



PEER SUPPORT TEAM DEVELOPMENT

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. To assist members through the stress the department has determined that as an organization we want to offer each member mental, emotional and physical support in order to maintain minimum job requirements throughout the duration of their career. It is believed that a Peer Support 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 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 that members can trust and ultimately a successful program.

MISSION STATEMENT: LISTEN, REFER, and SUPPORT

They 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. The 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 to. 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 consists of representation from Labor, Management, 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 Standard Operating Procedures

Peer Support Team Coordinator

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

- The Peer Support Team Coordinator is appointed by the Advisory Board and their main responsibility is to assist the Advisory Board in continuous evaluation and maintaining of the Peer Support Program.
- 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 Coordinator.
- 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 mental health professionals.
- 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.

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 supervisory approval or notification is not required.
- Peer Team contact information will be available through Firestrong.org. At the request of a Supervisor, the Team Coordinator may contact Peers, as appropriate, from the Peer Team Roster to assist with High Stress Incidents (HSI) or other circumstances.

- Peers are volunteering their time in order to help provide an additional mental health tool for this department 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
- Respect for management and union
- 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 teams should be free of any current major personal problems themselves or have at a minimum of 2 years sobriety.

Peer Selection Process

- Building and adding Peer Support Team members should be advertised through deployment email and other means of department marketing.
- Interviews of interested members should be conducted by the Peer Team Advisory Board to make sure members meet the qualifications.
- Having members of all ranks, time on the job, and from the different components of the fire service can only help serve the diversity of the department.

Training

- Peer Support Team members will attend the 16 hours of initial training provided by the department
- CE's will be offered quarterly attendance is mandatory

Receiving Calls on Shift

- Peers are not authorized by the Peer Support Program to take time off of shift
- Let the member who contacts you know you are on shift
- If the member calling is in crisis give them the Fire Support Line as back-up if you need to respond with your crew on a call.

Referrals from other Members & Family

- We don't 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
- 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 keep 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 Program Policies* of a Peer, a review process is to begin and to be conducted by the Peer Advisory Board, as outlined in the Terms and Conditions/Confidentiality Agreement

TERMS AND CONDITIONS/CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

- The agreement of this portion of the document 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 the Peer Support Program Guide.
- If there is any confusion or disagreement with any of these guidelines or this confidentiality agreement, it must be brought to the 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 nature of the peer program.
- The Peer Support Program is a confidential program. No records identifying employees who utilize the program will be maintained.
- 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 the Peer Support Guide.
- 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 revert back to more training, or be asked to step down permanently from being a Peer.
- If the Peer is allowed to continue in the Program with more training, in lieu 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, in no more than 24 hours, the Peer Coordinator, Peer Board Member, or Licensed Crisis Care facility (Fire Support Line, Hospital)**

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 possibly termination.
- 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 termination may follow.
- The Peer may resign from the Program at any time by notifying the Program Coordinator Commitment
- Mentors agree to a 2 year commitment of being a peer, 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 Program