

Model Peer Support Team Policy

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The Model Peer Support Team policy is a basic framework from which law enforcement and other agencies can develop an individualized and comprehensive peer support team policy. It is a companion document to the Model Peer Support Team Operational Guidelines. The limited duplication of information in these documents is intentional.

The Model Peer Support Team policy:

1. Includes elements of peer support team policies that have worked well for many agencies over many years.
2. May be rewritten and structured to accommodate each agency's policy text format and style of writing.
3. Must be edited to incorporate relevant state statutes, existing policy, available support services, and the existing or planned structure of the agency's peer support team.
4. May be edited to include any additional topic areas desired for inclusion in a peer support team policy.
5. May be edited to delete any topic area not desired for inclusion in a peer support team policy.

* Options for alternative wording are presented in () parentheses. Notes from the author are presented in *italics*.

Model Peer Support Team Policy

PEER SUPPORT TEAM

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The Peer Support Team (PST) provides support to department personnel and their families. The PST also provides support during and following critical incidents, and assists the department licensed mental health professional as needed. *If the department has a designated licensed mental health professional.*

ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION

The PST is comprised of selected department personnel trained in peer support. It functions under the general direction of the department mental health professional, and under the specific direction of the PST coordinator and assistant coordinators.

AVAILABILITY AND TEAM RESPONSE

The PST is available 24 hours every day. PST members are accessible by direct contact or by request through Communications (Dispatch).

PST members are available to assist employees and their families with the stressors of everyday life, the cumulative stressors of law enforcement, and the issues frequently present during and following critical incidents. Any person associated with (employed by) the department may contact a member or members the PST for support with personal or work-related matters.

Critical incident on-scene support: PST members may respond or be requested to respond to the location of a critical incident or any other location to meet with incident-involved personnel.

PST members should make a reasonable effort to contact the PST coordinator prior to responding to any critical-incident-related location to engage in on-scene peer support. If this is not possible, PST members should notify the PST coordinator as soon as practical.

In the event that any personnel directly involved in a critical incident requests a particular PST member, supervisors shall make every reasonable effort to release the requested PST member from any alternate assignment so that the PST member may provide peer support to the involved employee making the request.

Absent exigent circumstances, PST members, when functioning in their peer support role, shall not be utilized for other assignments.

Supervisory referral: If it is thought that professional support or peer support would assist an employee to better manage personal or work-related stressors, supervisors may recommend that a person under their direct supervision contact the department mental health professional or the PST. Such recommendations do not constitute a supervisory order and employee contact of available support services is optional.

CONFIDENTIALITY

PST member confidentiality during peer support interactions is specified under (cite state statute if your state has a PST confidentiality statute). *The statutory provisions for PST member confidentiality should be listed. PST confidentiality statute information is included in the PST policy so that it remains readily available to department personnel.*

If your state has a PST confidentiality statute that protects information in the court system only (as in Colorado), a provision for administrative confidentiality must be included in the PST policy. Without such a provision, PSTs could not provide best-practices peer support. If your PST utilizes the PST Clinical Supervisor or the PST Clinical Advisor model, it is best to clarify the clinical oversight and supervision component of the model in the PST policy.

If your state does not have a PST confidentiality statute that specifies PST member confidentiality, it is best to specify PST member confidentiality in the PST policy. In states lacking a PST confidentiality statute, the only provision for confidentiality of peer support interactions will come from department policy.

When PST confidentiality is specified by policy only, it is important to remember that statute supersedes policy. Therefore, policy-based confidentiality is limited by state statute and may be further limited by federal, state, and municipal rules and regulations. This is especially true for rules that require the reporting of workplace sexual harassment. Information relevant to worker's compensation claims may also be affected.

Confidentiality provisions for PST members established in policy do not normally extend to court proceedings. In states without a PST confidentiality statute, during a court proceeding, PST members may be compelled to disclose information discussed in peer support interactions.

Administrative confidentiality, limits of PST member confidentiality, and a clinical oversight and supervision provision can easily be established in policy by including the following paragraph:

Information discussed in PST interactions is not subject to disclosure by PST members without the consent of the recipient of peer support, except:

- (1) Information that includes an admission of, or any information related to, criminal conduct is NOT confidential.
- (2) PST members are subject to all disclosures mandated by law (rules, and regulation).
- (3) PST members function under the clinical oversight and supervision of the PST mental health professional. This person is designated the "PST clinical supervisor." PST members have an obligation to discuss their peer support interactions with the PST clinical supervisor. Discussions between PST members and the PST clinical supervisor are confidential within the limits prescribed by law. Clinical oversight and supervision of PST members is established to help insure the highest quality of peer support.

See: Police Peer Support Teams: Questions and Answers, Model Peer Support Team Operational Guidelines, Model Peer Support Team Confidentiality Statute, and the Law Enforcement Peer Support Team Manual at www.jackdigliani.com for more information about peer support team models, the peer support role, and PST member confidentiality complexities.

TEAM SELECTION

The PST coordinator is designated by the chief (sheriff, director). The assistant coordinators are selected by the department mental health professional and the PST coordinator (the PST coordinator and PST selection committee).

Department personnel are notified when there are vacancies on the PST. Interested personnel must submit a letter of interest to the PST coordinator within the specified time limit. In the letter of interest, applicants must include (1) information about why they wish to become a member of the PST, (2) a list of any past training relevant to peer support, (3) a description of experiences relevant to peer support, (4) a brief statement about how they personally manage stress, and (5) any other information pertinent to their application.

Applications are screened by the Team Coordinator and selected members of the PST (a PST selection committee appointed by the chief). The applicants that are chosen are interviewed by the PST coordinator and selected members of the PST (members of the PST selection committee) to determine suitability. (Current PST members may provide input before an applicant is selected.) The PST coordinator submits a list of the selected applicants to the chief for final approval and appointment to the PST. Newly appointed members of the PST must complete a course of department-approved peer support training prior to engaging in peer support.

Members of the PST serve at the discretion of the chief of police (sheriff, director).

CRITICAL INCIDENTS

A critical incident is defined as an incident that is outside the norm of everyday experience. Critical incidents have the potential to cause significant physical or psychological injury.

Examples of critical incidents include but are not limited to:

1. Weapon-related incidents involving serious bodily injury or death.
2. Officer involved shootings.
3. Death of a fellow employee or former employee.
4. Assault on an employee.
5. Employee or other hostage situations.
6. Offenses involving the assault or death of children.
7. In custody deaths.
8. Exposure to suicides or significant suicide attempts.
9. Vehicular crashes that involve serious bodily injury or death.
10. Catastrophic incidents such as an airplane crash, school bus crash, a fire, flood or tornado, that causes loss of personal property, serious bodily injury, or death.

When employees are directly involved in a critical incident, they are escorted from the scene as soon as practical. Employees may request or will be assigned a member of the PST who will maintain close contact with them and provide support and assistance as necessary (in accordance with the department critical incident protocol).

Leave following a critical incident: An employee directly involved in a critical incident that does not involve the death or serious injury of another person due to the employee's actions may be granted immediate administrative leave at the discretion of a supervisor. Additional time off on sick (administrative) leave may be granted by the chief (division commander, deputy chief, director) or designee.

In incidents where an employee's actions result in the death or serious injury of another person, the employee is placed on administrative leave until the administrative investigation of the incident is completed. Administrative leave beyond the completion of the administrative investigation is at the chief's discretion.

CRITICAL INCIDENT DEBRIEFING

Critical incident debriefing is a supportive group interaction for personnel who have recently experienced a critical incident. Incident debriefings may be facilitated by (appropriately trained) members of the PST or by the PST clinical supervisor (department mental health professional) (and members of the PST). *PST member facilitated debriefings should be conducted only by those PST members trained to facilitate debriefings. PST member facilitated debriefings are not appropriate for incidents involving force-related, direct-involvement of police officers.*

PST Member Facilitated Debriefings: The PST coordinator, in consultation with the PST clinical supervisor (department mental health professional) will determine whether an incident-related PST debriefing is appropriate following any critical incident. If a PST member facilitated critical incident debriefing is appropriate, the debriefing is open to all personnel involved and/or affected by the critical incident. Participation in a PST critical incident debriefing or other group PST interaction is voluntary.

PST member facilitated critical incident debriefings must be approved by the PST clinical supervisor (department mental health professional) and shall be conducted in accordance with the PST Operational Guidelines. The identity of participants and information discussed during any PST-member facilitated debriefing or other group PST interaction are confidential within the limits prescribed by law and department policy.

PST Clinical Supervisor (Mental Health Professional) Facilitated Debriefing: Debriefings and other group interactions conducted under the facilitation of the PST clinical supervisor (department mental health professional) are confidential within the limits prescribed by law. Participation in a PST clinical supervisor (mental health professional) critical incident debriefing is voluntary.

INTERNAL AFFAIRS (ADMINISTRATIVE) INVESTIGATIONS OR SUPERVISORY INQUIRIES

Personnel involved in an internal (administrative) investigation or a supervisory inquiry that wish assistance in dealing with the stress related issues arising from the investigation or inquiry may utilize the support services of the PST clinical supervisor (department mental health professional) or uninvolved members of the PST.

PEER SUPPORT TEAM OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES

The Peer Support Team operates under the department-approved and adopted Peer Support Team Operational Guidelines.