



## **ESF Guide for Families of Emergency Service Volunteers Now Available**

Often it is family members who are the first to notice concerning changes in behaviour or mood of their emergency service worker yet, according to ESF's research, families often lack the confidence to help them. Like physical health challenges, the sooner mental health challenges can be addressed the better.

The newly available ESF Guide for Families of Emergency Service Volunteers, developed with assistance from the State Government, responds to what ESF heard when speaking with family members.

The Guide aims to help family members of emergency service workers, support their volunteer family member, recognise the signs of mental distress, support and talk to the emergency service volunteer in the family about how they have been impacted by the work they do, and talk to their children about the complexity of emergency services work, and know where to go for help.

Further, the guide emphasises the importance of families protecting and nurturing their own mental wellbeing while acknowledges both the joy and pride, but also the difficulty and stress of having a family member involved in emergency service work.

One area of identified from ESF's research into what support families of emergency service workers want was that there was a gap in support for children. The Guide addresses the unique position children of emergency service workers grow up in - they may worry about their caregiver's safety, or not understand why their caregiver sometimes behaves in a different way when they return home from volunteering, or why parents or caregivers might miss big celebrations like birthdays, Christmas, or school events. Concerns can be intensified by exposure to news reports and discussions with peers at school. The Guide steps parents and caregivers through talking with children about emergency service work, and how they, and their families can work together to optimise their mental wellbeing.

According to Courtney Daly the partner of an emergency service worker, "*This resource is a great introduction to all families of emergency services workers. I wish I had had this so I could identify the changes in my husband before he got to his worst. I encourage all partners to read and learn about the mental health concerns common in this line of work and begin to monitor your partner. You'll see it before they do!*"

The Guide is an initiative of ESF's new Family Matters Strategy and has been informed by significant consultation with the families of volunteers. It follows the successful pilot of Flourishing Families workshops in East Gippsland in January developed and delivered by ESF in partnership with MacKillop for families of emergency service workers in disaster affected areas.

Building on the success of ESF's Mental Health Matters program which is delivered as a workshop to volunteer brigades and units at a time that suits them, ESF will be hosting four online evening workshops in 2024 specifically for partners of volunteers. The first of these is scheduled for 18 March, and you can register your interest [here](#).

To find out more and see the Guide for Family of Emergency Service Workers have a look [here](#).

Families play a vital role in supporting our volunteers so that they can do their important community work. This is just the start of how ESF plans to help the sector to support families.

## RESPONSES

"The value of support from the families of effective emergency service people is immeasurable, particularly in the instance of volunteers. This guide provides solid information to assist the volunteering family. I am very thankful for the support of my own family, and that extends to all the families of the wonderful volunteers I have had the pleasure of working with over the years. These volunteer families work hard to keep communities safe and connected. Well done to you all."

**Andrew Perry, Fire fighter and former Captain Yarck Rural Fire Brigade**

[Read the guide here](#)