

Peer Support Program

333.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The San Luis Obispo Police Department recognizes that employees may be exposed to stressful and/or traumatic incidents, to which they experience significant stress related symptoms that may adversely affect their personal wellbeing and ability to perform their assigned job function. The purpose of this policy is to provide a peer support system for employees, enabling them to better manage symptoms of stress resulting from a personal or professional crisis. Decisions derived from this directive shall be made for the welfare of the employee.

A successful approach to this problem has been to provide a program which offers a non-professional (peer) support program in addition to the current professional Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The peer support program is composed of a group of employees who have been nominated by their peers and have volunteered to make themselves available to any member of the department. This program will provide another way for the San Luis Obispo Police Department employees to talk out personal and/or professional problems confidentially with someone who understands and cares.

333.1.1 MISSION STATEMENT

The Peer Support Program is a program that offers assistance and appropriate support resources to employees when personal or professional problems negatively affect their work performance, family unit or self. This assistance is confidential with the exceptions listed in section 374.3.1 below and provided it does not violate any law or department regulation.

333.2 POLICY

It shall be the policy of the San Luis Obispo Police Department to provide departmental employees with voluntary and confidential resources of support and assistance relating to personal, work, and/or critical incident stress.

The purpose of this policy is to provide all employees with the opportunity for peer support during times of personal or professional crisis. Some specific responsibilities of the Peer Support Program are:

- (a) To provide an accessible support network of employees willing to be of service to employees and their families who express a need for assistance.
- (b) To promote trust, appropriate anonymity and confidentiality for employees participating in peer support efforts.
- (c) To develop employee ability to anticipate personal conflict and awareness of available alternatives for self-help
- (d) To maintain an effective, on-going peer support training process
- (e) To provide services, upon request, to personnel off duty due to injury or illness.
- (f) To train employees in wellness, healthy habits, and wellbeing; and to provide resources for such.

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333.3 ACCESSING PEER SUPPORT

The Peer Support Team is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to all employees and other agencies when needed. There are Peer Support Team brochures available at several locations in the main station and police substations, including the briefing, report writing, and the Records Section with team member contact information included.

333.3.1 CONFIDENTIALITY

One of the most important responsibilities of the Peer Support Team is the promotion of trust, anonymity and confidentiality for employees who seek assistance from the Peer Support Team. Communication between a Peer Support Team member and an employee is considered "privileged" by the department, except for matters that involve violations of the law or serious misconduct.

Members of the Peer Support Team shall operate under the following guidelines:

- (a) It shall be mandatory that Peer Support Team Members maintain strict confidentiality in matters discussed in debriefings, defusing, meetings, and training. Any statement or discussion with Peer Support Team Members while acting in a Peer Support Team role shall remain confidential.
- (b) Types of information that are not protected by confidentiality include
 1. Information about child, spouse, or elder abuse per 11165 Penal Code.
 2. Threats of suicide or homicide
 3. Admission of criminal conduct
 4. Threats to harm another person
 5. Witness to a crime
 6. Information gathered that would require investigation per Department policy.
- (c) Peer Support Team Members shall not discuss debriefings in which they have been involved or provide any information about the team's activities except in the instances listed above and then only after consultation with the Peer Support Team Leader, Coordinator, and/or Chaplain.
- (d) The Peer Support Team is not an investigative unit of the Police Department. Therefore, except as required by law, it will not be the policy of this department to question Peer Support Team Members or any other participant involved in a CISM debriefing or defusing of a critical incident concerning the content of such discussion, unless it meets the criteria list above.

333.4 CRITICAL INCIDENTS

A "critical incident" is any event that causes an unusually intense stress reaction. The distress people experience after a critical incident may limit their ability to cope, impair their ability to adjust, and negatively impact the work environment.

Critical Incidents that should require a Peer Support response may include, but are not limited to:

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- (a) Officer involved shootings;
- (b) Where an employee witnesses another employee's death or serious injury;
- (c) Where an employee is taken hostage;
- (d) Where an employee is a witness to a suicide;
- (e) Where an employee is a witness to a violent death or serious injury;
- (f) Infant/child death
- (g) Incident that is likely to affect the employee's ability to interact with the public and carry out their job functions;
- (h) Any other incident deemed appropriate by any employee and approved by a supervisor.

333.4.1 CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS DEBRIEFING AND DEFUSING

Debriefings and defusing will be conducted by Peer support personnel as soon as practical after a critical incident. Debriefings should occur within 24-72 hours after the critical incident and will be conducted by qualified personnel. Attendance at debriefings is highly recommended for all employees involved in the critical incident.

A defusing immediately follows the critical event and generally lasts no longer than one hour. It gives all parties involved the incident the "big picture" of what occurred. It gives involved personnel a reminder about exercise, what foods to eat, to drink plenty of water and to know their thoughts are normal. Peer Support Team members may be present to give assistance and support. A defusing may eliminate the need for a formal debriefing or it may enhance the formal debriefing process. The Peer Support Coordinator and Program Advisor in consultation with the Chief of Police will decide on the need for a formal debriefing.

One certified CISM mental health professional and two to three Peer Support Team members are required to conduct a debriefing. A Chaplain is optional but is highly recommended. The debriefing may last one to six hours.

333.5 TEAM STRUCTURE

The Peer Support Program Coordinator acts as the primary liaison between the Peer Support Advisors, resource persons, Chief of Police and the department. The Program Coordinator serves as the link to ensure that the Peer Support Program is being managed by the Peer Support Advisors in accordance with the goals and objectives established for the program.

Program Coordinators - The Program Coordinator(s) should be the rank of Sergeant or higher. The Program Coordinators shall be responsible for the Peer Support Program budget and coordination of the Peer Support Team. Additionally they will:

- (a) Assist in training and selection of Peer Support Team Member

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- (b) Provide continued training in the techniques of Peer counseling, advising, and guiding
- (c) Provide guidance at debriefings.

The team may consist of the following positions:

- Peer Team Coordinator
- Peer Team Leaders
- Assistant Team Leader
- Debriefing Leader
- Debriefing Team Member
- One-on-one Team Member
- On Scene Response Team Member

333.6 ROLE OF TEAM MEMBERS

Peer Support Team Members provide support and assistance to employees in times of stress and crisis. The responsibilities of a Peer Support Team Member are as follows:

- (a) Convey trust and anonymity and assure confidentiality within policy to employees who seek assistance from the Peer Support Program;
- (b) Attend assigned Peer Support training seminars;
- (c) Provide assistance and support;
- (d) Assist the employee by referring them to the appropriate outside resource when necessary;
- (e) Be available to employees for additional follow-up support;
- (f) Maintain contact with the Program Coordinators regarding program activities;
- (g) Attend quarterly meetings;
- (h) Agree to be contacted and if necessary, respond at any hour to assist an employee in need.
- (i) Program Coordinator and Leaders will have quarterly meetings with the Chief of Police

333.6.1 PAY AND COMPENSATION

When members of the Peer Support Team are notified to respond or attend a debriefing, the following pay and compensation policies will be in effect. Whenever possible, overtime will be pre-approved by the chief or their designee. The Peer Support Program will fall under the Investigations Division for budget and accountability purposes.

- (a) If the personnel are "on-duty" they will be paid as Hours Worked;
- (b) If the personnel are "off-duty" they will submit their time to their immediate supervisor or their designee; all overtime will be preapproved by the chief or their designee.

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- (c) The pay/compensation will be the same as the guidelines set forth in the applicable Memorandum of Understanding for that Team Member.
- (d) There is no pay/compensation for being on the call-out roster.
- (e) Selection of members on the Peer Support team is not considered a special assignment as set forth in article 8 of the Memorandum of Understanding.
- (f) Members on the Peer Support Team are considered "At Will" and can be removed by the chief or their designee.

Generally, when an employee is on duty, meetings and follow-up contacts by a Peer Support Team Member will be coordinated with that employee's immediate supervisor. Consideration should be given to the employee's position, minimum staffing levels, calls for service and availability to attend meetings.

333.6.2 TRAINING

Peer Support Team Members should receive training in the following areas:

- (a) Effective listening;
- (b) Critical incident stress;
- (c) Debriefing and defusing techniques;
- (d) Post-traumatic stress;
- (e) Problem-solving skills
- (f) Relationship termination;
- (g) General assessment skills;
- (h) Referral follow-up.
- (i) Crisis Intervention Training (CIT)
- (j) Mindfulness Training

The suggested minimum training is:

- (a) 24 Hour Basic Peer Support Course;
- (b) Basic Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) course;
- (c) National Organization of Victim Assistance (NOVA) Basic Crisis Response Training
- (d) Any additional training as deemed necessary by the Chief of Police, Program Coordinators or Program Advisor.