

Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to provide a guide to organize participation in a Peer Support Program (PSP). This policy should serve as a guide and resource availability list for departments within San Diego County. It is not intended to replace individual agencies policies. The development of an agency specific Peer Support Program policy is advised. A comprehensive Peer Support Program (PSP) provides employees the opportunity to receive emotional first aid and tangible support through times of personal or professional crisis from fellow employees, who are specifically trained in peer support skills. The PSP offers a special kind of crisis intervention and support service facilitated by fellow employees, which is not always possible for mental health clinicians to provide.

The intent of the PSP is to provide county wide, as well as a departmental network representative, reflective of the Fire Departments of San Diego County work forces both in job positions and personal experiences, who are available to come to the aid of their fellow employees on a broad range of emotional or professional issues. The intent of the PSP is to be able to provide employee support for issues/traumatic event such as, but not limited to:

- Injury, illness or death of an employee or family member of an employee
- Assisting family members with an employee's death
- Hostile/Harassment workplace issues
- Violence and victims of crime
- Line of Duty Death
- Catastrophic incidents that involve multiple deaths or serious injuries
- Infant or child death or serious injury
- Marital, relationship, health, substance abuse, family, financial, employment, legal or other personnel problems
- Any incident that is likely to affect the employee's ability to interact with the public and carry out their job functions
- Any other incident deemed appropriate by any department supervisor or peer support team member
- Military and Veteran Issues
- Any emotional overwhelming event in a department members personal or professional life

Policy:

Procedures

1. The PSP is a strictly voluntary program consisting of Fire Departments of San Diego County employees who have been specially trained in stress management, crisis intervention, and communication techniques as defined by AB1116 "Grayson Peer Support Confidentiality"
2. Fire Departments of San Diego County employees will be trained and certified as peer support members to provide peer support services
3. The PSP members are not licensed counselors or therapists, but act as peer support providers offering information, guidance, and direction during emotionally charged matters, in a confidential setting
4. If it is appropriate, according to the employee's case, PSP members are then to refer the member to the proper professional provider and program for assistance
5. The peers will also work in conjunction with designated culturally competent behavioral health professionals
6. Peer support is not to be considered a substitute for professional counseling. Peer support does not replace Critical Incident Stress Debriefings (CISD) or its activation criteria

Peer Support Team Selection

1. PSP members are selected from department personnel at large. The recruiting process for the PSP shall consist of identifying those individuals who meet the following criteria:
 - a. Agree to maintain confidentiality as provided in this policy
 - b. Be empathetic and possess effective interpersonal and communication skills
 - c. Be motivated and genuinely concerned with the well-being of all fellow employees
 - d. Must be willing to attend and successfully complete training programs
2. Members of the PSP must remain in good standing, in order to continue to participate on the PSP. Circumstances that could cause a team member to be removed from the team include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Disclosing any confidential information or conversations
 - b. Repeated non-participation in programs when called upon

General Guidelines

1. Any communications a person makes to the PSP members is on a strictly confidential basis and will not be released to department members or any other person except where required by law
 - a. If the Fire Department requires a reporting system, the information that is shared shall not be specific enough that can be tracked back to the fire personnel seeking assistance
 - b. No records identifying employees who utilize the program will ever be maintained
 - c. All communications shall be in accordance of AB1116
2. PSP members are volunteers that receive department sponsored in-depth training that is ongoing
3. Members must complete initial training before being placed on the team
4. All members must adhere to the confidentiality section listed below
5. Any fire department personnel may go to a PSP member without having to notify his or her supervisor or anyone else
6. Any fire department officer or member (including administrative staff) who is made aware of any situation which may need the response of the PSP may contact the PSP Designated Department Lead directly
7. In the event that the PSP member's services are required, s/he will be available to:
 - a. Listen and talk with an employee after a critical incident or crisis
 - b. Provide information on resources available, such as designated culturally competent behavioral health professional, the Employee Assistance Program, Alcoholics Anonymous, credit counseling, Chaplain, Firestrong.org, etc.
 - c. Conduct an incident defusing or debriefing
 - d. Respond to an employee's own request for peer support or a request from an employee regarding another
 - e. Provide peer support program information to new employees
 - f. Provide peer support to employees who have suffered serious injury or long-term illnesses
 - g. Provide peer support to personnel or family during personal crisis

Program Management

1. The PSP is accountable to and overseen by a designated department lead

Designated Department Lead

1. Provide a link between the respective department program and the county wide peer support sub-committee
2. Provide feedback through the chain of command to the respective department Command Staff
3. Manage the program and coordinates the team of peers
4. Maintain an accounting of resources utilized by the program, including appropriate non-confidential data
5. Responsible for facilitating the logistical, administrative and educational needs of the program
6. Ensures strict adherence to program's confidentiality policies by all members

Training and Education

1. To ensure that any PSP member associated with the Fire Department served meets appropriate qualifications and is willing to make the desired commitment, the following standards must be met. These training standards and continuing education are guidelines and any training identified by AB 1116 shall be adhered to.
 - a. Initial Training/Education
 - i. All members of the program are required to complete either of the following trainings before being added to the team:
 - ICISF CISM (three-day course)
 - IAFF Peer Support
 - ii. All members of the PST are required to complete training in CISM (Assisting Individuals in Crisis & Group Intervention) or equivalent when provided
 - b. Continuing Education
 - i. Educational content will be identified by the Designated Department Lead utilizing a variety of factors
 - Current trends
 - Substance use/abuse
 - PTSD, etc.

- ii. Trainings will be conducted regularly or as needed when an immediate trend is identified by the Designated Department Lead
- iii. PSP members will receive ongoing training in the following areas
 - Effective Listening
 - Critical incident stress management
 - Debriefing and diffusing techniques
 - Post-traumatic stress
 - Problem solving skills
 - Relationship termination
 - General assessment skills
 - Referral and follow-up

Confidentiality

1. The Peer Support Program confidentiality shall adhere to AB1116
2. PST 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 unless required by law
3. PST members shall not divulge shared information with other employees, family members, friends, supervisors or management, or the general public except where required by law
4. No records identifying employees who utilize the program will be maintained
5. Except where required by law, peer support team members cannot receive a direct or indirect order nor be compelled to share confidential information unless written consent by the employee is expressly given
6. PST members will maintain confidentiality to ensure the nature and success of the peer program
7. It is the peer's responsibility to notify the members, before the meeting, of the circumstances they cannot hold confidential, i.e., danger to themselves or others, the member admits to illegal acts, child abuse or elder abuse, court order, legal requirements, etc.
8. If these guidelines are found to be breached, then the respective department has the right to convene and discuss the removal of the peer from the team
9. The peer may be asked to remove themselves from the PST or be removed by authority of the respective department

Definitions:

- **Traumatic Event:** Any incident which could cause severe physical or mental injury, usually due to an external agent
- **Peer Support Program:** A voluntary employee assistance program, which is designed to assist in the identification and resolution of employee concerns, and offers assistance and appropriate resource information to employees during times of personal and professional problems, which may adversely affect an employee's personal or professional well-being
- **Peer Support Program Member:** An employee who by virtue of prior experience, training, or interest, has expressed a desire and has been selected to provide support for peers