

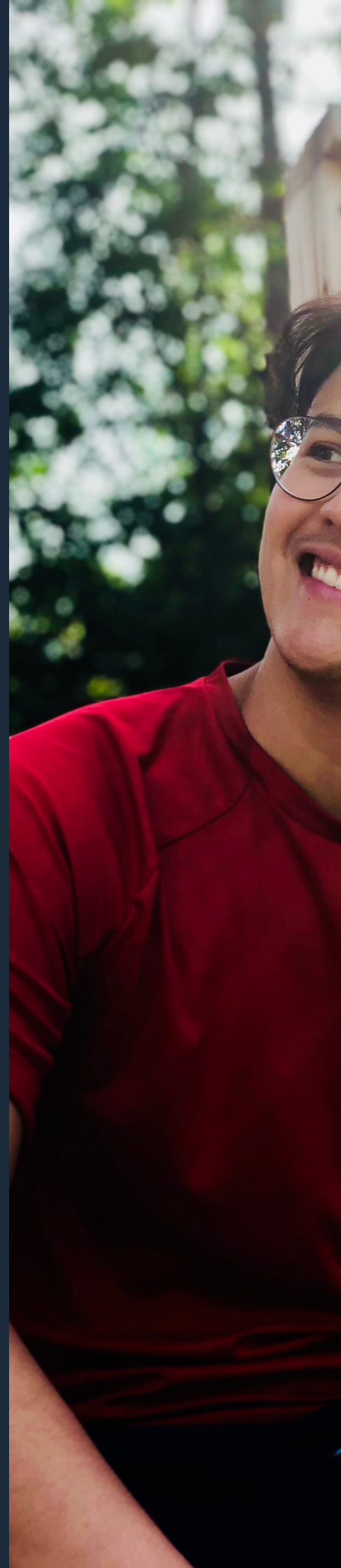


BEYOND THE UNIFORM

# IDENTITY AND CAREER TRANSITION

a guide for first responders

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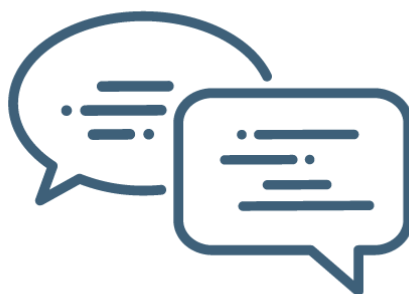
# INTRODUCTION

Identity is our sense of who we are, our place in the world, and how we believe we are valued in our communities.

Our identity can be linked with cultural background, gender, family, likes and dislikes, abilities, past experiences, relationships, beliefs and values.

For many of us, our careers also play a role in how we see ourselves. For first responders in particular, the work is not just a job; it's a calling. People might be drawn to the role because it aligns with who they are. It's a powerful role that comes with a clear purpose, value, respect and authority, which can be very satisfying and rewarding.

But it's also a "hungry" role. It asks more of a person and doesn't have the usual boundaries that other jobs have. There is a risk that the work can consume other aspects of a first responder's life and identity.



# THE CHALLENGES TO IDENTITY DURING CAREER TRANSITION

There are many losses associated with transition, including your sense of belonging, purpose and respect. Identity can take a hit and you may be left feeling alone, lost, uncertain or as though decisions are out of your control – especially if you are leaving the role sooner than you planned.

The uniform is a powerful symbol of identity and many first responders can feel naked without it.

When changing roles, it's important to acknowledge the losses and give yourself time to grieve and process them. It's important during this time to give yourself a chance to work out how to be in the world without the container of the uniform or the first responder role.





## CAREER TRANSITION: FULL OF OPPORTUNITIES

It's important to know that who you are is not entirely determined by what you do. Who you are as a person and who you are at work will always be connected, but they should also be distinct from each other. The values you hold close will be with you wherever you are – they are part of who you are – but how you enact those is different at home, at work, and in the community.

While difficult, transitioning out of a first responder role can offer a (sometimes unwelcome) opportunity to become clearer about and more connected with who you are.

Below are some practical things you can do to stay connected with the parts of you that found expression in the job, and explore how to continue the story of you through this time of transition.

# PRACTICAL STRATEGIES TO CONNECT WITH YOUR IDENTITY THROUGH CAREER TRANSITION

## CONNECT WITH YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Your loved ones don't need you to be 'something'. They just need you to be you. Ask the people closest to you to describe what they see in you when you're not in uniform.

## TRY NEW THINGS

Follow the things you're curious about or interested in to find something new to try. What are the things that light you up? What excites you? What brings you joy?

## SEEK SUPPORT

Finding the right people to support you makes it easier to sit with the uncomfortable feelings, connect with yourself, and explore what might come next. You don't have to tackle everything about career transition on your own.

## REFLECT ON YOUR CAREER

Many career transitioning people may avoid this because it can feel painful. However, there is good evidence that connecting with important moments in our life help us stay in touch with who we really are and hold on to a sense that our existence matters. This enhances our sense of meaning and can buffer loss, helping us to pursue important life goals. Just because you are changing careers, doesn't mean your first responder role ceases to be part of your story. You can stay connected with it as part of who you are.

## KEEP A JOURNAL

It's no coincidence that this is a common practice for teenagers who are at the stage of development when they are trying to work out who they are in the world. Reflect on each day: What were you glad about? What was hard? What were you proud of? What were you grateful for? What did others seem to respond to? What felt most like "you", and what didn't? Ask yourself questions and answer them.

## REFLECT ON YOUR PLAN AND MAKE CHANGES

Self-care is constantly changing. Sometimes things will work and other times they won't. It is okay to modify your plan as you go.

## CONNECT WITH YOUR VALUES

What do you see as important qualities? Find a few words that mean something to you. Some ideas to get you started include honesty, authenticity, loyalty, fun, creativity, courage, compassion. Values are the part of our identity that work like a compass to help guide our direction and life choices – and they will help to guide you towards a meaningful next step in both your lifestyle and career choices.

## WHAT ARE YOUR SKILLS AND TALENTS?

You have developed many skills and talents in your career so far, and in your personal interests. Be honest with yourself about what you have to offer, and which skills and talents you want to pursue further. Not all of your interests or skills need to become a career path, but following the curiosity you feel about them can be a great step.

## GIVE IT TIME

Transitioning out of one career and into a new career or lifestyle is a big change. You need some time to process it, acknowledge what has happened, grieve, remember and honour where you've been. Try not to put pressure on yourself to have all the answers right now. Your transition will find its own timeframe.



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