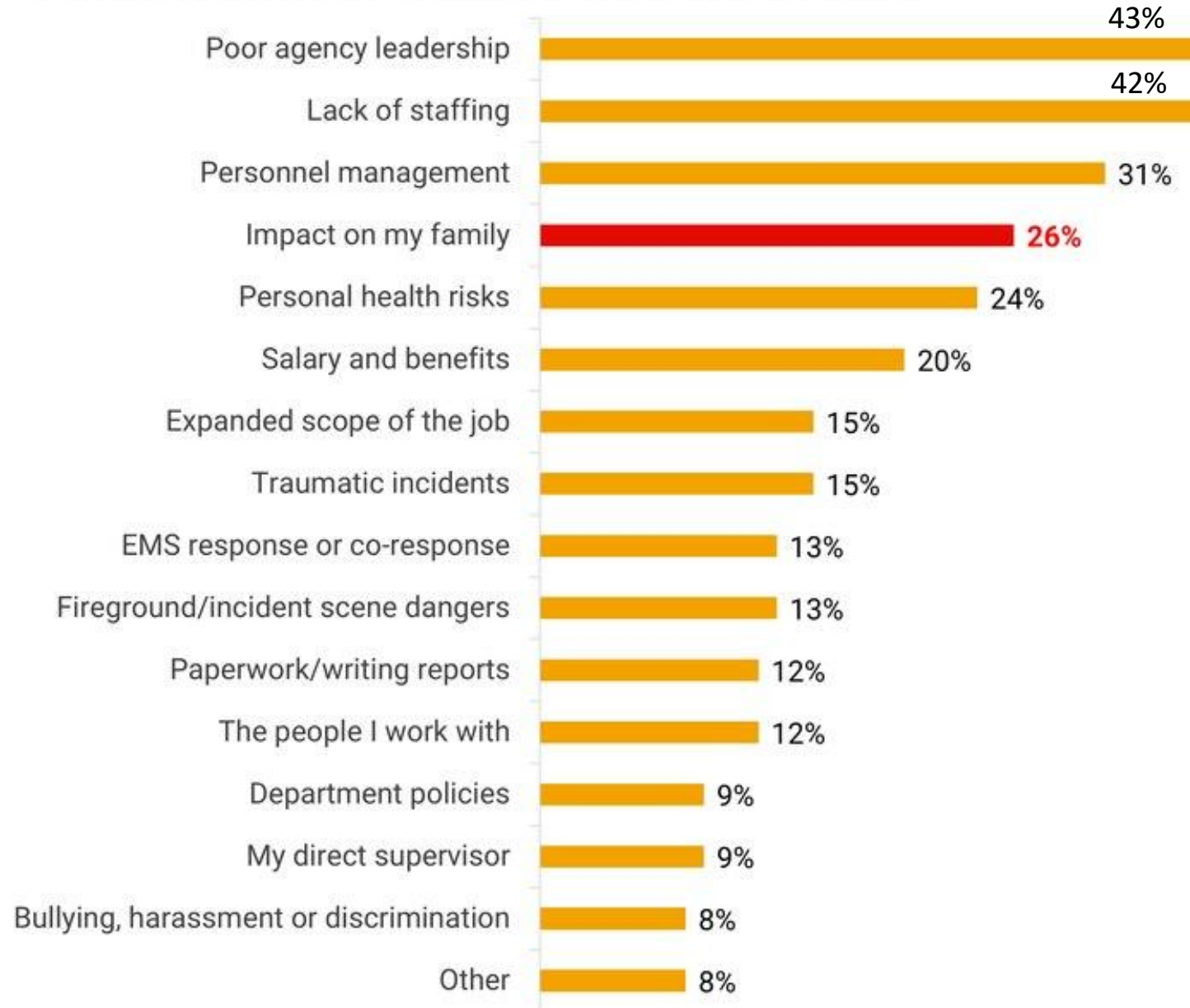
FIRE RESCUE 1

WHAT FIREFIGHTERS WANT IN 2023: STAFFING & STRESS RELIEF

2,200 Firefighters

- **47%** agreed with the statement, "My stress level is negatively impacting my relationships with family."
- **26%** Job's Impact on Family one of their top 3 stressors
 - **38%** of them... ranked it #1

What are the most stressful aspects of your job? (Select 3.)



“Not at Our Department...”

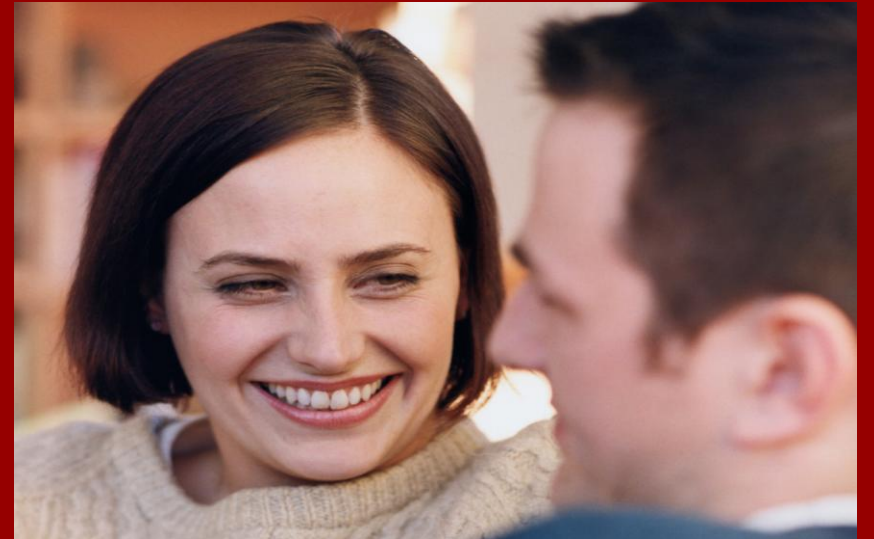
Beginning of 2024

- Lost 8 IAFF members to suicide in two months
- *9 if you go back three*
- *2 were at same department opposite shifts*
- *1 also took his spouses life*

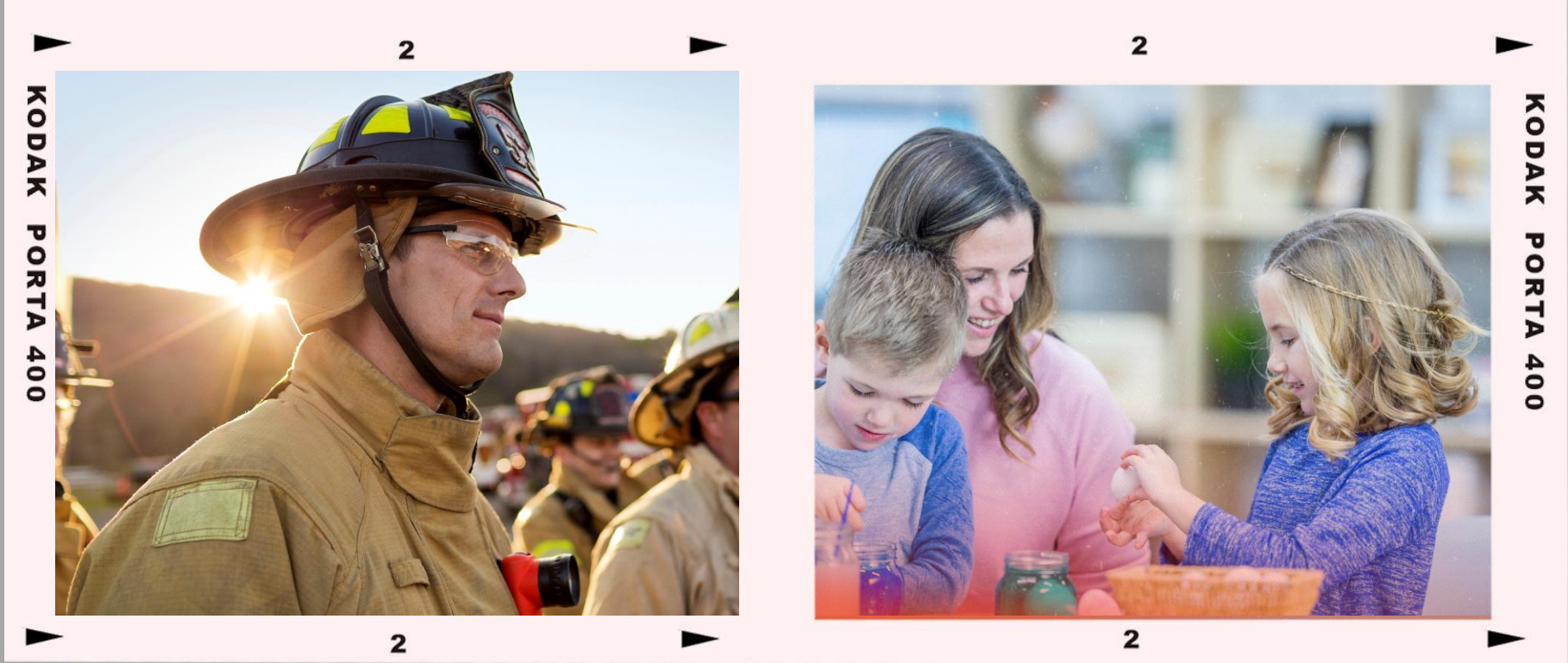
“This is why all of our significant others are exhausted and never functioning 100% at home.”



Why Challenges at Home?



Transitioning Home





Holiday Season
Survival for
Firefighter Families

IAFF Webinar

Tips to Reduce Holiday Stress

- 1. Be Flexible**
- 2. Use Your Support System**
- 3. Focus on Your Priorities**
- 4. Stay Present**
- 5. Practice Healthy Coping**



A close-up photograph of a couple embracing on a beach. The woman is in the foreground, wearing a dark blue patterned top, with her arms wrapped around the man. The man is wearing a light blue t-shirt. The background shows a blurred beach scene with rocks and the ocean under a warm, golden sunset sky. The text "Spouses Experience" is overlaid in white, centered on the couple's embrace.

Spouses Experience

LONELY

- ✓ **Definition: When we feel a mismatch between our desired and actual social connections**



RESENTFUL

“I Hate Your Job.”



RESENTMENT



CHALLENGES WITH COMMUNICATION





How can you provide the support and guidance that your department's families need to thrive?

Barriers

LEVELS OF FAMILY SUPPORT

- SPOUSES
- PEER SUPPORT

- COMMUNICATION
- EDUCATION

- WELCOME
- ANNUAL FAMILY EVENTS
- ACKNOWLEDGE LIFE EVENTS
- SUPPORT IN CRISIS
- CONNECT TO VETERAN SPOUSES

- Invite
- Introduce
- Educate
- Connect

Welcome Aboard!



ANNUAL FAMILY EVENTS



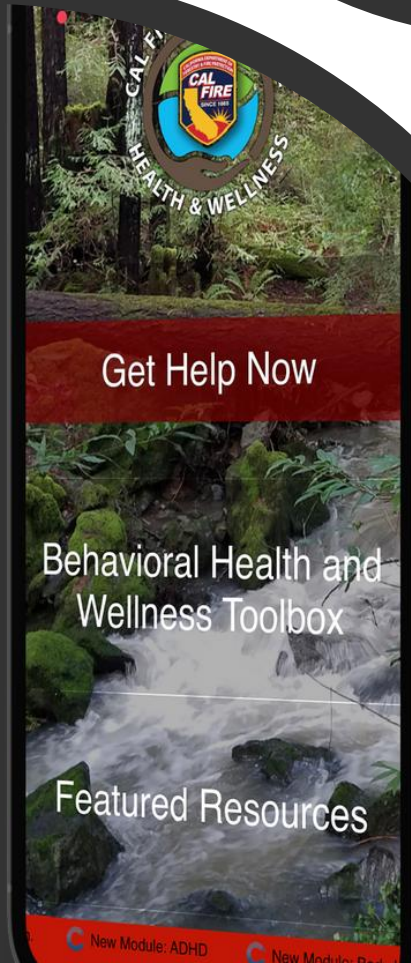
**Holiday
Party**



Family Day

Family BBQ





COMMUNICATION & EDUCATION



Support Networks





Physically

- Physical activity
- Nutrition
- Sleep



Socially

- Peer Check-ins
- Family support



Pay Attention

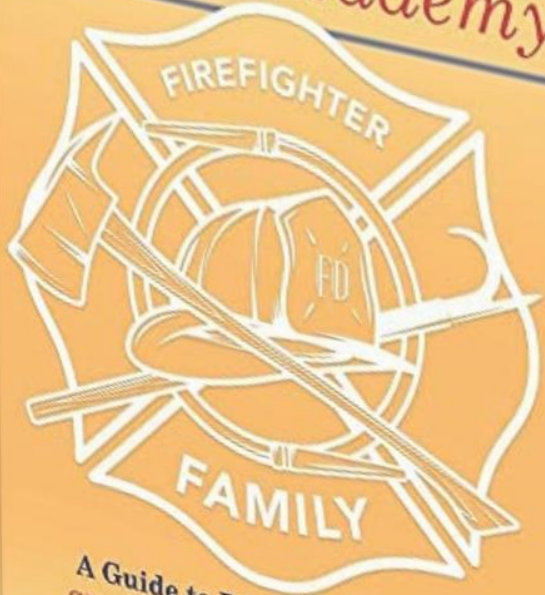
- Expect uncomfortable
- Act on red flags
 - education
 - assessments
 - Resources



RECOVERY & COPING

Following a Critical Incident

The
FIREFIGHTER
Family Academy



A Guide to Educate & Prepare
SPOUSES for the Career Ahead

RACHELLE ZEMLOK, PsyD

IN CHALLENGING TIMES

SUPPORT

A top-down photograph showing two hands, one from the left and one from the right, supporting the word 'SUPPORT' which is written in large, 3D, light-brown cardboard letters on a white surface. The hands are positioned under the 'P' and 'O' letters, with fingers spread, suggesting a gesture of support or assistance.

3. Family Prep for Challenging Times

- Academy/ Probation
- Holidays
- Promotion/ Job change
- Fire season prep

“If we can predict it, we can prevent it.”



Fire Season Family Preparation

An aerial photograph of a forest fire. A bright orange and yellow fire line is visible, winding through a dense green forest. Thick white smoke is rising from the fire, partially obscuring the trees in the background. The overall scene is dramatic and highlights the impact of fire on a natural environment.

- Setting up support system early
- Preparing your kids for fire season
- Staying connected and supportive
- Managing the stressors
- Firefighter mental health

LIFE EVENTS



SPOUSE TO SPOUSE SUPPORT



A close-up photograph of a hand placing a red puzzle piece into a larger white puzzle. The red piece is the central focus and features the text "Peer-to-peer" in a white, sans-serif font. The puzzle pieces are interlocking, and the background is a light gray surface.

Peer-to-peer

Barriers

LEVELS OF FAMILY SUPPORT

- SPOUSES
- PEER SUPPORT


- COMMUNICATION
- EDUCATION

- WELCOME
- ANNUAL FAMILY EVENTS
- ACKNOWLEDGE LIFE EVENTS
- SUPPORT IN CRISIS
- CONNECT TO VETERAN SPOUSES


A photograph of a family of four sitting on a green couch and laughing together. The father is on the right, smiling broadly. The mother is in the center, laughing with her head tilted back. Two young girls are on the left, also laughing. The scene is warm and joyful.

FAMILY SUPPORT


- Build Community
- Adjust/ Adapt
- Prepare for & Support during challenging times



Start where
you are,



use what
you have,



do what
you can

Fire Chief's Letter Home Template

Scan Here



Congratulations and Welcome to the Family!

I wanted to take a moment to officially welcome you to the Loveland-Symmes Fire Department. Your spouse has begun their career here with us, and you are part of that as well. The schedule and shift work can be challenging, with shifts on holidays, during significant weather events, birthdays, and other special occasions. The work has other more personal challenges as well; stressful calls...

IAFF Resources



Webinar: **“Suicide Awareness in the Fire Service”**



PDF:

“The Power and Connection of Family: A Lifeline for Firefighter Mental Health”

THE POWER OF FAMILY & CONNECTION
A LIFELINE FOR FIRE FIGHTER MENTAL HEALTH
AUTHOR: RACHELLE ZEMLOK, PSYD



Rachelle Zemlok, PSYD, is a licensed psychologist based in Livermore, California. She is the wife of a career fire fighter and the mother of two young children. As a national speaker and clinician, Dr. Zemlok specializes in supporting and educating first responders and their spouses.

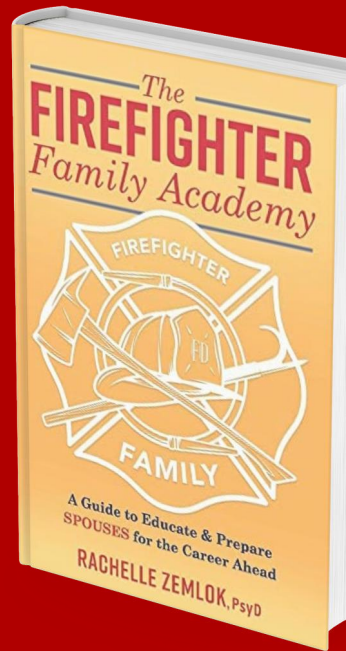
THE FIRE FIGHTER EXPERIENCE: HOW STRESSORS IMPACT PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS
The fire fighting profession comes with a unique set of stressors that can significantly impact personal relationships. It's not uncommon for fire fighters to bring work stress home, either by emotionally withdrawing or by unintentionally letting the tension spill over into family life. These stressors can create distance between you and your loved ones, leading to strained relationships and further isolation. Moreover, the demands of the job often mean fewer opportunities for social engagement outside of work. The long hours and irregular schedules can shrink your social network, leading to maladaptive behaviors, such as isolating yourself from family and friends. Given these challenges, it's essential to be proactive in maintaining healthy and supportive relationships.

As fire fighters, you face a unique set of challenges every day—physically demanding work, exposure to traumatic events, and a responsibility that weighs heavily on your shoulders. While the nature of your job requires incredible

Other Resources

SPEAKING

Podcast



Blogs/Articles/ Videos

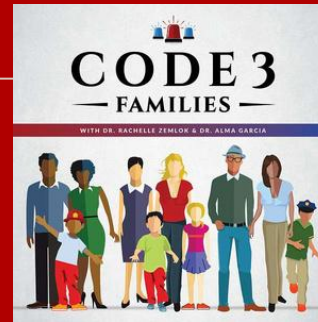


Dr. Rachelle Zemlok

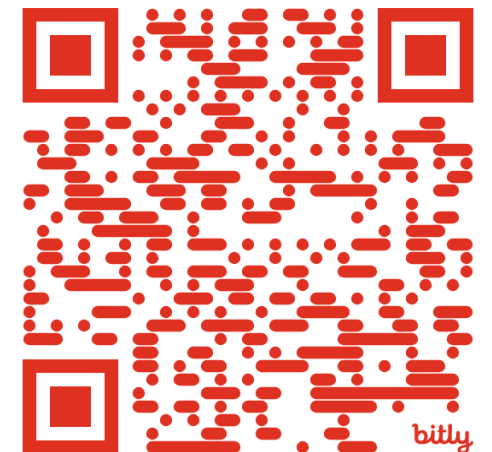
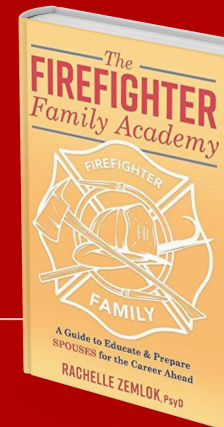
www.FirstResponderFamilyPsychology.com

(925) 621- 8738

- In person speaking
- Webinars/ virtual workshops
- Content creation
- Spouse's groups
- Blogs/videos/social media



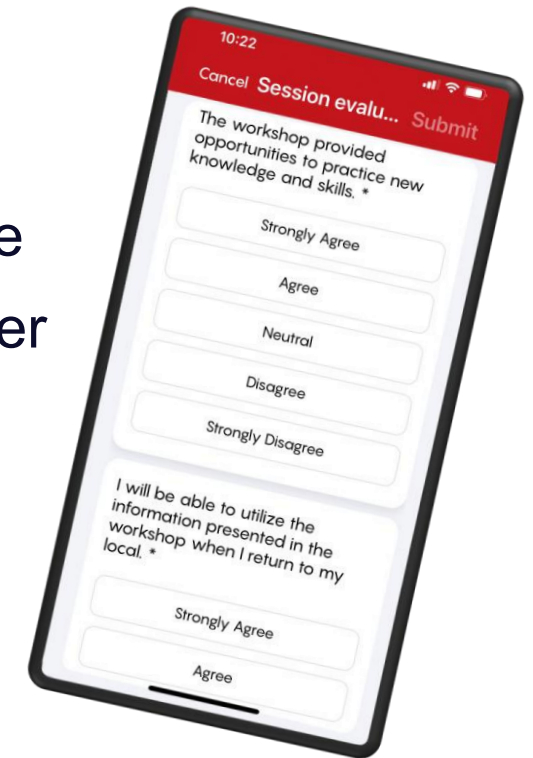
Podcast



@FirstResponderFamilyPsychology

EVALUATION AND WIN AN IPAD!

- **Submit your workshop and overall evaluations to be automatically entered in two drawings for a new iPad!**
- **Complete your evaluations using the IAFF app:**
 1. Download the IAFF app and sign in with your iaff.org username
 2. Tap the 2026 Strive for Excellence Summit event image to enter the event's dashboard
 3. Tap "Sessions" and tap on the workshops you attended
 4. Tap "Evaluation" and complete the evaluation
 5. Tap "Submit"



For the event's overall evaluation, follow steps 1 and 2, then tap "Event Evaluation" located in the event's Dashboard.

