

This is a sample of a document/plan that a Auburn PD spouse came up with to start there group.

Auburn Spousal Support (A.S.S)?? Just kidding but we do need a name, a mission statement etc

### Goals:

- To help facilitate a sense of family
- Provide support in times of need
- Be a sounding board – a rock in times of chaos as we will all need support at different times.
- A soft place to fall where you are understood, loved and supported
- We want all law enforcement spouses to know when this lifestyle becomes too difficult...  
**YOU ARE NOT ALONE!!!**
- To provide a means for spouses to connect, communicate needs and rally support.
- A way to feel connected to the bigger picture – we are all in this together

### Needs from the Department:

- Communicate to the Group liaison, alerting us to:  
*Births Deaths Injuries Illness Marriages New Hires*  
*On the job incidents Moves Fundraisers/causes Military Deployment*
- IF one of the above happens, liaison then “Rally’s the troops”, providing general information on the circumstances, what is needed and coordinate who can help  
*Babysitting, transportation, housekeeping, meals etc*
- Permission to send out interoffice e-mail OR insert in paychecks OR postage for letter to go home to spouses introducing them to the idea and including a “survey”
- Ability to photocopy
- List of who to call/when to call  
Peer support contacts  
Sergeants  
Back door numbers  
Who to call in times of “what if”
- Training through peer support team for those “key contacts” willing to provide support or assistance 24/7
- Approval/support of “holiday” activities where families can come and participate/potluck with their officer when on shift during the holidays – per crew if not a department wide celebration – include the families in the shift life, help the officer feel included so they feel a part of their family during these times– brings a sense of normalcy.

### Database building questionnaire should include:

Introduction letter explaining the where, why, and who of the group – open invitation and encouragement to participate.  
Someone willing to create the database and send it out to members

### Please reply with the following:

- Spouse name
- Officers name & current shift assignment
- Address, phone number, e-mail and indicate preferred mode of communication

- Birthday
- Anniversary
- Do you wish to receive support from us in times of need?
- Would you be willing to provide support in times of need?
- If so what? (ie: meal prep, transportation, babysitting, housecleaning etc)
- When would you be available to provide support (day, night, weekends only, only weekdays, only evenings, etc.)
- Would you be interested in attending a spouse group?
- If so, what topics or guest speakers would be of interest?
- When would be the best time for you to attend?
- Would you take advantage of on site babysitting if it was made available?
- Do you have older children who could assist with babysitting the younger children?
- Do you have resources you would be willing to bring to share with the group?
- Would you like to be introduced to a “mentor”
- Would you be willing to be a mentor?
- If a group format does not appeal to you, would you be interested in meeting 1:1 or via phone?
- Please provide us a contact outside the department that could act as a liaison for yourself/family in time of need.

**First meeting need to establish “ground rules”:**

We want this group to be productive

A safe place for spouses to feel warm, welcome, included, valued and able to openly share thoughts and concerns without judgement or repercussions.

Therefore, we want active listening, respect and CONFIDENTIALITY!!!!

That might mean NOT going home and sharing with your spouse or other officers (we know THEY talk) what is discussed at our meetings!! What is discussed at the meeting stays at the meeting.

Must be married to law enforcement (not a place for administrative staff to listen in)

This is NOT a bitch session – if you have a complaint or a specific issue, you will be heard but then key contacts will direct you to the correct resource to handle your specific issue(Employee Services, EAP, peer support etc) This will be provided to us from Admin

We are not counselors but we have been there, we understand.

This is to be viewed as an opportunity for us to grow and learn, a safe place to release pent up anxiety or emotion. Not a “clique” not exclusive BUT all inclusive!

Eventually, if the group agrees, we could extend the invitation to family members of officers as they too share a unique and special bond

**Ice breaker:**

Raise your hand if you are sitting next to someone you know – please stand and move next to someone you have never met. Interview each other answering the following questions:

Name - spouses name - shift they work - where you live -years married - years in law enforcement – children -  
work or hobbies -what you hope to get out of this group -

Given the tragedies of the last few months, a word that sums up where you are at.

## **Rational – Justification for need of group**

While many organizations have attempted to form these support groups, historically attendance has been poor. It has been shown that these groups are critical for the support and sense of connection they can provide.

For the families in our department facing difficult situations, if we already have an established, organized group and a means to communicate, those in need would be able to seek support and realize assistance is not far away. Further more, those who have benefited from the support in the past will feel a sense pride in the ability to give back.

Imagine, a tragedy strikes one of our police families – they are facing the worst time in their life and their personal space is filled with complete strangers – you mean well but I DON'T KNOW YOU!! What a lost and helpless feeling.

Having a good means to communicate with other spouses will help nourish good relationships and form a strong bond.

Our recruits and officers receive extensive training on how to do the job and how to remain proficient in their skills – they need our support and strength but who teaches us??

We have an obligation to support them so that they can be the best officer they can be....but who supports us?? WE CAN!!!!

Officers have training to teach them how to survive but no one teaches the spouse how to survive this challenging lifestyle. When we are facing a statistic that 3 out of every 5 police marriages ends in divorce – we need all the help we can get.

We all share a common denominator being involved in a relationship that already has so many strikes against us – the challenges we face are tremendous

High divorce rates      alcoholism      affairs      suicides etc

We need to work together to overcome those statistics. We each live a very distinctive lifestyle many others around us could never understand. Here we can be open and realistic about the challenges we face, share ideas that have worked, tips they have used etc.

No matter where we are at in our relationships or in our officers career, we all have grown from our experiences and that knowledge and experience can help someone else dealing with whatever they are facing.

Officers have peer support team members they can turn to for critical incident stress debriefing etc – the officer was there and knows first hand the close call they experienced and they work through it – unfortunately the spouse goes through it right along with them, however, they only have their imagination to guide them through the incident which can be WAY worse than reality, and no one to turn to.

We as spouses are expected to cope with everything – lets have a list of who we can turn to on those days when we feel we are not coping well. People who care about us and all we endure with this career.

A supportive group can lift each other up with kind words and encouragement

Spouses may be having difficulty adjusting to the shift schedules, the reality of facing another birthday, holiday anniversary alone.

Many of us have well meaning family and friends but unless you have walked in our shoes, faced the fears, worked through the anxiety of the many different ways harm can come to our loved ones – if you have never lived this “high risk lifestyle” it is really difficult for us to hear “I understand”. However, these spouses COMPLETELY understand and it can be so reassuring to know you are not alone.

A new wife may not understand reactions from her husband after a troubling call, however, a 15 year veteran can offer advice and reassurance. If the spouses feel heard, understood and supported they will have a greater sense of comfort and security.

Sitting at home alone, worrying – feeling you are all alone and how tough things are is positive energy wasted – listening to others and sharing your experiences can be very empowering.

Stress at home = increased stress on the job (or at the academy, or during FTO)=increased stress at home – vicious cycle. If we as spouses can be a support and sounding board to help reduce spouses level of stress = decreased stress at home = decreased stress at work.

There is no telling what changes this life will bring – at times we may need other to tell us keep going, you can make it, I've been there, it gets better. We share similar problems, situations and challenges – who better to help deal with fears and anxiety related to the job.

If primarily women attend, having female officers attend meetings (those married to officers) can give us great insight into the realities of the job – those “details” our husbands feel they must protect us from. Situations our spouses may face but they are not willing to share with us or are not able to talk about. Again, many times it is the imagination that gets the best of us – knowledge is power!

Help to develop coping skills – we are a critical part of law enforcement – we are there to stand beside our officer through the good, the bad, the scary etc – we are the ones who are there when our officers come home and need someone the most – the “silent partners” behind the badge.

We need to be congratulated and celebrated for being the significant other. Don't forget, your officers success is due in large part to the fact that “Behind every good cop is an even better Spouse!!” – mission statement??