

PROTECT & SUPPORT PA

A GUIDE FOR CORRECTIONS FAMILIES



THE WORK DOESN'T END WHEN THE SHIFT DOES.

AND NEITHER DOES ITS IMPACT.

THIS GUIDE IS FOR WHAT COMES NEXT.



Pennsylvania
Department of Corrections

WHY THIS GUIDE EXISTS

Starting a career in corrections is a big step for both staff and their families.

Here in Pennsylvania, the Department of Corrections is one of the largest workforces in the Commonwealth, with staff serving in correctional institutions, community corrections centers and in communities across the state. This work plays a critical role in protecting public safety, supporting rehabilitation and strengthening the communities we live in, including many rural areas where corrections professionals are a vital part of the local workforce.

Corrections work is meaningful, but it comes with unique demands. For new staff and their families, that transition can take some getting used to. You may notice shifts in routines, communication, or how stress shows up at home. That's a common experience in corrections families.

This guide is here to help you understand that transition and support each other along the way.

WHY IT'S HARD TO "LEAVE WORK AT WORK"

CORRECTIONS WORK TRAINS THE BODY TO STAY ALERT.
SOMETIMES THAT RESPONSE FOLLOWS STAFF HOME.

Corrections professionals are trained to stay aware, make quick decisions, and respond to unpredictable situations. That constant vigilance helps keep them safe at work — but it can also make it difficult for the body to fully relax after shift.

For families, this may show up in ways that feel confusing at first. Understanding these stress responses can help you better support your loved one.

WHAT YOU MAY NOTICE

- Trouble sleeping & relaxing
- Irritability & hypervigilance
- Needing quiet time after work
- Not wanting to discuss work details
- Being highly alert in public places

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Give them time to decompress
- Prioritize sleep & healthy routines
- Communicate & spend time together
- Don't take silence personally
- Be flexible with schedule changes/missed events

WHEN IT MAY BE TIME TO REACH OUT FOR HELP

Most stress reactions improve with rest, healthy routines and support from loved ones. But if these behaviors become frequent, intense or begin affecting safety, relationships or daily life, it may be time to seek additional support. Asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness. Here are some warning signs to watch out for:

- Ongoing anger that seems out of control
- Heavy alcohol or substance abuse
- Severe sleep problems that don't improve
- Withdrawing from friends & family
- Persistent depression or anxiety
- Thoughts of self-harm or suicide

Understanding the Stress Response

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE BRAIN?

Corrections professionals are trained to stay alert, assess risk and respond quickly in unpredictable environments. Over time, the brain can become wired to stay on high alert, even after the shift ends.

That response helps keep them safe at work, but it can make it harder to fully relax at home.

This is often a trained survival response, not personal choice or a reflection of your relationship.



HIGH ALERT MODE

- Fast reactions
- Constant awareness
- Protective instincts

THE GOOD NEWS: THE BODY CAN RESET!

With healthy routines, time and support, the nervous system can learn when it's safe to relax again.

BREATHING

A calm drive home, quiet time after work or simple breathing exercise can help signal that the shift is over.

- Box breathing (4-4-4-4)
- Calm app (Pg. 7)

MOVEMENT

Walking, stretching or quick movement breaks can help release built-up stress.

- Pickleball or tennis
- Going to the gym together
- Taking a walk or hike
- Yard work or home projects

CONNECTION

Time with family, trusted friends and healthy support systems can reduce isolation.

- Date nights with spouse
- Volunteering
- Family game nights
- Shared rituals

SLEEP

Sleep helps lower stress hormones, process memories and allows the body to recover

- Shared wind-down routine
- Avoid heavy conversations before bed

REMEMBER: YOU ARE A SUPPORT SYSTEM, NOT THEIR THERAPIST. ENCOURAGEMENT, PATIENCE AND OPEN COMMUNICATION CAN MAKE A MEANINGFUL DIFFERENCE.

The 8 Dimensions of Wellness

Wellness isn't one-size-fits-all. When one area of life feels out of balance, it often affects others. That's why the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections uses SAMHSA's 8 Dimensions of Wellness framework to recognize that well-being includes many connected parts of life—at work, at home, and everywhere in between. Understanding these dimensions can help families provide support when it matters most.



WELLNESS IS CONNECTED.

When one area feels off balance, others may be affected too. Strong support systems at home can make a meaningful difference.

FINDING THE RIGHT SUPPORT

Work in corrections can be stressful, and no one is expected to manage it alone. Across the Department of Corrections, there are resources designed to support staff health, stability and overall wellbeing.

Some supports are formal programs. Families are an important part of that support system, and knowing what resources exist can help you better understand how staff are supported when challenges arise. The following are key department-wide resources:

RESOURCE	WHAT IT IS	HOW IT HELPS	HOW TO ACCESS
CISM (Critical Incident Stress Management)	A trained response team activated after serious events (e.g., staff death, assault, facility crisis, traumatic incidents).	Provides immediate emotional support, debriefings, crisis counseling, resource guidance, and follow-ups.	Activated through facility or regional leadership following a critical incident.
MENTORING	Department-wide program pairing employees with experienced mentors or peer mentees.	Supports career growth and job satisfaction through guidance, encouragement and connection.	Employees can apply to become a mentor or request a mentor through their local mentoring committee.
STAFF WELLNESS	A network of designated Wellness Leaders located at every institution, BCC facility, and parole region.	Shares wellness resources, supports staff engagement, helps coordinate wellness events, and promotes a positive workplace culture.	Contact local institution, BCC, or parole office leadership to connect with your site's Wellness Leader.

WHAT YOU'LL FIND NEXT

- **State Employee Assistance Program (SEAP)**
 - Legal & worklife services
 - Caregiver support
 - Financial guidance
 - Mental health + substance abuse treatment
- **Mental health + counseling resources**
- **Free wellness and prevention apps**
- **New employee benefits summary**
- **Enrollment deadlines**

A NOTE ON USING THESE RESOURCES

Many staff wait until things feel overwhelming before reaching out. These programs are most effective when used early, even for everyday stress, not just major challenges. Support is part of the job structure, not an exception to it.

WHAT'S SEAP?

The State Employee Assistance Program (SEAP) is a free, confidential service available to all Commonwealth employees and their family members. It's here to support you through a number of life's challenges, including stress, mental health struggles, substance abuse, financial worries, family/relationship issues, legal questions, or conflict resolution. SEAP can help connect you with the right resources so you have the support you need.

WHO'S ELIGIBLE?

All active employees and their families are eligible for SEAP. Family members include: spouse or partner, children (regardless of age or residence), other individuals who reside in the employee's home (regardless of relation), and other family members (regardless of residence, including but not limited to: parents, siblings, aunts/uncles & grandparents).

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LEGAL SERVICES

- Unlimited, no-cost phone consultations with a licensed attorney about:
 - Landlord/tenant disputes
 - Wills & powers of attorney
 - Criminal cases & more
- Free 30-minute in-person consultation



WORKLIFE SERVICES

- Access a personal concierge
- Find new parent resources and child care
- Locate household services (cleaning, pest control, pet sitting, etc.)
- Educational and career support
- Find local support groups and resources



CAREGIVER SUPPORT

- 6 free hours of help caring for a loved one
- Help coordinating transportation
- Assistance setting up meal delivery
- Recommendations for home modifications
- Locate independent living or in-home care



FINANCIAL SERVICES

- Speak to a financial coach on the phone
- Get guidance on saving, budgeting, planning and more
- Access to financial tools, tips & articles through Brightplan



MENTAL HEALTH

- Access therapy anytime with Talkspace
- Get personalized care recommendations
- Find in-person mental health care near you
- Psychiatric Urgent Care available within 48 hrs



SUBSTANCE USE

- Talk to a trained recovery specialist
- Help finding an in-network provider
- Take an online assessment
- Find support resources nearby

HOW TO ACCESS SEAP



1-800-692-7459
TTY 711



liveandworkwell.com
Access Code: **Pennsylvania**

Need to Talk?

Sometimes the best support is simply having someone to talk to. Through SEAP, employees and eligible family members have access to free, confidential counseling services for life's everyday challenges—whether that's stress, relationships, grief, financial concerns or major life changes. Help is available when you need it.

988 | SUICIDE & CRISIS
LIFELINE

WWW.988LIFELINE.ORG
CALL OR TEXT 988

Call or text 988 to speak with a confidential, compassionate crisis counselor. Chat online at chat.988lifeline.org



Optum

WWW.LIVEANDWORKWELL.COM
ACCESS CODE: Pennsylvania

Get connected any time, day or night, by calling 1-800-692-7459 and ask for a SEAP Specialist. You can get up to six free counseling sessions per issue, per year – online or in person.



talkspace

TALKSPACE.COM/CONNECT

To get started, call SEAP at 1-800-692-7459, TTY 711, to obtain an authorization code prior to registering (first visit only), choose a provider, and message anywhere, anytime.



ADDITIONAL PSYCHOTHERAPY BENEFITS FOR PSCOA MEMBERS

PSCOA union members have access to up to six employer-paid psychotherapy visits each contract year. Additional counseling support may also be available to family members in certain circumstances. See Article 33, Section 26 of the PSCOA Collective Bargaining Agreement for more details.



Free Wellness Apps

Your benefits extend beyond traditional counseling services. Through SEAP, employees and their family members have access to free wellness apps that can support stress management, sleep, mindfulness and emotional well-being right from your phone.

Optum® Self-learning by Uptime is a micro-learning app that extracts life lessons from some of the most popular books, courses, documentaries, and podcasts and packs them into 5-minute knowledge hacks you can consume on the go.

Access Uptime through your State Employee Assistance Program (SEAP) . Available 24/7 liveandworkwell.com

Access Code: Pennsylvania



*uptime

From top Books, Podcasts, Courses, and Documentaries



Calm can help you tackle stress, get a good night's sleep and feel more present in your life. It's one of the most popular apps worldwide — and it's available at no cost to you as part of your benefits.

Ready to get started?

To register + download the app, scan the QR code for the Calm registration page and enter your company access code Pennsylvania



Already have the Calm app?

1. Open the app
2. Go to: Profile > Settings > Link Organization Subscription
3. Enter organization code
4. "Optum EWS"
5. In the "group code" field, enter your company access code Pennsylvania

Calm





New Employee Benefits

For Permanent Full-Time and Part-Time Employees (50%+)



Health Benefits

- Administered by PEBTF. **Action required to enroll!**
- Biweekly payroll deduction based on a percentage of gross pay.
- Includes Rx, dental, vision & hearing aid coverage.
- ID cards sent by providers; cards not issued for hearing aid coverage.
- Easy enrollment via Employee Self-Service (ESS).

Retirement

- Watch for a welcome packet about 2 weeks after hire date. Includes plan comparison + beneficiary form.
- Auto-enrolled in a default retirement plan.
- One-time, 45-day window to choose a different plan.
- Questions: State Employees Retirement System (SERS). Call 800-633-5461 or visit www.SERS.pa.gov
- Additional, voluntary savings plan: Deferred Compensation Plan via Empower Retirement: Call 866-737-7457

Flexible Spending Account (FSA)

- Pre-tax payroll deduction for eligible healthcare expenses.
- Dependent Care Account Program (DCAP) for dependent care expenses. Administered by Businessolver: Call 833-628-0580 for more information.

State Employee Assistance Program (SEAP)

- Free, confidential help for you & family (behavioral, financial, legal).
- Available from day one. Call 800-692-7459 (24/7) or visit www.liveandworkwell.com

Commuter Benefits Program

- Monthly pre-tax payroll deduction to use on eligible Transit and Parking expenses for work-related purposes.
- The Jawnt Pass debit card makes it easy to pay or load funds onto your mobile wallet.
- Administered by Jawnt. For more information call 888-513-5935 or visit www.jawntpass.com/enrollment-guide/copa

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Insurance

- Employer-paid policy after 90 days – designate beneficiaries online at [metlife.com/mybenefits](https://www.metlife.com/mybenefits)
 - Choose “Commonwealth of Pennsylvania” as your Employer and register using your SSN and DOB.
- Optional group-rate insurance:
 - Supplementary Life Insurance. Visit www.prudential.com/pennsylvania or call 800-893-7316
 - Short-/Long-Term Disability. Visit www.oa.pa.gov/disabilityinsurance or call 833-628-0580
 - Auto/Home Insurance, Identity Theft Protection, Pet Insurance, Critical Illness Insurance. Visit www.PAEmployeeSavings.com or call 855-669-6600

Additional Savings & Discounts

- Buy savings bonds via www.TreasuryDirect.gov
- Discount Program via www.PAEmployeeSavings.com
- Programs for:
 - Student loan aid & forgiveness
 - Tuition discounts & scholarships
 - Tax-advantaged college savings plans
 - Learn more at employment.pa.gov, “Our Benefits”



Have Questions?

Contact the HR Service Center



866-377-2672



RA-HRSCemployeeSvcs@pa.gov



[EmployeeResourceCenter.oa.pa.gov](https://www.EmployeeResourceCenter.oa.pa.gov)

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Choose Well. Live Well.

Your benefits. Your Choice.



Benefit	When to Enroll	Important Reminder
Health Benefits – Medical, Prescription, Dental, and Vision	Enroll at anytime. When you're ready, get the information you need in the Health Plan Enrollment article on the ERC.	You must take action to enroll.
Retirement –	You must make a selection within 45 days of receiving your State Employees Retirement (SERS) package.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch the mail for your SERS packet. • Any decision you make on your retirement plan cannot be changed later. • Information is available at sers.pa.gov. • If you do not receive a packet, call SERS at 800-633-4561
Voluntary Benefits – 60 Day Enrollment	You have 60 days from your hire date to enroll. If you do not take action, you will need to wait until open enrollment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthcare FSA • Dependent Care Account • Critical Illness Insurance • Disability Insurance • Term Life Insurance
Voluntary Benefits – Enroll anytime	Enroll at any time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commuter Benefits • Home/Auto Insurance ID • Theft Protection • Pet Insurance