

## The Importance of Suicide Prevention Training for Public Safety Personnel

First responders play a major role in suicide prevention. They often have first contact with people who have experienced traumatic events or personal crises, so they are important “gatekeepers” for anyone at risk of suicide or self-harm.

There is research that indicates that first responders themselves are at elevated risk for suicide. The highest risk demographic for suicide remains men between the ages of 35-64, a demographic highly represented within public safety. Add to this the intense stress associated with the demanding work of public safety, whether it be fighting fires, rescuing people, or responding to suicidal crisis, and it is not difficult to see why public safety personnel could face psychological or emotional challenges.

For these reasons, Riverside Trauma Center considers it a priority to provide public safety officers with information about suicide risk factors and warning signs.

## About Riverside Trauma Center

Riverside Trauma Center, a service of Riverside Community Care, helps people in Massachusetts recover from the overwhelming stress caused by traumatic events, including natural disasters, serious accidents, and suicides by providing community outreach, consultation, and counseling. It also educates communities and organizations about suicide prevention, psychological trauma, and the emotional needs of returning veterans.

### Contact Us

For information about trainings for public safety personnel, contact Sarah Gaer at [sgaer@riversidecc.org](mailto:sgaer@riversidecc.org). For help after a traumatic event, call 888-851-2451, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and ask to speak to a Trauma Center Manager. For more information or to make an appointment, please call 781-433-0672, ext. 5738.

Riverside Trauma Center services are primarily funded through the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, donations, and grants. All contributions are welcome and appreciated. Some services may require a fee.

**Riverside Trauma Center**

A SERVICE OF RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY CARE

[www.riversidetraumacenter.org](http://www.riversidetraumacenter.org)

# Suicide Prevention Training for Public Safety Personnel



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## Riverside Trauma Center's Training for Public Safety Personnel

In the spring of 2013, Riverside Trauma Center began presenting Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR), a suicide prevention training for gatekeepers – those who are strategically positioned to recognize and refer someone at risk of suicide (e.g., parents, teachers, police officers) – to firefighters in Massachusetts. QPR teaches how to recognize the warning signs, clues, and suicidal communications of people in trouble so they can act vigorously to prevent a possible tragedy.

This program has since been modified to directly address the needs of all public safety personnel, including those who work in county correctional facilities, police stations, and EMS systems. Based on feedback received through one-to-one interviews and focus groups, this program now specifically addresses suicide among public safety personnel; focuses on additional issues they may face, such as depression, trauma, and substance abuse; and promotes resilience.

### Early Program Feedback

Feedback about the program has been very positive. Firefighters' feedback included the following:

*“Very interesting class. Instructor was very knowledgeable.”*

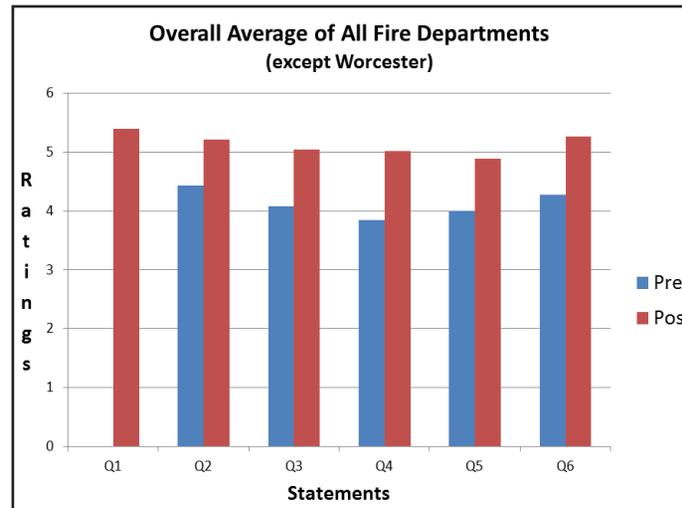
*“Great information session.”*

*“Great program, I feel more confident and now I will know what to look for.”*

*“More training required.”*

## Early Program Results

We surveyed the firefighters both before and after the class to gauge their perceptions about suicide prevention trainings, knowledge about suicide and risk, and confidence about questioning, persuading, and referring individuals. They rated six statements on a scale from one to six; six being the most positive rating. We are excited to report a significant shift in attitude and confidence according to these surveys.



They rated the following statements:

- 1: I have increased my knowledge of suicide prevention. (only asked post-training)
- 2: I believe that trainings such as this help to prevent suicide.
- 3: I feel competent to recognize the warning signs of suicide.
- 4: I feel confident that I can question a person about suicidal thoughts.
- 5: I feel confident that I can persuade someone to get help.
- 6: I feel confident that I can refer someone for help.

## Resources

Following are some helpful resources for public safety personnel:

- *Everyone Goes Home*® at [www.everyonegoeshome.com](http://www.everyonegoeshome.com)
- *CopsAlive* at [www.copsalive.com](http://www.copsalive.com)
- *Preventing Suicide: A Resource for Police, Firefighters and Other First Line Responders* at [www.sprc.org](http://www.sprc.org) in the library

## Contact Us

This proven training program is available to all public safety personnel in Massachusetts. The three-hour program is provided free of charge thanks to funding by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's Suicide Prevention Program. Three OEMS credit hours have been approved statewide. For further information or if you are interested in these trainings for your department, please contact Sarah Gaer at [sgaer@riversidecc.org](mailto:sgaer@riversidecc.org).

*“Sarah provided excellent training on a subject which all fire departments should take a long hard look at. It is time to brush aside the bravado and realize our firefighters are extremely susceptible to mental health issues due to the incidents they are exposed to.”*

-Joseph A. Conant, Commissioner  
Springfield Fire Department