

Taking Situational Awareness “Off-Scene”

Recognizing and Responding to a Peer’s Need for Support

As a public safety professional, you know how important it is to maintain situational awareness. Whether en route to a call or working an emergency scene, you are constantly assessing your environment for potentially hazardous situations and proactively mitigating threats.

Situational awareness can also be maintained “off-scene” – between calls and even off duty – as an important way to recognize potential threats to the mental health and well-being of your peers. By knowing what to look for, you can identify warning signs and take action *before* a crisis develops.

Look and Listen

You are already in the habit of regularly assessing your work environment by pausing to look around, listen and take note of any potential dangers. Follow the same steps to check on peers and help identify when support may be needed.



- Withdrawing or self-isolating
- Changes in mood; increased sadness
- Impulsive, reckless behavior
- Difficulty concentrating or performing tasks



- Expressing regular trouble with sleep or recurring nightmares
- Talking about relationship or family problems
- Making comments about suicide or self-harm

Speak Up

Situational awareness isn’t just about identifying potential problems – it’s also about taking action to ensure safety and improve outcomes. When you notice a safety concern on an emergency scene, you bring it to the attention of your partner or crew members, and work together to mitigate the threat.

Use this approach if you’re concerned about a peer. Don’t wait for them to ask for help. Even if it feels somewhat uncomfortable, start a conversation. Simply asking how they’re doing lets them know you care – and they don’t have to struggle alone.

- If your peer doesn’t want to talk about it, it’s best not to try to force a conversation. Just let them know that you care and you’re willing to listen.
- If your peer wants to talk, give them your full attention, show compassion, and avoid judging their behavior or responses. Don’t try to “solve” the problem for them, but offer positive suggestions and share resources. Encourage them to seek additional support.
- If you think a peer may be considering suicide, it’s important to ask the question directly. This can seem like a hard thing to do, but it consists of one simple question: “Are you thinking about killing yourself?” If they say “yes,” do not leave them alone. Stay with them to make sure they’re safe, and call or text a crisis line for immediate support.

When you ask about suicide directly, it gives the person an opportunity to answer honestly and ask for help if they need it.



988 Suicide and Crisis Line:
Call or text “9-8-8”

Crisis Text Line:
Text “10-18” to 741741

For more information about supporting a peer, including helpful conversation starters and resources, scan the QR code or go to nami.org/FrontlinePublicSafety.

