

# FREDERICK-FIRESTONE FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE.

---

## Section 100.21

### Peer Support Program

**Purpose:** Experiencing a traumatic event can be overwhelming for anyone. Stress reactions activate both physical and mental defense systems. Some of these reactions are temporary while others are long lasting. The impacts of work-related stressors manifest differently in each first responder, producing different psychological responses. For a first responder, prolonged or repeated exposure to such events can be debilitating and increase the risk of behavioral health issues and /or suicide.

The purpose of the Peer Support Program (PSP) is to prevent and /or lessen the potential negative impact of a stress upon emergency services personnel by providing emotional support, information and assistance. The objective of this policy is to provide members of the District and their families with support and resources on both a personal and professional level in accordance with the Districts' Health and Wellness program.

**Scope:** This Standard Operating Guideline applies to all personnel within the Frederick-Firestone Fire Protection District (the "District" or FFFPD). Department members and their immediate family members have access to the department psychologist for individual consultations or counseling. Members of the Peer Support Team (PST) are available at any time for individual consultations for department members and their immediate family members.

#### Definitions:

- A. **District Clinician/Counselor:** - An individual contracted by the District and licensed in the clinical practice of medicine, psychiatry, or psychology as distinguished from one specializing in laboratory or research techniques or in theory.
- B. **Confidentiality:** - As prescribed in professional ethics and state statutes CRS 13-90-107, CRS 12-43-218 (See attached Colorado Mental Health Act in appendix) and any other applicable laws.
- C. **Critical Incident:** - Any incident with an unusually strong emotional impact that may leave emergency services personnel with stress-related symptoms.
- D. **Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD):** - A meeting that occurs between 1 and 5 days after a critical incident. This is a group meeting approved by the Peer Support Coordinator (PSC) and facilitated by the (PST) and the District Counselor. The group will be conducted by at least two (2) (PST) members and the District Counselor and will include the persons involved in the incident and his/her family members, and any other personnel involved in the incident. The purpose of the

meeting is to provide an opportunity for all persons involved in a critical incident to discuss their feelings and perspectives regarding the critical incident. PST Members who were involved in the incident are not permitted to function as facilitators in the debriefing.

E. **Critical Incident Defusing:** - A meeting that occurs between 24 and 48 hours after a critical incident. This meeting is conducted by two members of the PST and only the District members that were involved with the incident. A diffusing is not a critique of the call, but an open forum for members can discuss how they are feeling about the incident.

F. **Critical Incident Stress Reactions:**

- **Behavioral Reactions:** Isolation, detachment, poor coping, interpersonal conflict, alcohol, medication, and/or drug abuse, engaging in high risk behavior, or any addiction.
- **Cognitive Reaction:** Concentration and problem-solving difficulties, “flashbacks” (vivid, distressing recollections of the sights, sounds, and smells of the incident), indecisiveness, memory disturbances, preoccupation with the incident.
- **Emotional Reactions:** Anxiety and fear, depression, emotional numbing, guilt, oversensitivity, irritability, feelings of helplessness.
- **Physical Reactions:** Fatigue, insomnia, nightmares, hyperactivity, exaggerated startle reactions, lethargy, psychosomatic problems (e.g., headaches or digestive problems).

G. **North Area Peer Support Team:** - (Peer Support Team) members that are part of the North Area Peer Support Team (NAPST), consisting of the following agencies:

- Adams County Fire Department
- Brighton Fire Department
- Federal Heights Fire Department
- Frederick / Firestone Fire Protection District
- North Metro Fire Department
- South Adams County Fire Department
- Thornton Fire Department
- Westminster Fire Department

- H. **Person to Person peer support:** - A meeting between a PST member and a member of the District or their immediate family.
- I. **Peer Support Program:** - A program designed to assist in the identification of critical incident stress reactions and resolution of employee concerns/personal issues. The program may offer assistance and appropriate resource information to employees during times of personal or professional problems that may adversely affect their personal or professional wellbeing or job performance.
- J. **Peer Support Program Coordinator (PSPC):** - a District member designated to coordinate the (PSP) and function as the primary liaison between PST members and the District's Chain of Command. This person is responsible for administering the program to include assigning and supervising Peer Supporters in the performance of their duties associated with the support and referral program. This person will interact closely with the Fire Chief for guidance and administrative assistance of the program.
- K. **Peer Support Team (PST):** - A group of District members that volunteer and are specially trained in peer support skills and are specifically selected through an assessment process that volunteer to participate as a point of contact and outreach for District Members who need services under the Peer Support Program. These personnel operate under CRS 13-90-107, District Policy and maintain strict adherence to confidentiality, moral and ethical standards.
- L. **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder:** - A condition of persistent mental and emotional stress occurring as a result of injury or severe psychological shock, typically involving disturbance of sleep and constant vivid recall of the experience, with dulled responses to others and to the outside world.

## 1. Overview

A. The District's Peer Support Program consists of two components:

- Person to Person Peer Support
- Critical Incident Stress Debriefings / Diffusing

B. Critical incidents are those incidents that can have an unusually strong emotional impact that may leave emergency services personnel with stress related symptoms. Usually these symptoms are transient (lasting a few days or weeks) and interfere minimally with the individuals performance, however, the symptoms may persist for longer periods and may have a more disruptive impact on the crew or industrial members.

Studies have determined that appropriated critical incident stress management (CISM) interventions can dramatically reduce the likelihood that symptoms experienced in reaction to critical incidents will persist and have a significantly disruptive impact.

- 99-100% of firefighters are likely to experience Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) symptoms at some point in their career, including trouble sleeping and distressing memories of difficult incidents.

## **2. Peer Support Program Objectives:**

- A. Provide emotional support during and after times of personal or professional challenges to employees and their immediate family members who express a need for assistance or for those whom supervisory staff feels could benefit from program involvement.
- B. Promote trust, allow anonymity and preserve confidentiality for employees utilizing the program. Confidentiality will be maintained as provided for in this SOG, law and high moral and ethical standards.
- C. Develop and train peer support personnel who can identify members having difficulty coping with personal or professional emotional stress and provide guidance or referral to professional or alternate resources as required.
- D. Provide personnel to listen, assess, and whenever necessary, refer for professional assistance, employees and their families during times of trauma, grief, or other personal or professional problems.
- E. The primary focus of the District Peer Support Program is to provide services to employees and their immediate family members who have faced traumatic events, to provide immediate intervention and assistance during times of crisis, and to assist in referring employees or family members to additional resources.
- F. Utilize the services of an appointed Counselor to guide the Peer Support Team members in appropriate referrals.
- G. The program will be administered by the Peer Support Program Advisory Board (PSPAB) which will be made up of the following:
  - Peer Support Coordinator (Board Chair)
  - Clinical Director (State licensed mental health professional)
  - Administration or management representative (Fire Chief or other designee)

## **3. Clinical Supervisor:**

- A. The clinical supervisor of the Districts' Peer Support Team will be a licensed mental health professional who is contracted by the District. The clinical supervisor assumes all of the responsibilities of a clinical advisor and provides direct counseling services to agency employees and their families. The actual services provided by the clinical supervisor are determined by either a job description or elements of a contract.

## **4. Peer Support Program Coordinator Responsibilities:**

- A. General supervision of the program.
- B. Coordination of recruiting and screening of Peer Support Team applicants.
- C. Ensuring all employees are aware of the program through training presentations, written memoranda or other literature that may be developed about the program.
- D. Preparing and disseminating to all employees a current referral list of professional counseling services approved by the (PSPAB)

- E. Identifying and coordinating the appropriate training for the selected Peer Support Team Members and documenting and maintaining all records pertinent to such training.
- F. Ensuring Peer Support Team members log peer support contacts and report these to the Coordinator. Contact will not breach confidentiality but will log number of contacts and the general reason for contact (i.e. critical incident, personal issue, etc.). Employee names or any other information that would tend to identify an individual employee **WILL NOT** be listed on the contact log.
- G. Acting as the liaison for peer support referrals and being responsible for assigning Peer Support Team Members to assist employees consistent with the particular need.
- H. Providing guidance and assistance to Peer Support Team members when problems or questions arise.
- I. Developing resources to assist employees when problems are identified.
- J. Develop and publicizing the procedures to follow to use peer support services.
- K. Have the authority to dismiss Peer Support Team members from the team for activities deemed detrimental to the team, clear inability to function appropriately as a Peer Support Team Member, or failure to attend required training and /or team meetings.
- L. A Peer Support Team Member that inappropriately breeches confidentiality will be immediately dismissed from the Peer Support Team and will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination.
- M. Coordinate with the NAPST

## **5. Peer Support Selection Process:**

### **A. Recruiting:**

- A minimum of three Peer Support Team Members will be needed and balanced across each shift, six is preferred. Peer Support Team Members must understand the need to maintain accessibility to all members and that shift assignments may need to be made in order to maintain adequate numbers of Peer Support Team Members on each shift.
- Members that are selected must demonstrate an interest and ability, be fully committed, have flexibility with their time, and have demonstrated trustworthiness throughout their tenure with the District.
- Must possess active listening and communication skills.
- Willingness to learn and attend team trainings.
- Understand and adheres to the confidential nature of peer support.
- Committed to providing peer support no matter time of day, on or off shift.

## B. Selection:

- Employees that are interested in being part of the Peer Support Team will submit their names to the Peer Support Team Coordinator.
- Interested employees will participate in an assessment center including answering essay questions and completing self assessments for the District Counselor. The essay questions will be reviewed by the Peer Support Program Coordinator, the Fire Chief and the District Counselors. The self assessment worksheets will ONLY be reviewed by the District Counselors, and they will provide the Peer Support Program Coordinator and the Fire Chief with a recommendation based on their review.
- Interested employees will undergo standardized testing and background checks.
- The list of eligible employees will then be submitted to the entire membership with a questionnaire. Members will make specific recommendations for or against the candidates based on specific traits such as; approachability, trustworthiness, integrity, and compassion. The questionnaire will be confidential and only reviewed by the Fire Chief and District Counselor, who will make the final decision on appointment.
- Appointed Peer Support Team Members will be required to take an oath of confidentiality and commitment.

## C. Minimum Continuing Education Requirements:

- Team members will attend a 4-day initial training in the first year and a 4-day specialist training in the second year.
- Team members will attend a 4-hour quarterly North Area Peer Support Team training.

## 6. Peer Supporter Responsibilities:

- A. Advising peers seeking assistance that Peer Support Team members are not exempt from laws, rules, regulations, or department directives; however, confidentiality will be maintained for any exchange of information that would not be in violation of the above.
- B. Providing short-term supportive assistance and or referral for assistance when deemed appropriate to employees utilizing the Peer Support Program. Employees may self-refer or be referred by another employee or supervisor.
- C. Maintaining contact with the Peer Support Program Coordinator regarding program activities and statistical data on program contacts for purposes of program evaluation, including the submission of periodic reports regarding support contact made with employees. Names or other identifying information regarding who is utilizing this resource **WILL NOT** be kept, only information on the general type of issue that was addressed. A Peer Support Team Member will not keep any written record or notes other than the log.
- D. Responding at any hour if necessary when contacted and assistance is requested or needed. Such requests will normally be made through the Peer Support Program Coordinator.

- E. Responding to the scene of a critical incident if requested by the Incident Commander, Peer Support Program Coordinator or other command staff.
- F. Notifying the Peer Support Program Coordinator should the Peer Support Team Member elect to withdraw from the Peer Support Program
- G. Adherence to the program policies and objectives.
- H. Notifying the Peer Support Program Coordinator should a conflict of interest arise.
- I. Not intervening in discipline actions. The Peer Support Team can provide emotional or referral support to the member going through a disciplinary action, but the details of the action cannot be discussed in accordance with the Confidentiality Statement.
- J. Not judging or providing opinions of an employee's actions.
- K. Providing referrals to the District Counselor when appropriate, with the approval of the involved employee. Many critical incidents have dramatic effects on not only the member, it can also impact the member's family. Acknowledging this fact to the member may identify family members who may benefit from contact from the Peer Support Team. **NO CONTACT** will be made with any member's family without direct consent and discussion with the involved member. However, Peer Support Team members are encouraged to discuss this as an option.
- L. Attending scheduled Peer Support Program meetings and trainings. Minimum requirements are 5 of the 6 bi-monthly meetings and 3 of the 4 quarterly NAPST meetings and any required refresher training. Peer Support Team members must submit a request to be excused from any meetings/trainings to the Peer Support Program Coordinator
- M. A leave of absence from the program may be granted for up to six months. A request for a leave of absence must be given to the Peer Support Program Coordinator. If approved, attendance requirements at meetings and trainings, and notification call outs will be suspended during a leave of absence.

#### **7. District Counselor Responsibilities:**

- A. All members and the member's immediate family will have access to the District Counselor via phone and Person to Person counseling sessions.
- B. Members can be referred to the District Counselor by the Peer Support Team member.
- C. Members can talk to the District Counselor without a referral from the Peer Support Team member.
- D. All conversations with the District's Counselor will be kept strictly confidential in accordance with applicable laws.
- E. The District Counselor will periodically perform ride-alongs with crews to create a familiarity and trust level with District members.
- F. The District Counselor will facilitate group support defusing's and debriefings.

G. The District Counselor will facilitate the Peer Support Team meetings/trainings.

#### **8. Referral Program:**

- A. The referral program is established to assist employees in dealing with emotional stresses which are the result of domestic, financial, health, other personal problems, or job related difficulties and to provide the employee resources to recognize and resolve the reactions to that emotion or stress.
- B. An employee may contact any Peer Support Team to obtain their help or to ask for professional counseling.
- C. Any employee aware of another employee who may need assistance can initiate a referral by contacting any Peer Support Team member. The Peer Support Team member will make contact with the referred member to assess their receptiveness to Peer Support Team assistance.
- D. Supervisory personnel can recommend a member to use the Peer Support Program when appropriate. It must be understood that this assistance is voluntary and that a member cannot be ordered to participate. The member should be assured that the referral has been arranged solely for his/her benefit and will be confidential.
- E. Referrals will not be used as a disciplinary action.
- F. Any situations that the Peer Support Team member feels are beyond their capabilities should be referred to the District Counselor for further assessment/help.

#### **9. Confidentiality:**

- A. The Peer Support Program is a confidential program. No records identifying employees who utilize the program will be maintained.
- B. Peer Support Team members shall not discuss information obtained while acting in a peer support capacity with anyone other than the District Counselor – Peer Support Program Coordinator for the purpose of mental health support unless required by law.
- C. Peer Support Team members shall not divulge information obtained from peer support program sessions with other employees, family members, friends, supervisors or management, or the general public. Violation of this requirement will result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.
- D. The Peer Support Team member cannot be found insubordinate for failure to divulge information obtained as a Peer Support Team member under any administrative investigation of employee misconduct. All information discussed during Peer Support Program counseling sessions is confidential and shall not be part of any misconduct investigation to the extent allowed by law.
- E. Peer Support Team members are required by law to report illegal activity or if the employee is a danger to self or others.



## **10. Peer Support Team Activation:**

- A. At any point in time, any District member or family member of a District employee may contact any member of the Peer Support Team for any personal or job related reason. Peer Support Team members will discuss only issues /stressors related to the person seeking counseling. Issues related to other parties will not be discussed. Peer Support Team members are trained in basic counseling techniques and will have resources available to assist in this process, but the Peer Support Team members will not be able to handle all situations and therefore may refer the situation to the District Counselor.
- B. The Peer Support Team may be requested by a District Officer for a defusing or debriefing when deemed necessary by those individuals by contacting the Peer Support Program Coordinator. This is highly recommended when there is any event where supervisors become concerned about the emotional/psychological reactions or responses of their assigned personnel.
- C. The Peer Support Team **WILL BE** activated in the event of the following circumstances:
  - A death or severe injury to an employee or employee's immediate family member (on or off duty)
  - A death or severe injury to a child
  - A scene where there are multiple deaths or mutilations
  - Lengthy exposure to scenes with multiple victims, or where personnel are exposed to serious threats to their own lives or safety

## **11. On Scene Support:**

- A. Members of the Peer Support Team will report to major critical incident scenes when requested by the Incident Commander or Chief Officer.
- B. The Peer Support Team members should be stationed at the rehab area to provide support for personnel on rest breaks and help monitor crews on scene for signs of stress reactions.
- C. This will also be the time when the Peer Support Team will begin planning for more support options utilizing group defusing or debriefing.
- D. In the event of a large scale incident where many members may require on-scene support, defusing, or debriefing, the North Area Peer Support Team may be called in for assistance and to help coordinate with the District Peer Support Team.

## **12. Individual Consultations:**

- A. Any District member or immediate family member of a District member may request an individual consultation with a Peer Support Team member or the District Counselor after exposure to a critical incident or other stressful matter by:

- Contacting their officer to request person to person session, defusing, or debriefing.
- Contacting a member of the Peer Support Team.
- Each employee and immediate family/household family members may each receive up to 10 individual, group, or family counseling sessions per year paid for by the District at the District Counselor's facility in a calendar year. The District member will be responsible for any mileage fees associated with offsite sessions.
  - Any member or qualified member's family that utilize this resource will be assigned a number that only the District Counselor will know. The District Counselor will bill the District directly for these sessions utilizing the assigned number and providing only a general description of the reason for the visit. The District Member or qualifying family member would be financially responsible for any visits over ten (10) at a discounted rate.

### 13. Defusing:

- A. The procedure for setting up the room and how to conduct these sessions is covered in the initial training and will be kept up to date with the bi-monthly trainings.
- B. Occur within 48 hours (but typically the same day) of the incident.
- C. The officer will notify the Peer Support Program Coordinator that a defusing is needed for a particular incident. The affected crew will be placed out of service for the defusing with coordination with the Battalion Chief.
- D. The defusing will be conducted by a minimum of two Peer Support Team members that were not part of the incident.
- E. The defusing is not a critique of the incident, but a small group discussion that should last no longer than one hour.
- F. The defusing should take place in a private, secure area with **ALL District Members** that were involved with the incident being defused. Members and outside organizational participants will not take part in the defusing, but will be included in the debriefing.
- G. Information discussed in the defusing **WILL NOT** be shared with non-participants.

### 14. Critical Incident Stress Debriefing:

- A. Occur 1 to 5 days following the critical incident.
- B. The company officer will notify the Peer Support Program Coordinator that a debriefing is needed for a particular incident.
- C. The District members involved with the debriefing will be out of service during the debriefing with coordination with the Battalion Chief. Scheduling the debriefing off duty if possible is preferred in order to maintain service levels.
- D. A debriefing may occur without a defusing, but a debriefing should always take place if a defusing has taken place.

- E. A debriefing is a more formal, structured discussion that will be conducted by a minimum of two members of the Peer Support Team not involved in the incident and the District Counselor (the same members that facilitated the defusing if applicable).
- F. The debriefing is not a critique of the incident, but an open forum for members to discuss their feelings and reactions concerning the incident.
- G. This is a formal discussion that may last one to three hours.
- H. The debriefing should take place in a private, secure area with **ONLY** those involved with the incident at the scene, but may also include dispatchers, law enforcement, and other agencies or personnel actively involved in the incident.
- I. Any information discussed during a debriefing **WILL NOT** be shared with non-participants.

Shodan M. Goyd 2-24-2017  
Fire Chief Date

