

It's not normal, to see the things police officers see, hear, smell, touch and experience.

It's not normal, to carry the burdens police officers do, emotionally, physically, and mentally.

It's not normal, to see dead bodies, mangled bodies, decomposed bodies, dead kids, abused kids, homeless people suffering, and people victimized, taken advantage of, raped or killed.

It's not normal, to respond to scenes of horrific suicides, fatal car accidents, gang violence, domestic violence, random violence, dead animals, and abused animals.

It's not normal, to tell a family member their loved one has died and won't be coming home during a death notification call for service.

It's not normal, to respond to shooting calls where you watch someone take their last breath, or stabbing calls that make you cringe when you their flesh cut wide open and blood everywhere.

It's not normal, to stand next to a dead body for hours securing a crime scene, waiting for the coroner to arrive, so you can go eat dinner, as if nothing happened, as if "it's just another call".

It's not normal, that seeing such horrific things becomes your "normal" and you tell yourself it doesn't bother you. It's not normal, to be numb to things that would likely devastate the rest of society.

It's not normal, to experience extreme highs and lows in one day, one minute you're typing a report and the next you're responding to the local business being held up at gunpoint with shots fired. It happens that fast, it is fun in some ways, but it's not normal.

It's not normal, to work rotating shifts, rotating days off, work on holidays, birthdays, anniversaries and maintain a semblance of a "normal" life. It's not normal, to miss these moments in life and expect it not to take a toll on a marriage or the relationship with your children.

It's not normal, to slowly lose friends that aren't police officers too. It's not normal to say, "they just don't understand me anymore" or "they don't know what it is like to be a police officer". It's not normal,

for lifelong friends to wonder why you've changed, become more cynical or even angry and distance themselves from you.

It's not normal, to go to work and not know what time you will get to go home, or if you'll even make it home at all.

It's not normal, to wake up at night in a cold sweat because you dreamed you got shot multiple times by a "bad guy" and you were powerless to stop it. It's not normal, to lie in bed unable to sleep, because all the things you saw that day play in your head like a bad movie you can't turn off.

It's not normal, that nearly every call you answer, someone is counting on YOU to help them. They may be at their lowest point, maybe they are experiencing a crisis, a loss, and you have to be there for them, no matter what is going on in your personal life.

It's not normal, that you as a human being could be personally dealing with a crisis, a divorce, a dying family member, alcohol addiction, or thoughts of suicide, and you're expected to show up and solve other people's problems with no regard for your own.

It's not normal, to go to work every day in hopes of making a positive change or influence in someone's life only to be spit at, kicked, punched, stabbed, or shot. It's not normal, to feel you can't "win", no matter what you do, or how many lives you save or stickers you give to kids.

It's not normal, that simply sitting in your work vehicle being present, can get you shot and killed because the decal on that work vehicle said, "POLICE" on it, like NYPD Officers Liu, Ramos, and Familia. Gone, but not forgotten.

It's not normal, to be shot while eating dinner, minding your own business, only because the patch on your shoulder said, "POLICE", like Florida Sheriff's Deputies Sergeant Noel Ramirez and Deputy Taylor Lindsey. Gone, but not forgotten.

It's not normal, to never be "off duty". To always be alert, aware, cautious, even concerned, that you may be a target at any given time due to your chosen profession.

It's not normal, you do the job and maintain a professional demeanor or smile while holding back tears, because in the end you know, someone has to do it and you're proud that you aren't normal.

It's not normal, to attend a funeral for a coworker who died doing the same job as you, almost annually.

It's not normal, that no matter how much all these things bother you, you couldn't see yourself doing any other job, because carrying this burden is what you were meant to do. This is your calling.

You are not normal, you're a police officer.

Luckily their normal is not your normal. If you're reading this and you aren't a police officer, some of the things you just read may have bothered you. Odds are good, the images that popped into your head made you uncomfortable, or were hard to think about or even picture. I hope this was the case, because that is a police officer's daily reality. At the very least, I hope it changes your perspective of police officers and what it is they actually do and experience every single day.

This topic isn't widely talked about among police officers, for a multitude of reasons. To start, it isn't a fun topic to talk about. Yes, there are times that officers gather and share "war stories" about all the crazy things they have seen and dealt with. But don't think for a minute, that the ugliness of it all isn't still lurking beneath the surface, waiting to rear its ugly head when they least expect it.

Most officers simply choose not to talk about these things and change the subject when asked about what "crazy things they've seen". Some may even lie and say "nothing crazy has happened lately" just to avoid the topic altogether. Most officers don't rush home to tell their significant other what they saw or experienced during their shift. For most, it's easier to say, "today was fine" or "I don't want to talk about it" to avoid the conversation and having to relive the bad things they may have seen or experienced that day.

This sort of behavior is common, a defense mechanism if you will. Over time, police become "numb" to seeing the worst side of society. But in the end, it's still there, lurking and waiting to show up in their subconscious again. It's like a pressure cooker that constantly gets tested to see how much more can be fit inside. Almost inevitably, it eventually gives way and explodes. Sadly, it can explode in many different forms.

For some, it explodes in the form of an unexplainable outburst, angry rage, or reaction to something that normally wouldn't bother that person. For others, they may just break down and cry inexplicably until they feel better, not really knowing what triggered it to happen. Some turn to alcohol or other substances to mask the pain or feelings, which lead them down a path of destruction. No two people are the same, therefore, no two police officers are the same. They all experience different things in their careers and each thing affects them differently than the next officer.

Maybe now when you see them, you don't just see a man or woman in a uniform that took an oath to protect you, but also a person who runs toward the things most run away from each and every day. They see things so you don't have to see them. They carry a heavy burden and do it because they were chosen to carry it, so you don't have to.

Being a police officer is much more than writing traffic tickets, breaking up a fun little house party with underage high school kids, or responding to the fender bender to facilitate the exchange of personal information. A police officer is much more than what meets the eye or what you see on television.

People in society simply create their image of what something or someone is, based on their personal experiences and that makes total sense. For example, if your only experience with police officers is being pulled over for speeding, I imagine it is possible you haven't thought about what a police officer experiences on a daily basis.

I hope this article changes that. The next time you read about a fatality car accident or horrible tragedy, feel sympathy and empathy for the victims, but don't forget the people responding to the scene, what they experienced and how they are affected too.

I fully recognize that police officers chose their profession and I also recognize that, "if they don't like it, they can quit." Some people try being a police officer, only to find out, "it isn't for them" and kudos to them for having the courage to admit that.

I firmly believe it isn't a job, it's a calling. If you become a police officer solely to pay the bills, you are likely not the kind of police officer most people want on their department or patrolling their community.

Being a police officer is recognizing that you will see the worst side of humanity that society has to offer and you accept that as your normal. Chances are good that when a police officer starts their career, they have thought about these things but didn't quite know what it actually meant until they experienced it firsthand.

It takes a special kind of person to do this job, one that isn't..."normal".

To the hundreds of thousands of brothers and sisters in blue around the world, who put their lives and their "normal" on the line every day, thank you.

Don't be afraid to admit if you're struggling, need help, or just want to talk to someone. As weird as it may seem to you, asking for help is "normal".

Thank an officer today.

– The Officer Next Door