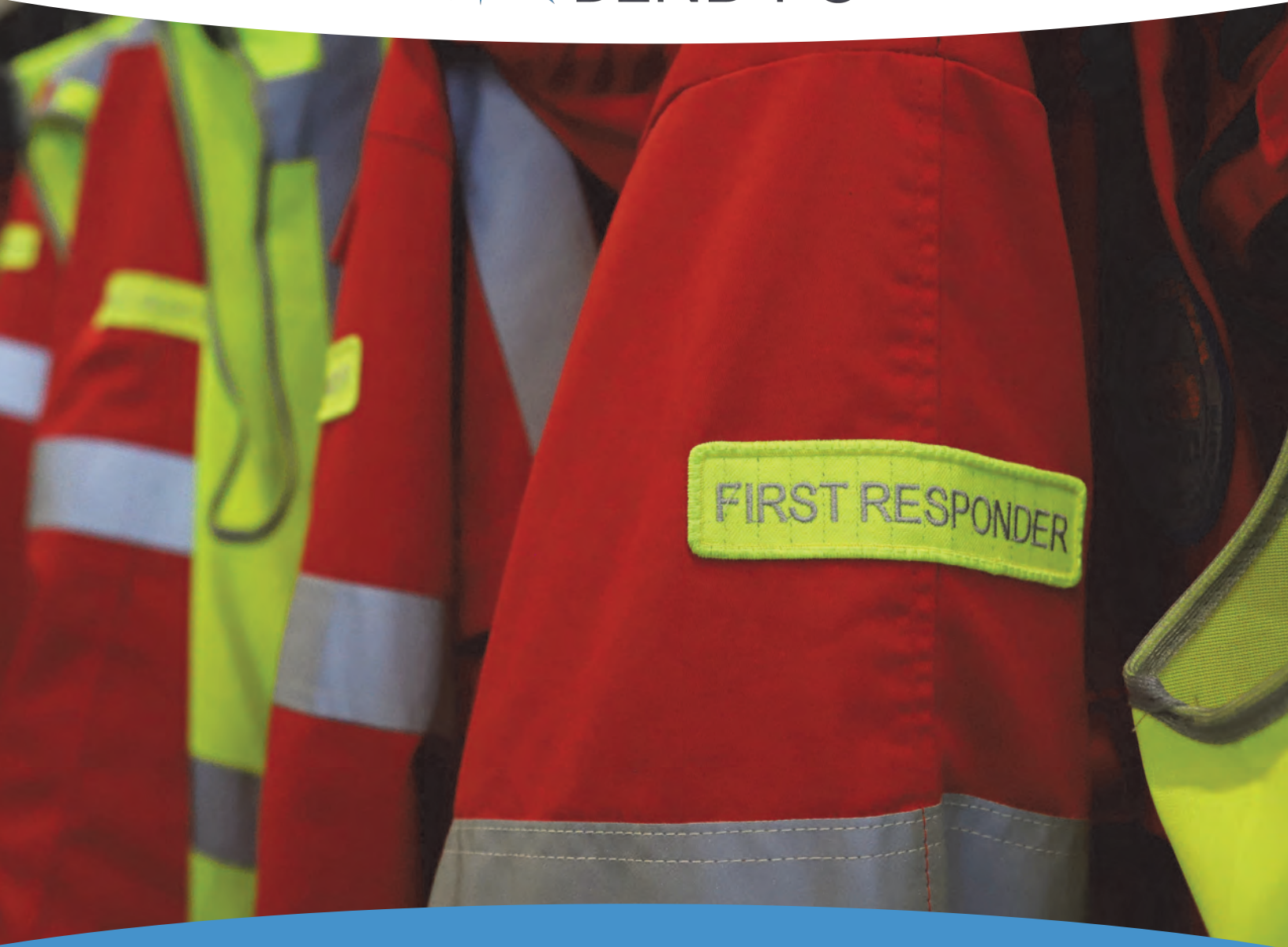




RIVER'S  
BEND PC



# Family Action Plan for First Responder Families

**Preserving Mental Health and Family Resilience**

Developed by **River's Bend PC**  
Evidence-Based, Compassionate, Connected Care

# Introduction: Why Family Wellness Protects First Responders

First responders, police officers, firefighters, EMTs, dispatchers, and corrections staff, routinely witness trauma and human suffering. Research shows that **the well-being of their families is one of the strongest predictors of their long-term resilience.**

When families are stable, connected, and supported, first responders experience:

- Lower rates of anxiety, depression, and burnout
- Better sleep and emotional regulation
- Stronger motivation to seek support when needed

At River's Bend, we believe prevention begins at home. This plan provides **proactive, clinically informed steps**, from simple routines to deeper relational work, to help families build lasting emotional resilience.

We also integrate **Front line Strong Together (FST5) principles**, Michigan's initiative supporting first responders and their families, to promote peer support, open communication, and community connection.



"In their careers, first responders endure hundreds of traumatic events, far beyond what most people will face in a lifetime. For too long, they've carried this weight in silence. Today, we break that silence. We commit to removing the stigma, prioritizing mental health, and ensuring every first responder has access to the support, education, and care they deserve."

**- Chief James Gallagher, Bloomfield Township Police Department**



# Step 1: Strengthen the Foundation of Family Resilience: Why Family Wellness Protects First Responders

## Family Resilience Checklist

Use this checklist to assess how your family is doing in key areas. Rate each statement on a scale from **1 (Never true)** to **5 (Always true)**.

**Circle** your total in each category to identify strengths and growth areas.

Category	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
Connection & Communication	We make time to talk and listen to each other daily.					
	We can discuss difficult emotions (fear, anger, sadness) without judgment.					
	We show appreciation and gratitude to one another often.					
Flexibility & Problem-Solving	We adapt when routines or shifts change unexpectedly.					
	We solve problems together rather than assigning blame.					
Emotional Awareness	We check in about how everyone is feeling, especially after stressful events.					
	We recognize signs of stress or burnout in each other.					
Self-Care & Coping	Each family member has at least one healthy coping strategy (exercise, journaling, time outdoors).					
	We take time to rest and recharge individually and together.					
Support & Resources	We know where to turn if we need professional or peer support.					
	We maintain friendships or community ties outside of work.					

# Scoring Guide

**40–50:** Strong foundation, continue reinforcing routines and communication.

**25–39:** Stable, but room for growth in specific areas, review steps below.

**Below 25:** Consider additional support, family therapy, peer groups, or FST5 resources can help.

## **Reflect:**

What category had your highest score?

What area feels most important to strengthen this month?





# Step 2: Normalize Conversations About Stress & Trauma



## 1. Use Permission-Based Language

Many families of first responders avoid emotional discussions out of protection or fear of “adding stress.” Instead, open the door gently:

“You see things most people never do. It’s okay to talk about how it affects you, and us.”

“It sounds like that call was heavy today. I’m here if you want to unpack it.”

## 2. Practice the “Green-Yellow-Red” Check-In

This visual tool (adapted from FST5 trauma frameworks) helps families monitor emotional states quickly:

**Green:** Calm, connected, okay

**Yellow:** Tired, tense, or distant

**Red:** Overwhelmed, numb, angry, or withdrawn

Use it during dinner, before bed, or even via text.

**Example:** “I’m yellow tonight, need some quiet time first, then let’s talk.”

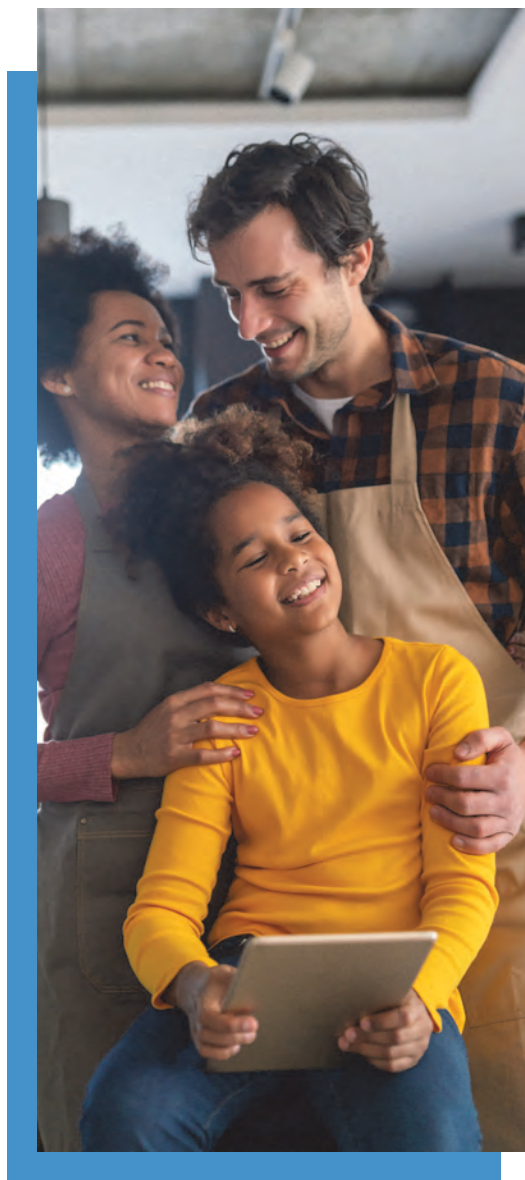
## 2. Learn About Secondary Trauma Together

Families can experience “**secondary trauma**” stress from supporting a loved one who experiences trauma.

**Easy:** Watch one short **Frontline Strong video** each month.

**Moderate:** Read a River’s Bend blog article on vicarious trauma.

**Complex:** Attend a family-focused wellness event or workshop at **River’s Bend** or your local department.



## Step 3: Prioritize Individual and Shared Self-Care

### The River's Bend "Self-Care Spectrum"

Type of Self-Care	Simple	Moderate	Advanced/ Family Practice
Physical	Hydrate, stretch, rest	Exercise routine, meal planning	Family fitness challenge or outdoor activity day
Emotional	Gratitude list	Individual therapy or journaling	Family therapy or shared mindfulness session
Relational	Text check-in during shift	Weekly family meal	Family retreat, couples therapy, or relationship workshop
Spiritual	5-minute breathing	Attend service or meditate	Create a family gratitude ritual or shared reflection time

**Pro tip:** Self-care isn't selfish, it's how we refill our capacity to care for others.

# Step 4: Build a Safety Net Before Crisis

## Create a Family Crisis & Recovery Plan

Having a plan reduces panic and guilt in times of high stress.

Include the following:

### 1. Signs of Stress to Watch For

- Withdrawal, irritability, disrupted sleep
- Increased substance use
- Avoidance of family or emotional conversations
- Loss of interest in usual activities

### 2. When These Signs Appear

- Agree on a “time-out” word or phrase (e.g., “pause for support”).
- Contact a trusted peer, counselor, or chaplain.
- Access professional help within 48 hours (not “when it gets worse”).

### 3. Emergency Contacts

**River’s Bend:** 248-585-3239 (Troy) or 248-702-6132 (West Bloomfield)

**Frontline Strong 24/7 Helpline:** 1-833-34-STRONG

**National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:** 988

### Family Exercise:

Write these on a card and post it in your home as a “Help Now” resource.



# Step 5: Strengthen Community & Connection

## Serve & Advocate Together

Helping others reinforces purpose:

- Volunteer at local mental health awareness events.
- Support a department wellness committee or family liaison program.
- Share your experiences with other families through peer mentorship.

## Celebrate Family Resilience

Pause regularly to acknowledge your effort:

“We’ve been through hard shifts and still show up for each other—that matters.”

Create a **“Resilience Wall”** at home with photos, quotes, or milestones (first responder anniversaries, recovery wins, family trips).





# Step 6: Personalize & Revisit the Plan

Treat this action plan as a **living document** that grows with your family.

## Quarterly Check-In Prompts:

- What's one stressor we've managed well this quarter?
- What self-care or communication habit slipped and how can we reset it?
- How connected do we feel as a unit (1–10)?
- Who outside our home supports us best right now?

## Personalization Ideas:

- Add family photos or inspiring quotes.
- Turn this document into a shared Google Doc or printed binder.
- Create sections for each family member to add notes or goals

## Closing Message

At **River's Bend**, we believe healing is not just about treating trauma, it's about cultivating connection, dignity, and balance.

Families are the unseen first responders behind every call, every shift, and every recovery. When you protect your family's wellness, you strengthen the entire community of care.

*"Strong responders come from strong families. Strong families grow from connection, not perfection."*

## Contact Us For More Information

**Troy:** (248) 585-3239

**West Bloomfield:** (248) 702-6132

**Bruce Goldberg:** bgoldberg@riversbendpc.com

**Cheryl Narduzzi:** cnarduzzi@riversbendpc.com

