



HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF POLICE

GENERAL ORDER ADM-24 PEER SUPPORT TEAM

EFFECTIVE APRIL 17, 2020

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I. POLICY

It is the policy of the Howard County Department of Police (HCPD) to assist members who become involved in highly stressful events that can disrupt their health, performance, personality, or relationships by maintaining a Peer Support Team.

II. DEFINITIONS

- A. Crisis Management Briefing: A brief educational support service provided by Peer Support Team members when members of the HCPD are in need of stress information in the midst of a critical incident.
- B. Critical Incident
 - 1. Any situation faced by members that causes them to experience unusually strong emotional reactions and has the potential to interfere with their ability to function either at the scene or at a later time. All that is necessary is that the incident, regardless of the type, generates unusually strong feelings in the members.
 - 2. Examples of critical incidents include but are not limited to:
 - a. Police shootings;
 - b. Line of duty death;
 - c. Serious injury to members in the performance of their duties;
 - d. Suicide of a member;
 - e. Mass-casualty or disaster incidents;
 - f. Death of children;
 - g. Hostage taking;
 - h. Barricaded subject with specific danger to personnel;
 - i. A personally threatening situation to a member;
 - j. A prolonged incident that ends in a loss; or
 - k. Any other incident that produces unusually high levels of stress.

- C. Critical Incident Stress Debriefing
 - 1. A formal Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) is a group discussion of a traumatic experience. The CISD follows a standardized group process model approved by the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF).
 - 2. These confidential meetings typically occur within a reasonable time of the incident. Although a CISD is usually held within three (3) days, the specific timing depends on a number of factors. Peer Support Team members must judge the timing of the CISD meeting on a case-by-case basis.
- D. Defusing: A brief, small group process conducted by Peer Support Team members within hours of a traumatic experience, at their discretion.
- E. Family Support Services: A set of interventions that may be utilized by Peer Support Team members to provide a range of crisis support services to families of members.
- F. Follow-Up Services: Contact by phone, station visit, meetings, etc. with members following initial services provided by a Peer Support Team member.
- G. Individual Support: One-on-one support available to members with any Peer Support Team member for many types of issues, such as work-related deaths, or more personal issues such as divorce, illness, disability, career concerns, family relationships, or financial issues.
- H. Lead Clinician: A mental health professional trained in Peer Support who provides psychological oversight, supervises the Peer Support Team interventions, and helps provide direct Peer Support services.
- I. Peer Support Team Members: Members of the HCPD who are trained in Peer Support through an approved course of study by the ICISF.
- J. Post Incident Education: Peer Support information sessions provided to HCPD members in the aftermath of a distressing critical incident.
- K. Pre-Incident Education: Peer Support information provided to recruit classes and during in-service education programs for HCPD members.
- L. Referrals: Recommendations by members of the Peer Support Team to HCPD members to contact the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), Chaplains, or to other mental health professionals.
- M. Rest/Information Transition Services (RITS): A brief set of supportive comments and instructions provided to a group of personnel immediately after they disengage from their first exposure to a major incident, such as a disaster.
- N. Team Coordinator
 - 1. A member of the Peer Support Team who is designated to perform the administrative duties of the Team. The Team Coordinator is appointed by the Chief of Police and is responsible for managing the Team.
 - 2. The Team Coordinator shall:
 - a. Review applications for Team membership to determine suitability for service on the Peer Support Team;
 - b. Ensure that Peer Support Team members are properly trained;

- c. Supervise the utilization of the Team in specific critical incident interventions; and
- d. Work closely with the Lead Clinician.

III. ENTRY INTO THE PEER SUPPORT TEAM

- A. The Peer Support Team is open to all members regardless of rank, seniority, or assignment. It is desired to have the Peer Support Team, as a whole, be a reflection of the rank, gender, and cultural diversity of the HCPD.
 - 1. Members who are interested in becoming a Peer Support Team member shall submit a request via their chain of command to the Team Coordinator. Interviews with the Team Coordinator will be required prior to appointment to the Peer Support Team.
 - 2. Names of suitable Team members will be provided to the Chief of Police for his approval.
- B. Serving on the Team is a voluntary assignment and members may resign from the Team at any time. Members may be removed from the Team by the Chief of Police if their duties, assignments, or any other reason creates an inability to function with the Team. Resignation or removal from the Team shall not be viewed by superior officers as a failure on the part of the member.
- C. Peer Support Team members must meet the standards of the ICISF and attend basic and advanced Peer Support classes taught by an approved ICISF instructor prior to their utilization as a Peer Support Team member.
 - 1. Peer Support Team members must maintain minimum standards of training established by the ICISF to remain in the assignment.
 - 2. The Team Coordinator shall ensure that all Team members meet training standards.
 - 3. Training records shall be provided to the Education and Training Division and Personnel Section by the Team Coordinator for accurate documentation.
- D. The Team Coordinator shall supply a current list of all Team members to the Chief of Police, the Command Staff, Watch Commanders, the Howard County Police Officers' Association, and post it on all HCPD bulletin boards.

IV. TEAM SERVICES¹

- A. The Peer Support Team member will provide crisis support services for members who are involved in a traumatic incident. The Team will work to:
 - 1. Mitigate the impact of traumatic stress on members of the HCPD who have experienced a traumatic event;
 - 2. Accelerate normal recovery processes of people who are having normal reactions to abnormal events; and
 - 3. Identify personnel who might benefit from additional services beyond the scope of the Team.
- B. The HCPD's Peer Support Team will maintain membership in and participation with the Howard County team which serves the Fire Department and other county agencies.
- C. Request for assistance from other agencies, both in and outside of Howard County, must be made through the Chief of Police.

¹ CALEA 22.1.4, 22.1.5

- D. The Peer Support Team member will provide peer support to individual members of the HCPD involving critical stress incidents. This individual support is not limited to critical stress incidents. Members may contact Peer Support Team members at any time for support on any issue that is of concern to the member.
- E. If a member presents an issue outside of the Peer Support Team member's scope of expertise, the Team member will recommend the member seek other available resources.

V. CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

- A. Members of the Team are required to protect the confidentiality of information obtained through their participation on the Peer Support Team, including but not limited to statements made by Team members; discussions among members of the Team; and medical, psychological, or other personal information obtained through participation in the peer support process.
 - 1. A Team member is prohibited from disclosing any such information except as required by law or permitted in this General Order. When disclosure is required by law or this General Order and is not considered a waiver of confidentiality or a waiver of an individual's privacy interest, the information shall be disclosed only as specifically required but shall otherwise remain confidential.
 - 2. Peer Support Team members are prohibited from making notes or recordings of conversations while providing support.
 - 3. When functioning as Peer Support Team members on a critical incident, Team members should not simultaneously hold investigative, administrative, or disciplinary roles in the incident which are in conflict with their Team member role.
- B. The following information, even if obtained through participation on the Peer Support Team, must be disclosed to the Chief of Police.
 - 1. Threats of suicide or homicide;
 - 2. Admission or threats of serious unlawful conduct; and
 - 3. Admissions of child abuse.
- C. Except in instances where disclosure is required in this General Order:
 - 1. It is the policy of the HCPD not to question a Peer Support team member concerning Critical Incident Stress Management services or inquire which individuals participate or receive services.
 - 2. The HCPD will not seek any information from a Peer Support team member about any service they provide.
- D. Peer Support team members who violate confidentiality will immediately be dismissed from the Team and may be subject to additional disciplinary action.

VI. PROCEDURES

- A. A District Commander or Watch Commander should notify the Team Coordinator, through the Communications Division, for any of the following incidents;
 - 1. Police shootings;
 - 2. Line of duty death(s);

3. Serious injury to officers or members in the performance of their duties;
 4. Suicide of a member;
 5. Mass casualty or disaster incidents;
 6. Death of children;
 7. Hostage taking or barricaded subject with specific danger to members;
 8. A personally threatening situation to a member;
 9. A prolonged incident that ends in the loss of life; and
 10. Any other incident that produces any unusually high levels of stress.
- B. The Peer Support Team should not be utilized for citizens not associated with the HCPD. The Police Chaplains or the Mobile Crisis Team should be called for assistance in these instances.
- C. Upon notification, the Team Coordinator will contact the on-call Peer Support Team member and have him respond to the scene and report to the officer in charge of the incident. Once the Peer Support Team member(s) has made contact with the officer in charge, a determination as to what, if any, on-scene Peer Support services may be required will be made.
- D. The Peer Support Team member:
1. Exercises no command authority when performing peer support duties, regardless of rank.
 2. Should avoid direct involvement in the incident and concentrate his attention on assisting HCPD members; and
 3. Should wear plain clothes as opposed to a uniform, if at all possible.
- E. Rest/Information Transition Services (RITS)
1. RITS may be used immediately after members have been removed from the scene of a disaster. Attendance at RITS may be mandated by the HCPD, however active participation cannot be required.
 2. The Peer Support Team will provide the members with information on critical incident stress and what they may expect in the weeks following the incident.
 3. This process will last approximately ten (10) minutes and will be immediately followed by an opportunity for the members to rest, eat, and drink some refreshments.
- F. Defusing
1. During incidents of intense stress, defusing may be provided to small groups. These will be conducted by Peer Support Team members. Attendance at a defusing may be mandated by the Department, however active participation cannot be required.
 2. The defusing will be held within 8 to 12 hours of the incident.
 3. After the defusing, Team members will make a determination as to whether any additional steps are required.

4. The lead Peer Support Team Member will contact the lead clinician assigned to the Team within 12 hours of the defusing to determine if any additional services need to be offered to those involved in the incident.

G. Critical Incident Stress Debriefings

1. When debriefings are necessary, they will be provided in accordance with the procedures established by the ICISF. Attendance at a debriefing may be mandated by the Department, however active participation cannot be required.
2. Debriefings will be made available for all members involved in the incident. All persons involved in the incident have a valuable contribution to make to the recovery process.
 - a. Every attempt shall be made to conduct the debriefing during the member's regularly scheduled shift.
 - b. Members attending debriefings who are not on duty are eligible for overtime compensation in accordance with the HCPD's overtime policy. Peer Support Team members will collect overtime slips and turn them in to the Team Coordinator, who will submit them for approval.
3. On occasion, members of the HCPD Peer Support Team may be asked to participate in a debriefing with members of the Department of Fire and Rescue Services.

H. One-on-One Contacts

1. Any member may approach any Peer Support Team Member at any time. Individual support conducted during off-duty time is encouraged but such meetings are purely voluntary on the part of the support person and the individual requesting the meeting.
2. A Peer Support Team member may be contacted by any member during the member's normal tour of duty. This contact is strictly voluntary and is usually initiated by the member.
3. A Peer Support Team member may approach members to offer assistance.

I. Other Peer Support Services

1. Other Peer Support services may be required and shall be arranged by the Peer Support Team member(s). Examples of additional services or referrals may include, but not be limited to, family support services and stress education programs for HCPD members and families.
2. Any decision that will affect staffing or operations will be brought to the attention of the Chief of Police or his designee.²

VII. CANCELLATION

This General Order cancels and replaces General Order ADM-24, Critical Incident Stress Management Team, dated December 31, 2014.

Authority:


Lisa D. Myers
Chief of Police

² CALEA 22.2.6d