

## Public Safety Wellness Unit (PSWU) Frequently Asked Questions

- **What does the PSWU do?**

The PSWU became an official unit on Oct. 1, 2021, under the Strategic Services division within the [City Manager's Office](#). The PSWU was established with the sole purpose of providing mental health services to the City of Irving's first responders.

- **Who has access to services offered by the PSWU?**

The PSWU provides services to Irving's first responders, their immediate families and retirees.

- **Who is considered a first responder?**

An emergency service provider as defined in [Section 784.001 of the Texas Health and Safety Code](#), [Government Code 607.001](#), and [Texas Government Code 421.095](#) which includes peace officers, firefighters, dispatchers and detention officers in the City of Irving.

- **I am not defined as a first responder but am seeking assistance. Where might I go for resources?**

Nonfirst responders can receive services such as Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM), debriefings, defusings, individual crisis interventions, crisis management briefings through peer support after a work-related or personal critical incident. Additionally, the City of Irving offers access to a variety of Employee Assistance Programs. Please contact [Human Resources](#) for more information.

- **What services does the PSWU provide?**

The PSWU offers short-term mental health services such as crisis counseling, grief counseling, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), biofeedback/neurofeedback, Yoga for First Responders (YFFR), case management, wellness check-ins, and family and retiree services. Additionally, the PSWU oversees and manages peer support services (critical incident stress management interventions) for Fire and Police. The PSWU clinicians provide a variety of trainings to foster resiliency, hope and optimism; minimize stigma; while also promoting the principles of psychological first aid which are safety, efficacy, calmness and connectedness.

- **Why are services geared towards first responders?**

Although mental health treatments are available, first responders often do not access them, due to strong barriers such as lack of culturally competent clinicians, stigma and accessibility- or time-based burdens. Additionally, studies show that first responders are at higher risk to die by suicide than nonfirst responders (i.e., general population).

*"It is estimated that 30 percent of first responders develop behavioral health conditions including, but not limited to, depression and [PTSD], as compared with 20% in the general population. In a study about suicidality, firefighters were reported to have higher attempt and ideation rates than the general population. In law enforcement, the estimates suggest between 125 and 300 police officers commit suicide every year."*

(<https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/first-responders-and-mental-health-when-heroes-need-rescuing>)

The PSWU is the City of Irving's response to address the crucial need for our first responders to receive timely and specialized mental health services in an environment that promotes safety to ensure longevity and quality of life.

- **What is Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)?**

EMDR therapy facilitates the accessing and processing of traumatic memories and other adverse life experiences to bring these to an adaptive resolution. When an individual undergoes EMDR, memories of a traumatic event are accessed in a specific way. It combines eye movements (there are other forms of bilateral stimulation such as left and right tapping) and guided instructions to help the person reprocess what they remember from the negative experience. In the reprocessing phase, the brain can "repair" the mental injury from that memory. The person will be able to remember the event and no longer feel like they are reliving it (e.g., PTSD), hence the related feelings become much more manageable.

EMDR therapy has been extensively researched and practiced with high rates of success. It has been endorsed by the American Psychiatric Association (APA); the US Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense; The World Health Organization; and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the Dept. of HHS. EMDR is a psychotherapy treatment that was originally designed to alleviate the distress associated with traumatic memories (i.e., PTSD, depression, anxiety). <https://www.emdr.com/what-is-emdr/>

- **What is Yoga for First Responders (YFFR)?**

Yoga for First Responders is an innovative program focused on improving not just mental health, but also physical health for first responders, as well as enhancing optimal levels of job performance from decision making to tactical skills. This program provides first responders traditional yoga training that is culturally informed and job specific for the purposes of effectively processing stress, building resilience, and enhancing performance.

- **What is biofeedback/neurofeedback?**

Biofeedback is a technique used to learn to control some bodily functions, such as heart rate and respiration. During biofeedback, the individual is connected to electrical sensors that help them receive information about their body. Neurofeedback is a training method that helps the brain to self-regulate. Additionally, neurofeedback addresses the trauma resiliency directly at its source, the brain.