

SCOPE:

This policy shall provide guidance for the administration and function of the Peer Support Program.

BACKGROUND:

Research has shown that careers within public safety services are qualified as high stress positions. This stress can occur because of the physical conditions that the job entails, but most recently has been associated to the unique, mentally taxing situations that the members are exposed to. This can be due to traumatic and repetitive calls while interacting with external customers (i.e. patients, and the citizens we serve.), as well as internal customers (i.e. fellow members, and management).

These interactions usually have some aspect of suffering involved; mentally, emotionally and/or physically. It has been proven that these daily interactions can produce high stress conditions for the provider. Members may or may not be more susceptible to the stress encountered on a daily basis and may differentiate depending upon their unique culture, background, personality and mood. The overarching goal of the Peer Support Program is to offer each member mental, emotional and physical support in order to maintain minimum job requirements throughout the duration of their career. We believe the Program will help members become more successful in utilizing the tools already available to the organization.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of the Peer Support Program is to prevent and/or lessen the potential negative impact of stress upon a member by providing emotional support, information and assistance. The Program will provide the member mental and emotional support through one-on-one discussions, pre-incident education, spousal/significant other support, on-scene support, and post-incident CISM debriefing. The Peer Support Team will be comprised of department members who have been specifically trained in stress management, crisis intervention and communication techniques. The Peers will also work in conjunction with designated mental health professionals.

GOALS:

1. To provide an added resource that will aid members and their families in their personal and professional crisis situations and to continue to nurture their mental and emotional wellness.
2. To provide a liaison between the member and their resources for support.

3. To continue to build a reputation as a team that department members and the community can trust and rely on during their times of crisis.

MISSION: LISTEN, REFER, and SUPPORT

Peers are to **Listen** to the member in order to understand their situation and possible needs. If it is appropriate according to the member's situation, they are to then **Refer** the member to the appropriate Professional Provider and/or Program. Afterwards the Peer is to continue to **Support** and reevaluate their needs. The Peer Team member's role is one of support and allowing the Professional Provider to facilitate the members' reactions to a critical incident, job related stress or personal crisis.

POLICY & PROCEDURES:

Peer Support is not to be considered a substitute for professional counseling or any form of professional medical or mental services. The SVF&MS Peers are not trained mental health professionals; they are trained to help navigate the mental wellness system to find resources for members. All Peer Support activities shall be voluntary. It is only meant to be an extra available resource to the members when needed. A Peer shall not hamper or impede any investigation or attempt to act as a representative for the member. The following is a description of each position, their functions, and guidelines by which they will abide. If at any time the persons holding these positions or titles feel they are no longer able to commit to these guidelines with integrity, they shall step down.

Peer Support Advisory Board

The board shall consist of the Deputy Fire Chief, The Battalion Chief overseeing the Health and Safety Committee, The Peer Support Group Leader, and a mental health professional.

- ✓ Oversees the selection of Peers.
- ✓ Develop and advise on policy.
- ✓ Constitute a line of authority from the Mental Health Professional to the department.
- ✓ Receive information on the progress of the program.
- ✓ Help find funding for the program.
- ✓ To provide administrative support to the program.
- ✓ Evaluate the program's operation.
- ✓ Maintain adherence to the Peer Support Program Admin Procedure.

Peer Support Team Leader

The Peer Support Team Leader manages the program and coordinates the team of peers. The role is designed to be the link between the program and the Board. The functions of the Peer Support Team Coordinator are:

- ✓ Have a running list of professional resources for potential referrals.
- ✓ Maintain an accounting of resources utilized by the Program, including appropriate and confidential statistical data.
- ✓ Coordinate the educational materials for the Peer Support Program.
- ✓ Ensure that Peers adhere to the Program's confidentiality policies.
- ✓ Receive complaints regarding any part of the Program, process, advise Advisory Board of major complaints, and notify complainants of action taken.

Peer Support Team

- ✓ Successfully complete the recognized basic hours of the Peer Support Team training course, as well as attend the appropriate amount of continuing education hours and mandatory meetings which will be decided by the team leader.
- ✓ Recognize that an assignment as a Peer is voluntary and be available to provide emotional/mental support to co-workers. Listen to the member, or those in need, in order to be aware of the situation at hand.
- ✓ Refer the members to proper avenues of professional assistance.
- ✓ Support the member after the referral and continue to follow up with the contact.
- ✓ Continue to maintain knowledge of the possible resources available to those in need.
- ✓ Adhere to the Terms and Conditions/Confidentiality Agreement.
 - **It is critical that team members understand that confidentiality is important but has its limitations. All members of the department, including Peer Support Team Members are considered “mandated reporters” of any potentially life-threatening situation and or significant illegal activity. Some of the situations that a Peer or any department member would need to immediately report to the proper authorities would be:**
 - **Threats of Suicide, Homicide, Self-harm or harm to others, Domestic violence, and Child abuse/neglect.**

Using Support Services

- Department members and their family/significant others may contact Peers directly for support services in dealing with reactions to critical incidents and/or personal crisis and stress. Departmental or supervisor approval or notification is not required.
- At the request of a department Supervisor, the Team Leader may deploy the Team to assist with High Stress Incidents (HSI) or other circumstances, to include coordinating CISM debriefings.

Recruitment and Selection

- ✓ Interested members may submit a letter of interest to the Peer Support Advisory Board indicating their interest in participation in the Program, and describing their reasons for wanting to be on the Peer Support Team.
- ✓ The Peer Support Advisory Board shall interview recommended members and select candidates based upon qualifications.

Who Makes a Good Peer?

- ✓ Good rapport with fellow members
- ✓ Respectful
- ✓ Good listening skills
- ✓ Sensitivity to the problems of others
- ✓ Understanding and adherence to confidentiality
- ✓ Willingness to learn
- ✓ Peers must be prepared to work within the guidelines and limitations of their organization's peer support program; they must be prepared to consult with mental health support staff and to refer staff to professional services when appropriate.
- ✓ It is recommended that those who are selected into the Team should be free of any current major personal problems themselves or have minimum of 2 years sobriety.

Peer Selection Process

- ✓ Building and adding Peer Support Team members should be advertised through email and other means of selective marketing.
- ✓ Interviews of interested members should be conducted by the Peer Team Advisory Board to make sure members meet the qualifications.

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- Having members of all ranks, time on the job, and from different components of the public safety field can only help serve the diversity and effectiveness of the program.

Training

- Peer Support Team members will attend the 24 hours of initial training provided by the department.
- CE's will be offered quarterly and attendance is mandatory.
- Team meetings will be held at the Team Leader's discretion and attendance is mandatory.

Receiving Calls on Shift

- Let the member who contacts you know you are on shift.
- If the member calling is in crisis ensure that you solicit help immediately in the event that you have to respond to a call so the member contacting you is not left alone in crisis.

Referrals from other Members & Family

- We do not take referrals and call members on behalf of others.
- Ask the person making the referral to have the member call you directly.
- Walk the person calling through the resources that they might need for the member, including giving them the City's EAP contact number. If the family member is contacting you regarding serious concerns or allegations regarding the department member, the proper authorities and or department chain of command needs to be notified.
- Peers should not be put in the position as agents for the department or crews to carry out counseling for members.
- The objectives of the above policies are to maintain the reputation of the Peer Support Team as a confidential reputable resource that members can trust.

Process and Conditions of Breach of Confidentiality

- The process of discipline is not to be taken lightly within this program. The effectiveness of this program relies heavily on the integrity of the Peer Team Members and the reputation they maintain. If at any time the Advisory Board is notified of a possible breach of confidentiality and/or Program Policies* of a Peer, a review process is to begin and to be conducted by the Peer Advisory Board, as outlined in Terms and

Conditions/Confidentiality Agreement.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS/CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

- The Confidentiality Agreement allows the member that is inquiring to become a Peer, to become a Peer Trainee. Only upon reading and full agreement of this document will the training process begin.
- It is understood that the Peer Support Team is strictly volunteer and that the Peers are to make themselves available for co-workers without requirement for compensation.
- Peer Team members shall agree to these Terms and Conditions/Confidentiality Agreement in order to show their commitment to this program.
- The Peer must agree with the guidelines of the Peer Team functions and policies outlined in this Administrative Procedure.
- If there is any confusion or disagreement with any of these guidelines or the Confidentiality Agreement, it must be brought to the Team Coordinator's attention immediately.
- It will be assumed that the Peer is in full agreement and satisfaction with these guidelines if the Coordinator is unaware of any disagreement/confusion, and the Peer is choosing to continue the training process/program.

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

- Peer Support Team members will maintain confidentiality to ensure the survivability of the Peer Support Program.
- The Peer Support Program is a confidential program.
- Peer Support Team Members shall not discuss information obtained while acting in a peer support capacity with anyone other than the Mental Health Professional or his/her designee for the purpose of mental health support unless required by law. Peer Support Team Members shall not divulge shared information with other employees, family members, friends, supervisors or management, or the general public.
- It is the Peer's responsibility to notify the members, prior to meeting, of the circumstances they cannot hold confidential.
- If these guidelines are found to be breached then the board has the right to convene and discuss that the peer may be asked to remove themselves from the Peer Team, as outlined in the Process of Discipline.

Process of Review

- ✓ In order for the Advisory Board to begin the review process of the Peer in question, at least one of two possible allegations must be brought to their attention.
 - The Peer in question is acting in contradiction to, or has failed to adhere to, the Guidelines of the Peer that are outlined in this Administrative Procedure.
 - The Peer in question has failed to adhere to the Peer Program Terms and Conditions and Confidentiality agreement that the Peer read and agreed to prior to training.
- ✓ Once the allegation of the Peer in question is confirmed to align with at least one of these two allegations, and agreed upon by a majority of the Advisory Board, the review process may begin.
- ✓ The review process may take as much time and consideration as the Advisory Board reasons to be necessary for each individual case.
- ✓ Upon completion of the review process the Board will conclude either:
 - That there is insufficient evidence to conclude any change in the Peer's good standing with the program.
 - That there is sufficient evidence to show the Peer is no longer in good standing and will require more training, or will be asked to step down permanently from being a Peer.
- ✓ If the Peer is allowed to continue in the Program with more training, in light of the confirmed allegations, the Board will consider the reputation and integrity of the Program that it is striving to maintain.
- ✓ Circumstances you may not hold confidential:
 - ****You witness a Member as being a Danger to themselves or others. In such circumstances you will notify, the proper authorities immediately. The 911 system should be used by the Peer Support Member if there is imminent threat to life.**

Withdrawal from Peer Support Team

- ✓ A Peer who fails to fulfill any of the binding responsibilities of a Peer may be removed from the Program upon the approval of the Advisory Board.

- ✓ Failure of the Peer to maintain a minimum number of continuing education hours may result in an immediate review process by the Advisory Board and possible removal.
- ✓ The integrity and reputation of the Program is essential to its continued effectiveness.
- ✓ If at any time the Advisory Board feels this integrity has been breached, a review process will begin and possible removal may follow.
- ✓ The Peer may resign from the Program at any time by notifying the Program Leader

Commitment

- ✓ Peers agree to a 2 year commitment, though, you may withdraw at any time with no repercussions.
- ✓ This commitment comes with a promise to attend all the mandatory meetings and maintain a required amount of continuing education hours of the Peer Support

