

WILMOT FIRE DEPARTMENT



2025 Family Guide





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Introduction

Congratulations — your family member has decided to become a volunteer firefighter! Whether you are excited, nervous, or just are not sure how you are feeling, this guide is intended to help you navigate the volunteer fire family life that you just became a part of. Being part of the volunteer fire family can be daunting, with many unknowns which can lead to many questions and uncertainties. It is our goal that the new family will read this guide, together, and understand the level of commitment and why your family member joined. The family unit must discuss the consequences of joining and the sacrifice you will make when your family member runs out the door during a family dinner or many other reasons to attend an emergency when someone else is having one of the worst days of their life. We cannot stress how important the family's role plays in the success of a volunteer firefighter.

The decision to be a volunteer firefighter is something that will touch your entire family, in some ways you may expect and in other ways you may not. While any volunteer work is noble, charitable, and honorable, volunteer firefighting goes beyond the average volunteer work. It becomes a lifestyle, it forms you, molds you and educates you. The implications of this affect not only the individual volunteer but also their family. Erratic schedules missed family events, and concern for their loved one's safety all become part of everyday life for family members; these are changes that may be hard for some to adjust to or fully understand.

Being a volunteer firefighter means your loved one is choosing to:

- Serve at a moment's notice, not when it's scheduled and convenient
- Spend extra hours training for their safety, and the safety of the department firefighters and develop and grow with their team.
- Put themselves in various situations to help those in need
- Bond with fellow volunteer firefighters, working closely together to keep everyone safe
- Contribute to the community

Throughout this guide, we will share comments from volunteer firefighters and their family members. You will see that it takes the support of the whole family to ensure that volunteer firefighters can serve their community and stay safe while doing it.

Even with the challenges and adjustments, having a volunteer firefighter in your family is exciting, rewarding, and often presents situations unique to a fire service family. We thank you for your willingness to share your family member with your local community. We hope this guide will help you understand what you may not know, navigate the rough spots, and celebrate the sweet ones.



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Volunteer Fire Families: A Chief's Perspective

Family support is critical for a volunteer firefighter. The tones never go off at an opportune time. There are times when you leave during the middle of dinner or just before you are about to go somewhere. Having a family that understands the commitment you have taken to assist the community and be there for your fellow firefighters allows you to respond and focus on the job at hand. Along with understanding families, you will sacrifice time spent together for the volunteer firefighter to respond, but also to attend drills and training so they can maintain crucial skills. Without this support, a volunteer firefighter is forced to choose between the needs of their family versus their commitment to the fire service. We hope that each family can find a suitable balance to share with your family member with the Township Fire department.





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Basics of the Volunteer Firefighters Life

Did you know that close to 80 percent of all firefighters are volunteers? Did you know that Volunteer fire departments are very efficient financially and effective first responders within the community delivering vital services and lifesaving skills? The cost to run a full-time career fire department has tremendous cost liabilities to the community. To be clear, we are not suggesting that career fire departments are bad, we are simply pointing out the positive attributes of a volunteer fire department. This model supports a lower tax commitment from Township citizens to deliver similar levels of service. Volunteer firefighters fill a much-needed role in their communities, protecting the lives and property of many people. As a volunteer firefighter, you and your family can expect that you:

- Attend weekly and/or monthly meetings and training sessions
- Participate in weekend on-call requirements once per month
- Perform physically demanding work
- Spend extended periods outside in inclement weather
- Be called out at any time of the day or night
- Be gone for extended periods while attending emergencies, sometimes all night with no sleep

Let's take a deeper dive into what this means for your family. We like to refer to a "Volunteer Firefighter" as "Paid On-call". Why, they are essentially on-call 24/7 days a week and 365 days of the year. Now we all know that is not realistic and not an expectation.

The Pager

Each volunteer firefighter will carry a pager or receive phone text alerts that tell them when there is an emergency. This alert can go off at any hour of any day, on any day of the week, in any weather condition. During dinner. At 3 am. On the way to work. When leaving for vacation. While at the grocery store, during a tornado warning. During a blizzard. When it's 105 degrees. The pager knows only one thing — someone needs help.

The Gear

You can't fight fires in street clothes or even the toughest pair of overalls. Special fire gear will be issued to protect your family member while in a fire or on the scene of an accident. These items can be big, dirty, and contain harmful contaminants, so you should never wash bunker gear in the family washing machine and avoid storing it in the home. Commercial grade washers and special dryers are provided at each fire station so that issued personal protective equipment (PPE), such as bunker gear can be cleaned after every emergency where exposure to products of combustion or biohazards occurs. Volunteer firefighters are required to always keep their gear clean and are not permitted to carry soiled gear in their vehicles. Suitable locations are provided to each firefighter to keep their issued PPE. We simply want to ensure their family members are not exposed to these harmful contaminants and the department has guidelines that your family member will be trained on to protect them from these same hazards. We provide written operating guidelines that outline the rules and expectations to



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firefighters. For example, in COVID safety, we have an extensive document designed to protect all firefighters in emergencies and when training or hall maintenance. Safety for your family member is our number one priority. To provide you with some context, each firefighter is issued bunker gear, helmet, balaclava, structural gloves, structural firefighting boots, personal SCBA mask, coveralls, safety boots, safety glasses, auto extrication gloves, flashlight and more. The department also provides several crucial pieces of equipment such as SCBA, specialty tools and medical-grade safety equipment to protect your family member. And, along with all this gear is extensive training on how to properly wear and use it. Again, we support and reinforce the importance of safety.

The Time Commitment

With a firefighter in the family, your calendar will now contain weekly training, the odd weekend training, station duties, standby, and meetings that your firefighter will be required to attend. The firefighter may attend additional training that may require a week of their time to certify in specialized disciplines. Once a month, for an entire weekend, each firefighter is required to be on call and available to respond to emergencies. Some firefighters will be asked to trade a weekend if something comes up. Your volunteer firefighter may even stop by the station at times to put their clean bunker gear back together and in their bunk ready for the next emergency. Eventually, your volunteer firefighter may take on additional roles such as a Company officer with the department, which requires more training, responsibilities, and meetings. You can expect a minimum of a few hours each month to be dedicated to the fire department, but often it will be a lot more. Training is mandatory and emergency calls are unpredictable. To first clarify, no volunteer firefighter can attend 100% of all training sessions or emergency calls nor do we expect this. This is unique, you have a part-time job as a volunteer firefighter, employed and paid by the Township, however, your volunteer firefighter does have the right to stay at work or home should circumstances dictate the need. Recruit training is mandatory, and 100% attendance is expected for their safety and to ensure they are successful. Your volunteer firefighter will be expected to attend more than 200 hours in the first year just for recruit training. The 200 hours are divided into a blend of at-home online training and practical training as assigned by the training division and will take a minimum of 1 year to complete. The goal is to have them trained, certified and truck ready within the first year. On top of this requirement, your volunteer firefighter is encouraged to attend regular training on Monday evenings to allow them time to meet their teammates and get to know how their station operates. This is accomplished using a mentoring program. The Monday evening in the first year is not mandatory but encouraged when time permits. After their first year, again assuming 100% attendance, they will have approximately 130 hours of regular duty training throughout the year on Monday nights and some weekends (typically 1 or 2 half-day and 1 or 2 full days), (recruit training is over, the 200 hours is gone). One last piece to their recruit training is a 4-day pump ops training course over two weekends during their third year. One day annually is dedicated to live-fire training in a controlled environment at WRESTRC. And don't forget, they are required to commit to weekend standby, once per month after they complete their recruit training program.



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The Physical Demands

Returning from a fire, accident scene, or even department training is not like returning from a trip to volunteer at the library. Training, fighting fires and responding to emergencies are physically and mentally exhausting activities. Wearing heavy gear and dragging charged lines while working in an emergency mode requires great physical exertion and mental stamina. Nights punctuated with emergency calls and interrupted sleep may mean your volunteer needs an extra nap on the couch or heads to bed early the next day. Aside from the time at the department and the time away from the calls, time to recover physically and mentally must be considered. Also, keep in mind that an exhausted person can and maybe a little extra irritable.

Harsh Reality

The world has changed. Society has changed, we have changed. This decision cannot be taken lightly. It costs the Township taxpayers (you) thousands of dollars to hire, outfit, and train one recruited firefighter to NFPA certification. Retention of firefighters is challenging for a variety of reasons. We need your commitment to the community. Joining and quitting in the same year or even 5 years down the road does not come close to recuperating the initial investment into the recruit firefighter that the taxpayer invested. This is a massive decision and needs to be carefully thought out. We ask all volunteer firefighters to consider how long they can dedicate to the department. If you feel it will be long-term with family support and truly want to make a difference in people's lives and the community, please join our team. However, we do understand that everyone joins with good intentions, life changes, and appreciate the commitment you make.

The Benefits

Now that we've covered the basics of the volunteer firefighter's life, let's look at some of the rewards and benefits this lifestyle provides to the volunteer firefighter and their family. One of the most amazing benefits of the volunteer fire service is that you gain an extended family. Firefighters are well known for their "brotherhood" / "sisterhood" and for taking care of their own even outside of the fire station. Many first responder families have stories of helping each other move, building a deck, helping with childcare, bringing meals when someone is sick, and of course, the camaraderie of station BBQs, annual banquets, and other fun activities together. Being around a group of people who understand the call of the fire service can be helpful, rewarding, and in many cases, has created a foundation for lifelong friendships.

You are known as a volunteer firefighter, but you are on-call, part-time, and paid. Firefighters are paid for training, work party, and all attended emergencies. Additional benefits include:

- Provincial Tax deductions
- Life Insurance program
- VFIS Insurance program
- Cover cost of DZ License physical after first year



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- Professional development Training (example: officer training) covered by the department
- Assistance obtaining DZ License (costs are required for the volunteer firefighter)
- Education assistance
- And more

Like any job, there are upfront costs, however, they will recoup their initial investment over time.

The “New Normal” of a Volunteer Firefighter Family

It is exciting to know that your family member can serve and care for your community in times of need. A great deal of pride comes with this privilege. Like any other group, club, or hobby, volunteer firefighting requires time to participate. However, spontaneously running out the door to a structure fire is very different than planning to leave the house at 6 pm on a Tuesday for a meeting. In many cases, the time required is unplanned and immediate. Just when you sit down to dinner... there goes that pager. Due to the nature of the work, it can also generate worry and concern, both for your volunteer and your family. If you have not discussed these changes together, they can create strain and tension within your family. Utilize empathy for the victim and their family that needs your loved one. This may help you cope with the unpredictable schedule of a volunteer fire family and provide the family with pride when you tell someone your family member is a volunteer firefighter.

Interruptions by the Pager

When you have a family member who volunteers with a fire department, you also inherit a new tagalong in your family — a pager. This is often the primary means by which a volunteer firefighter is notified of a call (they will also have a smartphone app). It is easy to despise the pager when it is constantly interrupting conversations, meals, and family moments. However, if you learn to associate the pager with empathy for the victims, it's easier to have a more positive outlook on the impact it has on your family. It could be that someone's grandmother has fallen and hurt herself, a car accident involving children, or a family in danger of losing their life or possessions to a fire. Remembering there is someone in need and that your loved one is equipped to help can lessen the frustration of hearing the pager announce yet another call. One way to mitigate these sometimes-unwelcome interruptions is to develop a plan with your volunteer firefighter for how pages and alerts will be handled. For your volunteer, being able to hear what is said over the radio is important so having a quiet rule when the pager sounds may be helpful for your family.

Your volunteer firefighter cannot help people if they don't have all the details for how to get to them. Robyn, the wife of a volunteer firefighter, shares this additional perspective:

“The tones immediately make the house quiet because everyone knows mommy wants to know what daddy is going to do. Most importantly, have an agreement that whatever was interrupted by the pager will be finished later. The pager should not become an



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excuse for not finishing important conversations, completing household chores, or spending family time together. As a spouse or significant other of a firefighter, an important communication skill to learn is to be able to stop a conversation when a call comes in and resume that conversation when both of you are in a comfortable place and able to continue.”

Real Life Volunteer Fire Families: Learning to Love the Pager

There are times when the pager goes off unexpectedly which causes a problem. Sometimes this results in a supper going cold, interrupted quality time, interrupted sleep, and so much more. At first, this was annoying, and I would get upset over losing sleep, or the cold supper, etc. However, four years later I now just pray that he returns home safe and put his food in the oven so he can warm it up when he gets home.

– Jamie W

So many times, when the pager went off, I would get angry. It seemed it was always interrupting something. Whether it was dinner, a movie, once it was even a concert, I was not a happy wife. I always looked at the pager as one more thing that took my husband away from our home, our family, and me. Now I look at the pager in a different light. I recognize the deeper meaning of the fire service. I recognize that my husband has chosen a calling that few choose. This wasn't an overnight awakening. It took years, arguments, guilt, etc. At one point he asked me if I wanted him to quit. Today, I'm so happy I stuck with it and "let" him stick with it. The pager has become a tone that he is needed by someone more than I need him at that moment, and that is okay.

I have developed ways to handle the unpredictability of the pager. The times that I least want a call to come (such as holidays), I imagine it will happen. Doing so stops the disappointment when it does happen or creates a sense of happiness at the end of the day that I had a full day with my husband. Most importantly, I have stopped pinning any guilt on my husband when he does have a call that has come at a difficult time. Normally, they feel just as bad for missing whatever event, they had to miss.

Communicating with your Firefighter when they are Away at a Call

When your volunteer firefighter gets a call, they must move quickly. There is only time for a quick "I love you! Be careful!" exchange before they jump into their vehicle and are on the way to the fire station. In the beginning, this experience may trigger some negative feelings. No one must take this personally. They are not intentionally or rudely abandoning you. Someone is in urgent need. Once a 911 call comes into Fire Dispatch, there is at least the perceived sense of a threat and emergency to the caller. When your volunteer firefighter arrives on an emergency scene, they will not be able to communicate with you. While you may be worried and concerned about them, their first attention must be on their safety, fellow firefighters, and those in need. You must remember that your family is not forgotten from their minds. Often when rescuing a young child or an elderly person, a firefighter can't help but wonder, "What if this



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was my family member? I must help them get to safety.” It is that drive to serve and protect that helps them do what they need to do.

If your loved one is gone for hours without returning a call or text message when attending an emergency scene, don't worry, they're safe and applying the skills they develop during all those nights and weekends attending training sessions.

Not Knowing your Volunteer First Responder Has Received a Call

There may be occasions when your volunteer firefighter receives a call when they are not with you. Perhaps they are at work or on their way home or out at the store and the pager activate. Time passes and you may be thinking, “Where are they? They left for the store 45 minutes ago. We use a program called “Who's Responding”. Who's Responding sends out text alerts to the firefighters, provides details of the call and maps the location. They will select a button in the app indicating they are responding to the fire station. Once they tap the response button a text message is automatically sent to their family members (typically their partner) that will tell them they are responding to an emergency (if they decide to activate this function). Some families purchase a scanner and listen to the call from home. This of course can be costly and typically serves no real purpose. Family members may hear a message that sounds bad but is likely nothing to worry about. Radio communications require extensive training and experience to fully understand the various messages you may hear.

Managing Your Worry and Fear

There is no doubt you are entitled to a little worry as a family member of a volunteer firefighter. Your loved one has decided to do some dangerous tasks in your community to help someone's day get better. Running into a burning building is the obvious one, but other possible concerns may surface, depending on each family member. Please be assured that it is normal to experience some anxiety, worry, and fear. To provide some comfort, we train regularly and with purpose. The good news, with technology and improved knowledge we have significantly reduced the number of firefighter fatalities and injuries in Canada. Canadian firefighters are trained to recognize danger and stay out of it. We do not encourage freelancing or aggressive techniques. Instead, we have a strict command structure with very specific tactics and duties assigned to each crew. 1000s of firefighters across Ontario attend emergencies daily with little or no consequence.

We want the family to feel comfortable knowing your firefighter is well equipped and trained to deal with the day-to-day emergency calls. When we train, it's a controlled environment and we never place any undue risk on firefighters. There are some very simple and easy techniques you can use to manage concerns if any.

- Your positive words
- Communication about concerns, early and often
- Contact the Fire Chief or Station Chief to discuss your concerns
- Trust in the firefighter's training and ability, we take this very seriously



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- Focus on the facts and focus on the tremendous value each firefighter brings to the Township

These skills are important in many areas of life but come in especially handy if you are a family member of a firefighter. You will most likely make friends with some of the other firefighters' partners and this network of like-minded people can be a valuable resource to share concerns. After all, you are sharing the same concerns.

Real Life Volunteer Fire Families: A Husband's Perspective

My wife is a volunteer firefighter and I sometimes worry when she goes out on calls. I know that it is important to her so, therefore, it is also important to me. Volunteering is a crucial part of our community, and I am proud of her for doing it. Although I worry about her, the pros outweigh the cons. She rocks, and I know how much she loves it! Her family supports her and every call she goes out on, we look forward to her return home to give her a great big hug and hear some of the stories she will share. She is a wonderful wife, a loving mother, and a strong and dedicated firefighter.

Agreeing on Schedules and Planning

Firefighting and emergency response can become a serious passion for some people. Passions tend to weave into every aspect of one's life. Some families volunteer together and share this passion. For others, it may seem that the firefighting passion takes over the calendar while family activities take a back seat.

Being able to talk openly about schedules and plans and balance volunteer time with family needs can minimize the impact. Don't expect to get this right immediately. It will take some time to figure out what works and adjust to your new normal as a fire service family. Everyone experiences this change, do it together and remember that the level of commitment was shared upfront. Be patient, you will settle in time. In some cases, the sacrifices made, turn into full-time career moves for some volunteer firefighters.

Below are some points to discuss as you work towards developing schedules and time boundaries with your family:

- Agree to discuss taking on extra volunteer duties or promotions before accepting them, be honest. Coming home from the Monday night training or a meeting and hearing your firefighter is the new assistant chief may not excite you as much as it does them. You may be thinking of all the extra time and obligations required that will impact your family.
- The same is true for volunteer activities with the auxiliary. Announcing you are the chair of the next baseball tournament or community BBQ can add extra stress to the family and it's a good idea to discuss such roles in advance before accepting.
- Discuss ahead of time when responding to a call is absolutely off the table, especially for special family events. In larger departments, there can be on-call and off-call times which allows for some time away from the pager. In other circumstances, it just may not make sense for your volunteer to respond. For example, if they are at work or your



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family is shopping outside of the coverage areas, it just wouldn't make any sense to respond, especially if it were a medical call. By the time they get to the station the call is over. However, if it's a major structure fire or another emergency event, once you get home without rushing, attend the station and assist there is always lots to do, assuming it suits the family's decision. When it's not your on-call weekend, feel free to enjoy time at home or take a family excursion. If you happen to be home, appropriate and it's a serious call, attend. Otherwise, enjoy your family time. Firefighters should never respond to the station with their families in the vehicle, their safety takes priority over everything else.

- It is fine to agree on the occasional pager off time, however, don't make it too frequent, there is an expectation of your attendance. If possible, agree to one or two evenings a week or month that the pager can be turned off so you can focus on your family without interruptions. If necessary, set this up with another volunteer family or department leadership so you can be assured to have some uninterrupted downtime. Be upfront and honest with your Station Chief and Platoon Captain. Don't jeopardize your full-time job, ever. It is highly recommended you discuss with your employer when and when you are not permitted to attend emergencies. Some employers will allow you to attend only major emergencies such as structure fires, and vehicle collisions with entrapment but not medical calls or alarms ringing calls.
- Take vacations away from home. Everyone needs downtime from their job even when it is a volunteer firefighting position. It is healthy and provides perspective and bonding time for your family.

No matter what the rules and boundaries look like for your family, just be certain to have this conversation together and be in mutual agreement to avoid any potential miscommunications and unnecessary disagreements. Balance your family schedule with the fire department activities, planned and unplanned.



Real Life Volunteer Fire Families: A Volunteer Firefighter's Perspective

My family is supportive by understanding the crazy hours, letting me decompress in my way, and realizing that my coming home in a bad mood has nothing to do with the



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family. My volunteering affects my family by pulling me away from family time and activities. But it also sets an example for my children to see me serving my community. They understand that sometimes I have to put others' needs above my wants.

Understanding the Importance of Training

It is easy to accept that a call for someone in need can come in at any time, any hour, any day than to give up another weekend of family time because your volunteer firefighter has training to attend. However, training is exactly what you want them to do so that they know how to keep themselves, their fellow first responders, and the community safe during an emergency. Some volunteer departments may have a low call volume, so training is especially important to keep your volunteer familiar with the equipment, procedures, and techniques necessary to do their job. Consider this scenario: most of the time you drive your car, but sometimes you need to drive someone else's car. It can take some time to familiarize yourself with where the lights are, where the parking brake is, where the hazard lights are, etc. The same can be true for fire apparatus and fire equipment. Unfortunately, in an emergency first responders can't waste precious seconds trying to remember how to hook up the hose lines and turn on the water or where the right tool is stored. Many scenarios can happen in an emergency that requires special training like gas leaks, floods, carbon monoxide alarms, car accidents that entrap victims, and chemical spills, just to name a few. Each of these scenarios requires some special knowledge that must be learned and re-learned as technologies and methods improve over time. A good philosophy in life is to never stop learning. In the fire service, training is perpetual and never stops.

Real Life Volunteer Fire Families: Pushing them to Train

I believe that to be a successful firefighter my husband must train and use that training to the fullest extent of his abilities. The training he receives is essential for him to properly protect the community, his department, his brothers and sisters, and himself, which in return is protecting our family. His training could be the difference between life and death. People often ask me why it doesn't upset me because of how much time he spends away from the family when he is only a volunteer. The answer is simple: What if that class or training he should have been at was what he needed to keep him safe in the first place? How selfish of me to want him to stay for dinner and watch TV with us instead of going to training. If what he missed at training was because of my selfishness, I wouldn't be able to live with myself. And then I ask them, what if he didn't volunteer? What if no one volunteered? Firefighters are special because they step up to the plate when no one else will. The dedication that these women and men put forth to protect someone they've never met is of the utmost honour in my opinion. What if your family needed them and no one responded to your situation? So yes, I will sacrifice that family dinner.

Our girls will sacrifice one band concert where their dad is absent for him to remain safe, to keep our own family safe and our community safe. That safety means more to



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us than that one hour of dinner or that one hour of band music. There will be other dinners and there will be other band concerts, but there will never be another husband or father like him. Saving someone's life or house and seeing the look on their face knowing what you did was the right thing is more precious than any other thing, any day!

Training is what keeps them safe. The time away from home is hard on our family, but it would be harder if he was hurt due to a lack of training. As a rural, volunteer agency we have an extremely light call volume. Training and drilling are the only way they have to keep their skills honed between calls. I push him to train. I pull up training schedules, and other training subjects, you name it. I'm constantly sending him announcements. The worst possible thing that could happen would be for him to be complacent in what he does. Training keeps that from happening besides, he is an amazing, qualified firefighter. And he is handsome in uniform.

Easing the Impact on Children

Firefighting can be such an exciting event for kids. The big trucks. The lights and sirens. Great dress-up clothes. And all that water! And when it's your parent, it's even more exciting. Robyn, the wife of a volunteer firefighter, noted, "The kids are so excited running to the window to see daddy leave on a call." On the other hand, sometimes it just seems that Murphy's Law always comes into play for the volunteer firefighter. On the night of the big game or that dance recital, the pager sounds, and mom, dad, grandma, or grandpa miss him as he responds, missing the event. Kids in fire families know this is a reality, but it can still be frustrating and confusing for them. It is important to have conversations with kids to help them understand that someone is in need and that it is their family members' responsibility to help them. Of course, this may not always make sense to a child, but in general, kids are resilient. Knowing that their mom or dad (or other loved one) helped someone in need can be a great source of pride for them. Be sure the children know that their activities are important, and their family members didn't leave because of the child or the event. Providing lots of reassurance and introducing them to the fire department can be very helpful. You will most likely hear a child of a firefighter expressing their pride in what their parent does.

Here are a few ideas for involving your children in volunteer firefighters' life:

- Take them on a tour of the station and trucks, show them your PPE and the equipment you use
- Show them the pagers and explain what happens when someone calls 911 in an emergency
- Explain how safe their parent is while serving due to the training they have received and the equipment they use
- Have a routine "goodbye" for when a call comes in and the volunteer will respond



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Real Life Volunteer Fire Families: A Daughter's Perspective

My name is Samantha, and I am fourteen years old, and both of my parents are volunteer firefighters. They both fight fires and handle other rescues, like car accidents, water rescues, and even a cat stuck up in a tree. But sometimes they get called during dinner or family time and must leave, and I know they are doing the right thing by going out to the fire call. Both of my parents are very brave to deal with people in pain or facing the loss of personal property. My parents inspire me by risking their lives to save someone else. Especially my mom because she showed me that even though I'm a girl I can still do what guys can do, like fighting fires. Having both parents as firefighters is pretty cool because I know I'm safe from anything bad happening, and that they would do anything to help save someone else in need of help. When I get old enough to be a volunteer firefighter, I want to be just like my parents: brave, strong, and have a lot of courage to save someone or something from a disaster.

Keeping Your Relationship Strong

It is a sad reality that first responders have a very high divorce rate, some quoted as high as 70 percent. These statistics come from career sources and do not include volunteer firefighters. We still want to discuss this important topic and be sure that communication is strong in the fire family home. There are many factors to which this can be attributed, including:

- Spending so much time apart from your spouse or significant other makes it more challenging to stay connected and on the same page. The stress and exhaustion of firefighting can impact one's personality, making it challenging to get along with them. It can require a very understanding spouse to adapt to these changes.
- Firefighters tend to become very close to their fellow firefighters as they find themselves in life-changing situations together, relying on each other for their safety and welfare. Whether it is a personal matter of life or death on an emergency scene or being witness to the death of a child, these moments can be tough for a firefighter; having other firefighters to confide in, in addition, to support from a spouse, is very helpful. Together, the firefighter and their spouse need to work on building and strengthening trust in their relationship. The spouse may find themselves jealous, not just of other people in the fire department, but of the passion their firefighter gives to the job and the time it takes away from their marriage and family.

Communication, trust, and time are big topics in any relationship but are challenged even further by the firefighter lifestyle. In addition, we can't overlook the other big relationship challenge – money. Yes, it is a paid position, and it may pay for your vacation or other items of your choosing. However, it will not pay your bills and it is recognized that your full-time job is extremely important.

1. Communication is key. This is true of all relationships, but right now we are talking about communicating specifically about the volunteer fire department and how it will



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affect your marriage or relationship. Read this guide together and talk about these topics. Try and understand how the other feels. Make agreements for how you will handle the situations and circumstances volunteer firefighting brings to your family and relationship.

2. Be supportive of your significant other's choice. Nothing drives a wedge in a relationship faster than being unsupportive of the other's interests and hobbies. It doesn't mean you have to want to be a volunteer firefighter as well. Being supportive means trying not to judge, criticize, or complain about something that your significant other loves and wants to do. They may not like your choice of Tuesday night TV, but they love you anyway. This support, from the fire family, means everything to the volunteer firefighter.

3. Stay strong by staying connected. Be sure you are having date nights and time away from the pager and fire department topics. Remember how you used to date when you first met and what you enjoyed doing together. Time together is required to stay close and connected. Sometimes just a great night away for dinner can carry you contentedly through the next 48 hours apart.

4. Understand and expect the mental and physical stresses that volunteer firefighting brings. When firefighter comes home from a call, they may need rest and downtime to recover physically and mentally. Yes, you may have been working or at home taking care of the house and family while they were gone, and you may feel tired as well. Learn to expect that the job doesn't end when the call is over and build in time for renewal for both of you. Keep the communication open and know when to seek additional support or professional help when the stress and emotional strain is too much. As their spouse or significant other, you will often see signs and symptoms of problems such as restless sleep, anxiety, or depression sooner than others. Know where to turn for help if these issues become overwhelming, and don't give up. Often these issues are short-term and will resolve.

5. Work through jealousy issues together. A significant other can feel jealous because they feel like an outsider to the fire department. In the volunteer firefighting world, it can be simple to avoid this because there are many roles for the whole family to support your community and department. Again, keep the lines of communication open and try to prevent it from escalating to the "it's us or the fire department" level before understanding the root of jealousy issues. Often, we may feel alone when we are having relationship troubles. It is difficult to find a confidante you can trust who is impartial and can still (gently) speak to you about ways to mend your relationship. The Fire department does offer a couple of events where some or all of the family is included.

Real Life Volunteer Fire Families: Being a Supportive Spouse

Keeping the balance between firefighting and your family starts with your firefighter and your marriage. My husband is usually very good about his commitments, but ultimately it is his choice on what he commits to outside of calls. It is also my choice how I react. I can choose to be upset and make him feel awful, or I can choose to live my life and find a calm non-confrontational way to talk about time and scheduling. Calm and non-



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confrontational are almost always the best way. As a fire spouse, I know that our life is different. We can't expect the 'Leave it to Beaver' life. I know that my firefighter will not be able to attend to all things. There will be times he will be home but needs to just sleep off last night's call. That is our life and adjustments must be made. I am my husband's biggest cheerleader and support. After 21 years I have learned to adapt and adjust to what he needs. This helps him, his department, and our community.



Volunteers Come in All Shapes, Sizes, Ages, and Genders

Volunteer firefighting isn't gender or age-specific, and we value a diverse, inclusive, and equitable workplace. There are women and men of all ages who volunteer in a variety of fire department of roles. In many communities, volunteers are the only way to provide emergency services, and it takes many types of people to perform many different functions to get the job done. There are lots of wonderful stories of people who volunteer well into their sixties doing what they can to serve their communities. If your family decides to volunteer together, this may raise some additional topics for you to discuss:

- If both parents are volunteer firefighters, will you work on a working fire together?
- Who will take the call this time versus who will stay with the children?
- How do you feel about your son or daughter volunteering for the department?
- Are you ready to handle the extra emotion of having a loved one work in a dangerous setting alongside you on the scene?

Having multiple volunteers in one family is common when there is a long history and tradition of firefighting. It sets such an example of service and selflessness for your children that it may seem natural for them to want to serve in the same way.



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Real Life Volunteer Fire Families: It's a Family Affair

Being organized is key for our household. We have routines; some are simple, such as the routine of leaving the house or getting the kids ready for bed. It creates a wonderful flow in the house, but when a call comes in, he can slide out and I can step up and finish what tasks need to be finished without feeling any stress.

Helping Your Volunteer Stay Physically and Mentally Fit

Staying in good physical condition is essential to maintain a healthy lifestyle and can save your firefighter's life as well as allow them to better support the other first responders and those in need on the scene. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is required regardless of being a firefighter or not. While this can require adding more time to your schedule for working out or planning healthy meals, it can also be a fun family activity that can be enjoyed together. Hiking, jogging, or biking can be done as a family and will benefit all. Healthy eating is a lifestyle change that can positively impact the entire family. Supporting your firefighter's need to be healthy and fit is one way to also contribute to your community and will help you to feel better as well.

A Heart-Healthy Firefighter Program promotes fitness, nutrition, and health awareness for all members of the fire and emergency services, both volunteer and career. Firefighting is not only a physically demanding job but also mentally demanding. Responding to calls is stressful to start with but added to that is the fact that firefighters often respond to calls involving life and death situations that can be very emotionally charged. Firefighters may be exposed to scenes of death, injury, and loss that most people will never see in their entire lives.

Acknowledging the emotional side of the profession is an important first step toward developing coping mechanisms and a support network to help mitigate its impact. Some departments may have support systems in place to help the first responders deal with these stressors immediately after the incident. These support systems can help the firefighters to manage the stress and adapt more quickly to routine life. In some cases, additional support is needed to deal with the longer-term emotional impact that may come from being a firefighter.

Many resources outside of the department can help your loved one manage the mental and emotional side of the profession. It is mandatory and legislated to have a program in place. Wilmot Fire department has both a program annually to support our firefighters, we also make Homewood and several other vital resources available to our firefighters at no charge.

When Your Volunteer Runs a Call for Someone They Know

One aspect that makes volunteer firefighting even more challenging is that you are often serving in the community where you live and know many people. Chances are your volunteer will eventually respond to a call to help someone that they know. It is never easy when a friend or loved one is injured or experiences the loss of a child, parent, or spouse, but being a firefighter on the scene to help this friend or loved one can be extraordinarily difficult. These situations are already very stressful and may be complicated by an existing relationship. Your firefighter needs to understand this risk and consider how a call will be handled when it



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involves someone they know. A strong family support system will be a great benefit to your first responder. These calls especially require your firefighter and your family to maintain a great deal of strength and professionalism to best help those in need.

Behavioural Health Warning Signs

Between the physical exhaustion and the mental stressors of emergency response, first responders may struggle to cope. As a family member of a firefighter, be prepared for and understand the responses you may see in them. When not addressed, these issues can turn into longer-term challenges such as depression, mood disorders, anxiety, substance abuse, or even Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Some studies have shown that up to 90% of firefighters exhibit some symptoms of PTSD. It is important to know the signs and symptoms so they can be recognized and treated. In most cases, your firefighter will cope well and move past these challenges. However, in some cases, although rare, they may have difficulties. Below are some common fire service behavioural health issue indicators.

Anxiety

- Excessive worry
- Restlessness or feeling edgy
- Becoming tired easily
- Trouble concentrating
- Feeling as if the mind is going “blank”
- Irritability
- Muscle tension
- Sleep problems (trouble falling or staying asleep, or having sleep that is not restful)

Depression

- Isolation around the fire station or at training events
- Changes in sleeping patterns (insomnia or hypersomnia) or eating habits (significant weight loss or gain, or decrease or increase in appetite)
- Unusual sadness after calls or perhaps frustration at the outcome
- Unusual or out-of-character anger (some firefighters may have anger issues not directly related to depression)
- Fatigue or loss of energy when compared to a firefighter’s history during training, on calls, or even activities around the station
- Depressed mood (e.g., feeling sad or empty)
- Lack of interest in previously enjoyable activities
- Agitation, restlessness, irritability
- Feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, and/or guilt
- Inability to think or concentrate or indecisiveness on or off the fire ground
- Recurrent thoughts of death, recurrent suicidal ideation, suicide attempt, or plan for completing suicide



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Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

- Restlessness
- Sleeplessness
- Hyperactivity
- Inability to relax
- Jumpiness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Mental replays or dreams in which a person hears feels, sees, smells, and/or tastes aspects of a traumatic event
- Shutting off one's emotions
- Avoiding triggers (places, people, and conversations)

Someone suffering from PTSD may be alert and on the lookout for danger. This is known as increased emotional arousal. It can cause a firefighter to:

- Suddenly become angry or irritable
- Have a hard time sleeping
- Have trouble concentrating
- Fear for their safety and always feel on guard
- Be very startled when surprised

It can also cause negative thoughts, moods, or feelings. These can include:

- Feelings of shame, despair, or hopelessness
- Difficulty controlling one's emotions
- Problems with family or friends
- Impulsive or self-destructive behaviour
- Changed beliefs or changed personality traits

Substance Abuse

- Frequent intoxication
- Intentional heavy use of alcohol or drugs
- Elevated tolerance for alcohol or drugs
- Symptomatic drinking
- Psychological dependence on alcohol or drugs
- Missed work due to alcohol or drug use
- Lost or impaired relationships caused by alcohol or drug use
- Concern expressed by family member or friend
- Problems with law or authority
- Financial problems
- Belligerence
- Isolation



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Suicide

- Appearing depressed or sad most of the time (untreated depression is the number one cause of suicide)
- Talking or writing about death or suicide
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Feeling hopeless
- Feeling helpless
- Feeling strong anger or rage
- Feeling trapped, like there is no way out of a situation
- Experiencing dramatic mood changes
- Abusing drugs or alcohol
- Exhibiting a change in personality
- Acting impulsively
- Experiencing a change in sleeping habits
- Experiencing a change in eating habits
- Losing interest in most activities
- Performing poorly at work or in school
- Giving away prized possessions
- Writing a will (in conjunction with other warning signs)
- Feeling excessive guilt or shame
- Acting recklessly

If you notice yourself or your volunteer firefighter exhibiting any of these symptoms, reach out for help. Communication and honesty are crucial. You are not alone; we have several strategies available to help. Doctors, clinics, hospitals, and even churches may also refer you to support groups or counsellors who can help you and your loved ones cope.





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Preparing for the Worst: Talking about Injury or Line of Duty Death

We rarely talk about this subject. No one ever wants to go through a line-of-duty death or injury. We feel it is important to talk about the subject and provide some fact-based information that will reassure the firefighter family that although injuries may occur, firefighter deaths are rare in Canada. Cancer is the highest contributor to firefighter line of duty deaths. Nearly 90% of firefighter fatality claims are caused by Cancer which has been an increasing trend over the previous years. Nevertheless, the evidence demonstrates a slowing down in the increase of these fatalities. Ontario is the province with the most claims and has seen a declining trend over the last 2 years. The data also shows an increasing trend of those in the older age groups (55+) to have claimed Cancer-related fatalities (around 80% of total claims). To put this in perspective, reporting Cancer deaths were not always provided where now it is. Past data was not accurate which lends to higher numbers. Proper data now more reflects what these numbers should reflect. Traumatic Injury has seen a decline over the years in both its fatality and time-loss injury claims. Young firefighters (49 years and younger) consistently dominated the injury claims with nearly 80% of total claims. However, the older age groups have seen an increasing trend in fatality claims (Cancer). It should be noted that statistics are based on career and volunteer firefighters, with career firefighters being the largest percentage. The good news is we have learned and continue to learn a great deal about the safety and continue to improve training and equipment. Knowing where the risks are provided knowledge and awareness to our valued firefighters. This knowledge allows them to concentrate on following department procedures that guide them to a safe workplace and safe work practices. The Canadian fire service is very safety proactive which has led to the downturn in line of duty injuries and fatalities. While it is not something you should focus on with excessive worry and fear, it is a topic you and your volunteer should plan for and discuss, especially if your volunteer is your spouse. Regardless of being a volunteer firefighter or not, this discussion should occur and far too often does not.



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Table 1 below for the fatality by nature of the injury:
 (Cohort 1: 2006-2015) vs (Cohort 2: 2008-2017) vs (Cohort 3: 2009-2018)

TABLE 1: CANADIAN FIREFIGHTER FATALITY CLAIMS BY NATURE OF INJURY

Nature of Injury	Percentage of Total Fatalities					Annual Fatalities per 100,000 FF*				
	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Pct. Diff (2-1)	Pct. Diff (3-2)	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Pct Diff (2-1)	Pct Diff (3-2)
Cancer	85.4%	87.9%	89.7%	3.4%	2%	49.5	61.5	62.4	24%	1.4%
Traumatic Injury	6%	4.6%	4.9%	(23.3%)	6%	3.5	3.3	3.0	(8.6%)	(9%)
Circulatory System	4.9%	4.2%	3.9%	(14%)	(7%)	2.8	2.9	2.7	3.6%	(6.9%)
Respiratory System	1.7%	1.6%	2.0%	(6%)	25%	1.0	1.1	1.6	10%	45%
Mental Disorder	0.2%	0.6%	1.2%	253%	100%	0.1	0.4	0.8	300%	100%

Note: random allocation of suppressed numbers was performed; therefore, the numbers represented here may not reflect the true numbers from the raw data. *only includes AB, BC, MB, NB, NS, ON, QC, SK, YT.

TABLE 2: CANADIAN FIREFIGHTER FATALITY CLAIMS BY AGE GROUP OVER COHORTS

Age Group	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3
15-19 years	0.2%	0.1%	0.0%
20-24 years	0.7%	0.1%	0.1%
25-29 years	1.7%	1.4%	1.3%
30-34 years	1.4%	1.1%	0.9%
35-39 years	2.7%	1.6%	1.2%
40-44 years	3.9%	4.0%	3.3%
45-49 years	6.5%	5.2%	4.8%
50-54 years	11.9%	10.5%	9.0%
55-59 years	11.7%	10.9%	9.9%
60-64 years	15.8%	13.5%	13.1%
65 years and over	43.5%	51.5%	56.2%

Knowing this information heightens awareness and knowledge. This information is used by departments to target specific areas that may require improvements. The point, tracking this information is invaluable to allow fire services the ability to analyze and apply this information to continual improvement programs.

Families may want to discuss these provided topics:

Financial planning. How will you support your family without your volunteer firefighter's income? What does and doesn't your insurance cover? Does the volunteer department



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provide any benefits in the case of a line-of-duty death or injury? Wilmot Fire Department provides life insurance coverage for all our volunteer firefighters.

Preparing for injuries. How will your family cope should your volunteer become critically injured? What support groups are available to help you and your family deal with new circumstances or lifestyle changes due to injury? Is your volunteer eligible to receive workers' compensation? Wilmot Fire Department provides WSIB and VFIS insurance coverage for all volunteer firefighters.

Take the time to have these difficult conversations so that you and your family are prepared if the unthinkable does occur. Preparing for a line-of-duty injury is something many fire families overlook. Something as simple as lifting a ladder can cause an injury that puts a firefighter off duty for six months and may impact their regular, paying job. If you are not financially prepared for this, it can be stressful for a family.

Here are some things to prepare for in the case of injury:

- Do you have enough savings to cover the time until WSIB begins payments? Or a plan for additional income to cover the difference between WSIB payments and your required income?
- Do you understand the benefits offered by your department in the event of injury? For a Wilmot Volunteer firefighter, you will receive the maximum allowable benefit payment that WSIB will permit. In some cases, this allowable benefit may exceed your firefighter's full-time wage, in other cases, it may generate a shortfall.
- Should your family consider an additional type of savings or insurance to be prepared for this scenario?
- How will your health insurance support you in the case of an injury? VFIS has several supplemental coverage options that traditional insurance will not cover. Your firefighter may have benefits with their full-time job that may provide some financial relief.

Being a Part of Your New Fire Department Family

While there are many challenges in the volunteer firefighting world, there can also be many rewards. One of them is being a part of a new community that can feel like family. Firefighters in general tend to bond due to the stresses of the job and the life circumstances they experience together. Families of first responders can also benefit from this common bond.

Many volunteer departments raise funds for equipment and apparatus that keep their volunteers safe, so it is common for families to rally together in support of these fundraising efforts. Some of the best memories of a community can be the volunteer fire department spaghetti dinners, bake sales, and festivals. These events offer an opportunity for family members to get involved and get to know the other fire department members and their families.



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Some departments also have auxiliaries or non-operational volunteer opportunities, enabling family members to get involved in ways other than through fighting fires or responding to emergency medical calls. One example is to provide rehab services to first responders during calls. When out attending a fire or extended emergency event, firefighters need to refuel their bodies with water and food and sometimes just need a place to warm up or cool off before heading back in with a fresh SCBA cylinder. This can be an easy way to get involved with the fire department, get to know other families, and show your volunteer how much you appreciate and support their choice to serve. Other fire departments may need help writing grants to obtain much-needed funding, conducting public education, or staffing department open-houses or recruiting events. The ways in which family members can get involved are endless. Remember, each fire department operates differently, ask before you assume that these suggested options are available.

Real Life Volunteer Fire Families: Involving the Family

Our town has a Christmas parade, in which the fire trucks take part. Our family is beside the fire truck and tosses candy to the children along the route. During Canada Fireworks, my partner attends with his team to keep the event safe while we attend and enjoy Canada Day Fireworks. It has been a wonderful way for our children to participate in a fun way.

It also provided them with an opportunity to see their dad in action! Our participation lets him know we support what he does for the community.

Family Dynamics

There are many benefits to being part of a fire service family, but, as with any family, there can also be challenges, disagreements, and even personalities that may not mesh. Remember that as our own families, the family dynamics in a volunteer fire department can vary, but at the end of the day, you are all there to serve together, do well together and help each other. One perspective to keep is this: Your volunteer fire families are going through similar stresses, strains, worries, fears, and interruptions. They experience this unique lifestyle with you and can be a tremendous source of support in times of need. While it may not happen overnight, many volunteer fire families find their best friends and confidantes in other volunteer family members. Your relationships, communication, and respect with the other fire service families are just as much a key to a successful volunteer fire department as your firefighter being able to respond to a call. As an age-old proverb states, it takes a village to raise a child. In this case, it truly takes a village to operate a successful volunteer fire department, and this includes the family members of the volunteers.

Understanding the Passion and Commitment of the Fire Service

Some of you may be reading this guide and thinking to yourself, “This is all good and I’m glad and proud to be a part of this but sometimes it seems like my spouse cares more about the fire department than our own family.” You are not alone in this feeling. Firefighting can be a very



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intense and passionate focus for some people. It gets into your firefighter's blood. It certainly seems as if some people were “born to be firefighters,” and for that, we can all be grateful to have people who want to do this dangerous work. However, balance is indeed important in all relationships. The bottom-line is don't confuse passion for what they do with the love of you and your family members. Speaking especially to spouses, keeping open and clear lines of communication is key to having a successful relationship with a volunteer firefighter. Even if you don't share the same passion for the fire service, try to understand your firefighter's commitment to this service and their need for your support. As noted, before, being a volunteer firefighter is more than a hobby – it is a way of life. By recognizing this and working together with your firefighter to adjust to this lifestyle, you can create a new dynamic that works for your family.





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A Volunteer Fire Family Oath

In the good times and bad, having a reminder of the why and the purpose is helpful. This Volunteer Fire Family Oath was created just for that purpose.

We are a Volunteer Firefighter Family.

We serve. We care. We support each other.

We strive for a healthy lifestyle and will train to be best prepared when duty calls.

We will live by the standards of honour, pride, and respect with which our volunteer firefighters serve our community.

We will remember that when the time to serve does arrive, we will support our volunteer's immediate response to assist those in need.

We will encourage and strengthen our volunteer firefighters with our positive words and actions.

We promise to respect the fire family and honour the fire service in all that we do.

Through strong communication and commitment to our families and relationships, we understand we all have a role to play in a successful volunteer fire community.

We accept with dignity the honour of being the family



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Thank you/Conclusion

Being part of a volunteer fire family can be an incredible and rewarding experience. You may not be the one that signed up to be a volunteer firefighter, but having a spouse, brother, sister, child, or parent join the fire service will still have a significant impact on your life. By embracing this new lifestyle with your volunteer, you can learn to break down barriers, overcome challenges, build relationships, and reap all the great things the fire service has to offer. We hope this guide has offered some insight as to what it means to be a volunteer fire family and will help you, your volunteer, and your family thrive in this service. Saying Thank you is important to us. The volunteer fire service plays a vital role in every community and this crucial service must continue. Your family commitment is commendable, and you should always remain proud of playing a role in making someone's worst day become just a wee bit better.





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Helpful Resources and Links for the Volunteer Fire Family

There are several resources available for volunteer firefighters and their families to help them navigate the fire service life. From firefighter health and safety to support for families and relationships, we encourage you to tap into these resources to help your volunteer and your family stay safe and strong. Several resources come from the US, some are for information purposes only, however, they remain applicable to the Canadian fire service.

Family Resources

Ontario Fire Administration Inc

<http://www.ofai.ca/candidate-information>

Daily in the Province of Ontario, firefighters safeguard the health, safety, welfare, and property of Ontarians! A career as a Firefighter puts you on the front line of emergency response in the Province of Ontario! Becoming a firefighter is one of the most challenging, fast-paced and rewarding professions available – and it might be just what you have been seeking in a career!

Canada Revenue Agency

Canada Revenue Agency/Agence du revenu du Canada - Canada.ca

Link to CRA regarding information for volunteer firefighters and your annual tax return. You may be eligible for an income exemption of up to \$1,000 or \$3,000 if you received a payment from a government, municipality, or other public authority for carrying out volunteer firefighter duties.

FirefighterWife.com

www.firefighterwife.com

This is an online community for wives, fiancées, and girlfriends of firefighters (some services are not available in Canada). Some free articles and resources may provide information to you. Its mission is to strengthen fire marriages and encourage fire families. Use the information as you see fit and keep in mind this is an American website, not all information applies to the Canadian fire service.

Memorial Grant Program for First Responders

<https://memorialgrant.ca/>

The Memorial Grant Program for First Responders recognizes the service and sacrifice of responders in keeping Canadians safe. Through the program, families of first responders who die as a result of their duties can receive a one-time lump sum, a tax-free direct maximum payment of \$300,000 for eligible beneficiaries.

Health & Safety Resources

Ontario Section 21 Guidance Notes

<https://www.ontario.ca/document/firefighter-guidance-notes>



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In cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, and Fire Service professionals, Section 21 Guidance notes provide basic safety and best practice guidelines for fire services in the creation of each fire department's guidelines and procedures.

Everyone Goes Home

www.everyonegoeshome.com

www.lifesafetyinitiatives.com

This program by the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation is designed to prevent firefighter line-of-duty deaths and injuries. It includes resources and training to help firefighters and departments implement the 16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives.

Firefighter Behavioral Health Alliance

www.ffbha.org

This nonprofit organization aims to educate senior fire officers, firefighters, EMS, and supporting personnel about behavioural health, the mental stressors that this type of job can have, and the consequences of not recognizing them.

Ontario Section 21 Committee Cancer Prevention Checklist

[Cancer Prevention Checklist for consultation.pdf \(oafc.on.ca\)](https://www.oafc.on.ca/cancer-prevention-checklist-for-consultation.pdf)

Firefighter Cancer Support Network

www.FirefighterCancerSupport.org

The objective of the Firefighter Cancer Support Network is to provide timely assistance and support to all fire service members and their families in the event of a cancer diagnosis.

Heart-Healthy Firefighter Program

www.healthy-firefighter.org

With heart attack being the leading cause of line-of-duty firefighter deaths in the US, this program from the National Volunteer Fire Council provides resources and tools for getting and staying healthy. This includes an interactive fitness challenge, healthy recipe archive, fitness demonstration videos, webinars, and resources for implementing a department health and wellness program.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and the Ministry of Labour's PTSD Prevention Plans

<https://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/ptsd.php>

PTSD resource for first responders in Ontario.

Getting Started: PTSD Assessment

<http://www.firstrespondersfirst.ca/>

A resource to assist with identifying any potential gaps

NVFC B.E.S.T. Priorities

www.nvfc.org/health_safety



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Help your firefighter be at their B.E.S.T. by focusing on health and safety. The B.E.S.T. priorities are divided into the areas of Behavior, Equipment, Standards and Codes, and Training and offer a series of practices first responders should adhere to stay safe, as well as resources to help them achieve these goals.

Share the Load™

www.nvfc.org/help

This support program from the National Volunteer Fire Council provides firefighters, EMTs, and their families with tools and resources for behavioural health. This includes a free, confidential, 24/7 helpline (only available to US firefighters); online resource center; newsletter; training; and more.

Other Resources

Firefighters Association of Ontario

[Fire Fighters Association Ontario | We Are Working for You \(ffao.on.ca\)](http://ffao.on.ca)

It is the mission of the Firefighters Association of Ontario to provide representation, resources, and education to and for firefighters across the diverse social and economic environments within the province of Ontario.