

What to Expect:

A Guide to the IAFF Center of Excellence for Spouses and Family



If your spouse or loved one is seeking treatment at the IAFF Center of Excellence (COE) for Behavioral Health Treatment and Recovery, you may experience a mixture of emotions, concerns and questions. Whether your loved one has already been admitted to the Center or is considering making the journey, one of the best things you can do for yourself and your loved one is to learn what to expect during the treatment process.

Why does my family member need residential treatment at the IAFF Center of Excellence?

Individuals typically seek residential treatment when symptom stabilization has not been achieved at a lower level of outpatient behavioral healthcare. In some cases, however, residential treatment may be clinically indicated when there is no prior treatment history. When an individual's work, family, home or social life is significantly impaired by symptoms or behavior, residential treatment may be a good choice.

Will the IAFF Center of Excellence cure my family member?

No. There is no quick fix or cure for mental health disorders or addiction. Recovery is an individual, lifelong process that is influenced by a complex mix of biological, social, psychological and environmental factors. When your loved one is discharged from the COE, this means he or she has met the treatment goals for that level of care and is no longer acutely symptomatic. Once home, your loved one will benefit from continued outpatient treatment, psychotherapy, medical oversight, a modified schedule and support from friends, family and employers.

What makes the IAFF Center of Excellence unique?

The IAFF Center of Excellence for Behavioral Health Treatment and Recovery is a one-of-a-kind treatment facility for members of the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) who are struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance abuse or other behavioral health problems. The facility is designed by IAFF members for IAFF members, with the mission to address the unique medical, psychological and social needs of fire fighters facing behavioral health crises.

With accommodations in one of four station houses, patients share an instant bond with one another, forged on the shared sacrifice and understanding of life in the fire service. Staff members are trained to understand the cumulative impact of occupational trauma, as well as the clinical implications of fire service culture and lifestyle. Treatment plans are designed to restore fire service personnel to their families, career and community.

How long will my family member be at the IAFF Center of Excellence?

It's recommended that most patients stay at the IAFF Center of Excellence for six weeks, but clinical and medical recommendations vary widely based on individual clinical



needs, insurance coverage and other individual factors. After the patient is admitted and assessed, an individual treatment plan is developed. The date of discharge is based on progress made towards treatment goals and stabilization of symptoms, rather than the passing of a certain period of time. Family members should not make plans at home that rely on the patient to discharge on a specific date.

What will happen when my family member arrives at the IAFF Center of Excellence?

If the patient is arriving via airline or train, he/she will be met at the terminal or station by the Center of Excellence driver in an IAFF-marked van. If arriving by car, he/she will be directed to check in at the Administrative Building. Upon arrival at the treatment facility, each patient will complete a nursing assessment, sign treatment consent forms, receive a body search and contraband check. Your loved one will then be greeted by staff and peers, who will ensure that he/she feels welcome and acclimated. Within three days of admission, your family member will receive a thorough history and physical, psychiatric evaluation, biopsychosocial assessment and a group orientation to the treatment program. Patients can begin attending group therapy and treatment programming as soon as they are medically cleared.

Why can't I communicate with my family member for the first 72 hours of admission?

When your family member enters treatment, it is time to focus on the recovery ahead first and foremost. During the first 72 hours after admission, communication with friends and family is restricted, which is a standard practice in residential psychiatric and rehabilitation facilities. The purpose of this period is to protect your loved one from the stressors of the outside world, such as relationships, work, bills, etc. These distractions can interfere with the individual's initial clinical assessment and adjustment to the treatment milieu. Your loved one will be quickly embraced by his/her peers and a caring staff. If your family member has signed a release of information (ROI) for you, you are always welcome to call the staff for updates as needed.

Continued on next page

April 2023

How often will my family member be in treatment groups?

The treatment day will vary based on your family member's level of care.

- **Detox/Residential** – Upon admission, most patients are in day-long treatment, seven days per week. At these levels of care, patients have two individual therapy appointments per week. If the patient is admitted to detox, he/she will meet with the medical team daily, while residential patients meet with the medical team two times per week.
- **Partial Hospitalization Programming (PHP)** – As symptoms stabilize, the patient will transfer to PHP. In this level of care, clients have weekly individual therapy and medical appointments and attend day-long programming Monday-Saturday.
- **Intensive Outpatient Programming (IOP)** – As progress is made in meeting goals and patients begin to transition into preparing for reintegration to home life and discharge, they are transferred to IOP. At this level of care, clients have weekly therapy appointments, group programming and medical follow up as needed.
- **Outpatient (OP)** – Once all treatment goals have been met and patients have demonstrated knowledge, insight and skills, they can be transferred to outpatient services and would typically be discharged. Clients who live within one hour of campus may continue to attend programming one to three times per week while living at home to support their reintegration into their community and home life. Local patients who receive outpatient services are expected to have medical providers in their own community and should expect that all medication and medical oversight be provided by those medical professionals.

How often can I speak to my family member?

Frequency of contact depends on your loved one and the goals identified in his/her treatment plan. After the initial 72-hour period after admission, patients are permitted to use landlines freely to make calls, unless the patient's clinical team feels such contact would deter treatment progress. Patients also have access to Skype in the station houses. Upon admission, a behavioral health technician will assist your loved one in retrieving important numbers from his/her cell phone, after which the cell phone will then be stored and locked by staff. Patients are permitted to sign out and use their cell phones five times a week between 4:15 and 5:15 p.m. (ET). You can call (240) 681-6000 if you wish to leave a message for your loved one, which staff will ensure is received by the patient.

Can I email my loved one?

Email access, as well as access to the Internet, is limited on the Center of Excellence campus. If a client has access to email on his/her cell phone, he/she can access email during the designated cell phone times. If email or the Internet needs to be accessed for specific purposes or to complete time-sensitive tasks, patients can coordinate getting access to email or the Internet with their primary therapist or the case manager.

What should I tell friends or family about why my family member is away?

Deciding to leave home for treatment is a big step and very personal decision for your loved one. Sharing that decision with others is both a personal and family decision. Before your loved one leaves for treatment, you are encouraged to discuss this decision together. Your loved one may want to defer disclosing his/her experience with others until later in the recovery process.

What should I tell the kids about why their parent is away?

It depends on their age, maturity and developmental level. While it may seem better to shield your children from the truth, healthcare experts generally agree that giving false information to your children is a misguided approach and may backfire. For more support in talking to your kids, see page two of the IAFF Guide *How to Tell Your Kids You Are Going to Rehab*.



Will my family member's fire department or local union know they are receiving treatment at the IAFF Center of Excellence?

Treatment at the Center of Excellence is completely confidential and governed by strict federal privacy laws (HIPAA). It is the patient's choice to disclose to his/her department or union that he/she is receiving treatment and where. Center of Excellence staff cannot acknowledge a patient's presence in treatment without the patient's expressed written consent in the form of a signed release of information (ROI). This means that even if a spouse, union leader or department personnel assisted in the initial referral of the patient to the facility, once the patient is admitted, the Center of Excellence cannot discuss his/her care unless the patient has signed an ROI for the specific individual. This also applies to cases in which a fire department physician requests a discharge summary as a condition of returning to employment. Such information cannot be released without the expressed written consent of the patient.

What will my family member be doing when they are not in therapy sessions?

While a strong psychotherapeutic program is the foundation of treatment, the Center of Excellence is designed to provide purposeful, goal-directed activity outside of the therapy room. Other activities include yoga, 12-step meetings, fitness training in a fully equipped gym, recreation, pastoral care, equine therapy (offsite) and biweekly meetings with IAFF union leadership. Patients can use the swimming pool, walking trails, volleyball and basketball courts, weather permitting. Patients often report some of the best therapy occurs through informal evening conversation with fellow fire fighters in their station houses.

Can my family member leave the facility to do other activities or visit with family?

Patients in PHP and IOP levels of care have a weekly opportunity to participate in community outings and offsite activities, unless it is the decision of the patient's clinical team that offsite activity would deter a patient's treatment or safety. Patients should make requests to their primary therapist for an offsite pass 48 hours in advance. Offsite outings may include shopping, recreational activities, sightseeing and religious services. Patients are subject to search upon reentry to the treatment facility.

Who is my primary point of contact for my family member's care?

Within 48 hours of admission, your family member will be assigned to a primary therapist. While your loved one will be cared for by an interdisciplinary clinical team, the primary therapist will also see your loved one for individual therapy and monitor overall treatment progress. While you may choose to contact your family member's primary therapist, the therapist can only contact you if your loved one gives written consent for him/her to speak with you by signing a release of information (ROI).

Will I have an opportunity to participate in family therapy with my loved one?

All patients meet with our family therapist and their individual therapist to explore how their support system back home can be integrated into their recovery. During these outreach sessions, the patient and the family therapist call the spouse, family member or support person to provide an update on the patient's treatment, explore concerns and discuss the future.

I have concerns about my family member's care, and I am having a hard time connecting with his/her individual or family therapist at the IAFF Center of Excellence. Who else can I contact at the facility?

Please remember that without release of information (ROI), staff cannot acknowledge or discuss your loved one's care with you. The Center of Excellence Clinical Director (Martha Rackets, LMFT) can be reached at (240) 681-6000, ext. 1234. The Center of Excellence Medical Director/Psychiatrist (Abby Morris, MD) can be reached at (240) 681-6000, ext. 1211.

Can I visit my loved one while he/she is in treatment at the IAFF Center of Excellence?

Family visitation is welcomed and can be coordinated with the primary therapist or the family therapist for family members aged 16 and older only. The clinical team will work with the client and family member to determine at what point such a visit will be beneficial for the patient and what goals will be addressed during the visit. Details regarding scheduling should be coordinated with the clinical team.



My family member wants to end treatment at the IAFF Center of Excellence against recommendations from the treatment team. Can you make him/her stay?

The Center of Excellence is a voluntary treatment facility, which means unless a patient displays a clear and imminent threat to the physical safety of self or others, he/she cannot be forced to stay against his/her will. If a client displays an imminent threat to the safety of self or others, he/she will be assessed by the medical team and a determination will be made if he/she needs to be transferred to a higher level of care, such as a hospital. When a patient expresses a desire to leave treatment prematurely, our staff will make every effort to help him/her understand the importance of staying in treatment. If there is a release of information (ROI) for a loved one, the staff will likely call and ask for assistance in supporting the patient to stay in treatment or you will be informed if the patient decides not to stay in treatment.

How can I support my family member once he/she returns home?

One of the best things you can do is to understand your loved one's discharge treatment plan and recovery needs, before he/she leaves the Center of Excellence. Center of Excellence therapists and case managers can help you understand the patient's aftercare plan and make suggestions regarding daily activity and socialization. Your loved one should not be expected to leave the Center of Excellence and resume daily, family and occupational functioning as usual. He/she will need additional time to attend aftercare appointments, individual therapy, intensive outpatient treatment or recovery meetings. Aftercare compliance is critical to continued recovery. Encourage an open and ongoing dialogue with your loved one about what he/she needs from you to stay on track. It can also be helpful to find a local support group for yourself.

My family member's struggles have impacted the whole family, including me. Where can I go for resources or support for myself?

Being the spouse or loved one of a fire fighter is never easy. Furthermore, if your partner has been in crisis, you may be feeling overwhelmed, isolated or anxious. Mental illness and addiction can impact everyone in the family. For additional information, support and resources, see the Center of Excellence *Family Resource Guide*.

To make a referral, call our 24/7 admissions center at 1-855-900-8437.

Learn more at www.IAFFRecoveryCenter.com

To learn more about IAFF behavioral health resources visit www.iaff.org/behavioral-health