
SPRINGFIELD POLICE DEPARTMENT GENERAL ORDER

NUMBER: SUP – 4	DATE: 02/12/2024
MPAC STANDARDS: 22.2.3	
SUBJECT: Peer Support	

I. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide the Springfield Police Department (SPD) with guidelines pertaining to the utilization of the Peer Support Team, Peer Support Team members and other stress management support systems.

II. Policy

The law enforcement profession can be stressful for its members and their families. Experienced and witnessed critical events place a huge toll on our mental health. It is the policy of the SPD to pursue proactive measures in employee health issues. As a component of this policy, the Department has established a Peer Support Team, also known as Peer-to-Peer to provide stress management assistance. The SPD has established a group of trained police officers from within the Department to act as “peer support” members.

III. Definitions

Critical Incident: Any event that is unusual, violent, and/or involves a perceived threat to or actual loss of human life that has the emotional power to overwhelm an individual’s usual ability to cope and which may interfere with the function of the person’s coping mechanism immediately or in the future.

Debriefing: A closed, confidential discussion of a critical incident that relates the feelings and perceptions of those directly involved prior to, during and after a stressful event. It is intended to provide support, education and work as an outlet for views and feelings associated with the event. These Peer Support Debriefings are not considered to be counseling, nor an operational critique of an incident.

Defusing: A brief, confidential discussion between an employee involved in a critical incident and a Peer Support Member immediately following an incident. The purpose of a defusing is to restore the employee’s cognitive functioning and to prepare them for future stress reactions related to the incident.

Mental Health Professional: An individual licensed to provide mental health services in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Approved by the Department Agency Head, this person will assist Peer Support Members in services and consultation as needed (e.g.

properly licensed social or mental health caseworker, counselor, psychotherapist or psychologist).

Peer Support Member: A member of the Department trained to recognize and understand stress reactions during and after critical incidents. Sworn Peer Support Member are police officers first and peer support members second; therefore, any conflicts of roles will be resolved in that context.

Peer Support Meeting: A private discussion about a stressful incident or situation held between Peer Support Members, family members or others upon request of the member.

Recipient: A member of the Department, or their family, requesting or being provided assistance through the Peer Support Team.

Peer Support Team: A team composed of Department members with specialized training in critical incident stress. The team consists of a Team Leader, an Assistant Team Leader, and Peer Support Members.

Team Leader: A Peer Support Member, chosen by the members of the Peer Support Team, in cooperation with the Department Agency Head, who oversees team trainings, schedules meetings and coordinates team activities. 4

IV. General Guidelines and Considerations

1. Peer Support Members provide assistance through proactive measures to members of the department in need of such assistance. Peer Support Members are available to assist department members involved in critical incidents occurring on or off duty, or for other emotional stressors. Said stressor may also negatively affect a member's family, persons utilizing such services may request these services for a spouse or an immediate family member.
2. Organization of a Peer Support Team may include representatives from all bureaus within the Department. Peer Team members will be selected by the Department Agency Head or designee through mutual agreement with the team guidelines and upon successful completion of peer training.
3. Participation as a Springfield Police Department Peer Support Member is a voluntary assignment. Peer Support Members are not counselors or therapists. They are to refrain from giving advice outside of their training and should consult with a mental health professional when necessary. The Peer Support Team is not an investigative unit of the Department. The Department will not question either the Peer Support Members or any other participants involved in a defusing, debriefing or other peer support activities concerning the personnel involved or the content of such events.

V. Procedures

Responsibilities

1. Peer Support Members will maintain professional standards associated with such assignment.

2. Team members are expected to remain in good standing within the SPD and to exhibit the character traits necessary to perform in this capacity.
3. Members should possess a good working knowledge of the department and perform his or her duties consistent with the values of the department.
4. Team members are expected to attend required training(s), maintain confidentiality, maintain a degree of self-awareness and monitor their own stress levels and seek appropriate ways to manage it, recognize that the Peer Support Team is not an investigative unit and avoid any potential conflicts of interest.

Confidentiality

1. Mandatory Confidentiality

It is beneficial for limits to confidentiality to be consistent with State and Federal law as well as Departmental policy. It is mandatory that Peer Support Team members maintain strict confidentiality in matters discussed during a defusing, debriefing and other peer support functions. Any recipient's statement(s) with Peer Supports who are acting in their peer support role shall remain confidential. Any violation of mandatory confidentiality will be removed from the Peer Support Team.

2. Exceptions to Confidentiality

Members of the Peer Support Team are bound to report the following incidents:

- a. The Peer Support Member has a strong belief that a recipient has committed a serious crime;
- b. The Peer Support Member believes a Recipient presents a danger to themselves or others (e.g. making threats or actions toward suicide, homicide, etc.); or
- c. The Peer Support Member believes a Recipient has committed child, spousal or elder abuse.

The Participants will be given the confidential nature, in writing, of each meeting and the exceptions to confidentiality at the beginning of every defusing, debriefing and/or meeting. Peer Support Members becoming aware of any exception will report it to the Department Agency Head or their designee as soon as possible.

Peer Support Activation

1. It shall be the responsibility of the Shift Commander or acting Shift Commander and/or the On-Scene Supervisor, to immediately contact the Peer Support Team upon one of the following types of incidents:
 - a. The unexpected death or serious injury of a Department employee or their immediately family;
 - b. Suicide of an employee;
 - c. All police shootings, or use of force incidents resulting in death or serious bodily injury;
 - d. Serious multi-casualty incidents and/or natural disasters;
 - e. Significant events involving children;
 - f. Fatal accidents involving department vehicles and/or pursuits;

- g. Prolonged incidents or rescue attempts with loss of life; or
 - h. Other critical incidents as determined by Squad Commander, Officer in Charge, Peer Support Member, or Department Agency Head.
2. It shall be the responsibility of the Team Leader(s) to provide the SPD with an updated roster of the Peer Support Members.
 3. When possible, the Peer Team members should avoid direct involvement in the incident.
 4. When any member of the Peer Support Team is requested by the proper authority to respond to a Peer Support CALLOUT during non-scheduled working hours, that member will be compensated on an overtime basis or compensated in the form of balance of overtime (BOT).
 5. An officer shall utilize and carry, or have immediately available, only department authorized weapons, restraining devices and chemical agents while on duty. The carrying and use of any unauthorized weapons, restraint devices and chemical agents when on duty is strictly prohibited.

Critical Incident Activation Procedures

If an on-duty Team member is available:

1. The Officer in Charge will confer with the available team member about an appropriate Peer Support Team response.

If an on-duty Team member is NOT available or no Team member is on-duty:

1. The Officer in Charge or their designee will notify the Team Leader of a critical incident as soon as possible.
2. If the Team Leader is not available the Officer in Charge will contact one of the Assistant Team Leaders.
3. They will discuss the situation and determine an appropriate response. Appropriate team personnel will be contacted and will respond to the incident.

Critical Incident On-Site Assistance

Team members may be requested to respond to the scene of a critical incident in order to immediately assist Department members with peer support services.

Peer Support Members who provide on-site assistance should:

1. Remain isolated from the actual incident site in order to retain their ability to provide objective assistance;
2. Not become involved in other official functions (e.g. traffic direction, taking statements, etc.) at the scene;
3. Attempt to address the physical needs of Recipients;
4. Provide appropriate beverages and/or snacks;
5. Provide shelter if needed (e.g. mobile command post);
6. Attempt to provide rest periods during long duration incidents.

Defusing:

A defusing will be held as soon as possible after a critical incident. The Peer Support Member(s) involved in the defusing will meet with the Shift Commander after the defusing to discuss the Recipient's status, including whether the Recipient requires, "down-time," reassignment or to be excused from duty.

Debriefings

A debriefing session, if deemed appropriate, will be held shortly after the conclusion of a critical incident. It shall be the responsibility of the Peer Support Team Member, in conjunction with the On-Scene Supervisor, to identify the affected officers in order to provide mentorship debriefing and/or de-fusion. The debriefing shall occur in a confidential and private setting.

The Shift Commander is responsible for:

1. Aid in scheduling the debriefing, at the most mutually convenient time for the participants.
2. Notifying the involved Department members, as well as the Peer Support Member(s) assigned to the incident, of the meeting and making any needed roster adjustments.

Department members **shall** attend debriefings of those incidents identified as critical. Members attending a debriefing session that is scheduled during a tour of duty will be excused from that tour of duty.

Follow Up Support

Peer Support Members assigned to a critical incident will continuously meet with all Recipients following the incident to ensure that any prolonged or delayed difficulties are addressed and to initiate referrals, if necessary.

Recipient Considerations

Department members receiving peer support services may voluntarily choose or reject any Peer Support Member, using any criteria they believe appropriate.

Records

Peer Support Team members will maintain a confidential record of the types of incidents that occurred and the employees involved. No notes or lists of attendees are to be taken at defusing, debriefings or other peer support functions.

Annual Reporting

The Peer Support Team Leader will complete an annual report and meet with the command staff to discuss the program and its application. Confidentiality will be maintained. The

Annual Report will consist of the following:

1. Number of Peer Support Members
2. Training provided to those members
3. Number of critical incident call-outs
4. Number of defusing and debriefing sessions
5. Number of stress management contacts
6. Total number of Peer Support Team hours expended upon activation

This will help assess the prevalence of critical incidents and stress management contacts, whether members are properly equipped with training to assist those involved in critical incidents and stressors, and whether additional Peer Support Members are needed.

Professional Mental Health Services

The Peer Support Team will work with other agencies and resources to provide additional stress management resources to Department members. These resources will also be made available to members who may not wish to utilize the Peer Support Team.

1. Mental Health Service Providers are available to all employees of this agency and their families through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or as allowed by insurance coverage. Use of these services shall be treated in the same manner as any other work-related illness or disability.
2. Peer Support Team personnel should continuously monitor personnel performance and behavior and shall be alert to behavioral indicators that suggest emotional problems. Such emotional concerns include:
 - a. Uncharacteristic or repeated citizen complaints, particularly those related to excessive force;
 - b. Abrupt changes in prescribed employee response or behavior such as excessive tardiness, absenteeism, abnormal impatience, irritability or aggressiveness or reported instances of overreaction or failure to act in the line of duty;
 - c. Irrational or bizarre thoughts or actions;
 - d. Erratic mood swings; and
 - e. Indications of alcohol or drug abuse.
3. Supervisory personnel who observe or receive information regarding the above types of behavior shall consult with the employee for an explanation and, when necessary, may confer with Peer Support Members, managers or mental health professionals for guidance.
4. Where circumstances indicate, the supervisor shall suggest voluntary self-referral to the employee. Where emotional impairment/dysfunction is suspected, either prior to or following these consultations, supervisory personnel shall determine whether an administrative referral to Mental Health professionals are warranted.
5. Under emergency conditions, when an employee's behavior constitutes a significant danger to themselves or others, a supervisor may order a direct and immediate referral for mental health evaluation. A mental health professional will be contacted for

instructions prior to the referral and transportation shall be provided for the employee.

6. In instances where supervisory personnel believe that an employee is experiencing serious or debilitating emotional or psychological problems, they shall direct that the employee be interviewed by a mental health provider.
7. Following the mental health assessment, an employee may be returned to the original duty assignment, reassigned to alternative duty, placed on temporary light duty or placed on administrative leave as deemed appropriate by the Department Agency Head or their designee.

Chaplain

The Chaplain is a resource available to all officers and employees. It also may be included in the training/activities of the Peer Team at the request of the Coordinator(s) or the Department Agency Head or their designee.

Special Considerations, Shootings and Serious Bodily Injury

The following peer support measures will take place in addition to regular procedures under the special circumstances of a line-of-duty shooting, or any other incident that involves serious bodily injury. In every instance in which an officer uses deadly force or is otherwise involved in an incident where such use of force, or other actions, results in the death or serious bodily injury to another person, the following steps should be taken:

1. At the scene, all responding officers and supervisors will display concern for the officer(s) involved in the incident and will provide any needed physical or mental first aid.
2. Responding officers will avoid any judgmental remarks.
3. The involved officer(s) will be removed from the scene as soon as possible.
4. Peer Support Members or other supportive officer will remain with the involved officer(s) to provide support.
5. An optional individual defusing session will be held with the involved officer(s) as soon as possible.
6. A supervisor will explain to the involved officer(s) what actions will occur administratively and the reasons why.
7. The Squad Commander will make arrangements with the assistance of the Peer Support Team to assist the officer in notifying his family and will provide them support.
8. All involved officers will attend a debriefing session shortly after the incident. Officers involved in such incidents will be encouraged to participate in a one-on-one debriefing with a mental health professional.
9. The Department, with the officer's consent, will screen public access (e.g. phone calls, mail and interview requests) to the involved officer(s).
10. An officer relieved from regular duty status and assigned to Administrative Leave status shall remain on leave until the investigation has concluded and their emotional needs are met. All criminal and administrative investigations will be expedited, consistent with applicable policies and statutes, and the involved officer(s) will be

advised of the outcome as soon as possible.

11. The involved officer's interests will be considered in all media releases.

Peer Support Members

1. Selection

Selection of officers to serve will be based upon, in part, prerequisite skill sets and personality attributes that are desirable for service in this capacity. Some of the factors that will be taken into consideration include the following:

- a. Education and training
- b. A demonstrated willingness to assist members of the Department who need support and advice.
- c. Officers with a positive attitude.
- d. Those that demonstrate the ability to be role models.
- e. The ability to resolve traumatic experiences.
- f. Personality attributes such as good judgement, compassion, maturity, being non-judgmental, good communication skills, personal and professional credibility.
- g. Demonstrated ability to maintain confidentiality and to seek out more advanced assistance when necessary.
- h. An ability to establish trust and rapport.
- i. A disciplinary history that does not include any conduct that would indicate that a member is unfit to serve as a Peer Support Member.

Appointment as a Peer Support Member will be made by the Department Agency Head, based upon recommendations of the Peer Support Team. Officers may be dismissed from service as a Peer Support Member for a variety of reasons including, but not limited to:

- a. Failure to attend or participate in periodic trainings.
- b. Failure to abide by the confidentiality requirements set forth within this policy.
- c. Whenever an officer goes beyond the bounds of his or her roles and responsibilities established for Peer Support Members.
- d. When a Peer Support Member is being adversely affected by the stressors of serving in the position.
- e. When in the opinion of mental health professionals and/or the Peer Support Team Leader, it might be in the best interests of the officer to withdraw from the program.

Peer Support Members shall notify their Team Leader immediately of any issues that may impact or affect their ability to operate as a Peer Support Member (e.g., personal critical incident, conflict of interest with an officer seeking services, personal or professional issues that preclude them from assuming Peer Support Member duties, etc.)

2. Training

Peer Support Team

The Team Leader, in conjunction with the OIC of training, will identify and institute mandatory specialized training for all Peer Support Members as needed. In addition, regular team meetings will be conducted to exchange information and enhance team coordination.

All Personnel

The Peer Support Team, in conjunction with the Academy Unit Commander, will identify and institute mandatory training for all personnel in mitigating and addressing stress. This training will be conducted within one year of the implementation of this policy. Team Members will also identify, as needed, training that would assist the family members of our personnel.

Supervisory Training

All supervisory personnel will attend training that includes, not only the provisions of the Peer Support Program, but also their role and responsibility to: 1) ensure that officers are aware of the resources available; and 2) identify employee behaviors which would indicate the existence of employee concerns, problems and/or issues that could impact the employees job performance and health. This training will be conducted within one year of the implementation of this policy.

Cheryl C. Clapprod
Police Superintendent

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