

## **218.20 Peer Support Program**

### **I. Purpose**

The Saint Paul Police Department's most valuable resource is its employees. The Department recognizes the value of providing an in-house program for employees to deal with personal and/or professional problems. The peer support program is comprised of a group of volunteers to make themselves available to any member of the Department, allowing them to talk through problems confidentially with someone who understands and cares. A peer support program can augment, but not replace, employee assistance programs (EAPs), in-house treatment programs, and out-of-agency psychological services and resources.

### **II. Definitions**

**Critical Incident** - An incident involving any of the following situations occurring in the line of duty per departmental policy 246.09:

1. The officer(s) involved used deadly force through the discharge of a firearm.
2. Intentional or accidental use of any other deadly or dangerous weapon that results in a high probability of death, or death, as a result of police involvement.
3. Attempts to affect an arrest or otherwise gain physical control over a person for law enforcement purposes that result in a high probability of death, or death.
4. Vehicular incidents related to police actions that result in a high probability of death, or death.
5. Any incident where the Chief of Police, or designee, invokes this policy at his or her discretion.

**Debriefing** - A closed discussion of a critical incident relating to the feelings and perceptions of those directly involved prior to, during, and after a stressful event. The debriefing is intended to provide support, education, and an outlet for views and feelings associated with the event. Debriefings are neither counseling nor an operational critique of the incident.

**Defusing** - An intervention that is a shorter, less formal version of a debriefing. A defusing is best conducted by the end of a shift and before those involved go home. The main purpose is to stabilize people affected by the critical incident so that they can return to their normal routine without unusual stress.

**Mental Health Professional** - A licensed mental health therapist approved by the Chief, chosen to assist PSCs when needed.

**Peer Support Team Coordinator** - The EAP sergeant, assigned by the Chief, who reports directly to the Division Deputy Chief.

**Peer Support Clinical Lead** - A contracted mental health provider who serves as the clinical expert for the team.

**Peer Support Counselor (PSC)** - A colleague (professional staff or sworn) who is a member of the Department's Peer Support Team. PSCs are trained to provide day-to-day emotional support for Saint Paul Police Department employees and participate in the Department's comprehensive response to critical incidents. PSCs are trained to recognize and refer cases that require professional intervention or are beyond their scope of training to a licensed mental health professional.

To increase the level of comfort and openness in PSC contacts, there must be assurances that such information will be protected. There are three levels of non-disclosure of personal information to differentiate in this context:

**Privacy** is the expectation of an individual that disclosure of personal information is confined to or intended for the PSC only.

**Confidentiality** is a professional or ethical duty for the PSC to refrain from disclosing information from or about a recipient of peer support services, barring any exceptions that should be disclosed at the outset.

**Privilege** is the legal protection from being compelled to disclose communications in certain protected relationships, such as between attorney and client, doctor and patient, priest, and confessor, and in Minnesota, peer support persons and staff.

### **III. Program Composition**

The Peer Support Team will consist of Peer Support Counselors, a Peer Support Team Coordinator, and a Peer Support Team Clinical Lead. The Clinical Lead and Peer Support Team Coordinator are both appointed by the Chief and will work together to provide oversight and support to the team.

### **IV. Responsibilities**

Peer Support Team Coordinator responsibilities are as follows:

1. Schedule Peer Support team meetings.
2. Supervise the PSCs.
3. Oversee operations of the PSC team.
4. Complete the same specialized training as PSCs.
5. Coordinate and oversee training with the Peer Support Clinical Lead.

The Peer Support Team Clinical Lead's responsibilities are as follows:

1. Continuously assess the mental wellness of the Peer Support Team.

2. Consult with the Peer Support Team.
3. Debrief with the Peer Support Team.
4. Provide referrals as needed.
5. Intervene when Peer Support Team members need to escalate a situation.
6. Provide training to Peer Support Team members.
7. Attend/lead Peer Support Team meetings.

PSCs provide support and assistance to members in times of stress and crisis. The responsibilities of a PSC are as follows:

1. Convey trust and ensure confidentiality within the guidelines to employees who seek assistance from the Peer Support Program.
2. Provide emotional support during and after times of personal and/or professional crisis to employees who express the need for assistance.
3. Support employees during tragedies or critical incidents and make proper referrals to professional resources.
4. Check on employees who are off work due to extended illness or injury and provide support for those who express the need for assistance.
5. Be available to employees for additional follow-up support.
6. Maintain contact with the Peer Support Team Coordinator regarding program activities without breaching confidentiality.
7. Agree to be contacted and, if necessary, respond at any hour to assist an employee in need.
8. Attend PSC trainings and meetings.

## **V. Procedures**

PSCs are a resource available to assist Department employees through times of personal or professional stress and help him/her continue to be productive employees. PSCs are available to:

1. Respond to an employee's request for peer support.
2. Listen to an employee.
3. Provide information on available resources.
4. Conduct or assist supervisors in conducting a debriefing or defusing.
5. Respond to a critical incident and support the involved employee(s) to allow Federation representatives to focus on their administrative work.
6. Provide peer support information to new members.

Some examples of applicable activities for a PSC include the following:

1. Personal issue support
2. Professional issue support

3. On-scene support immediately following a critical incident
4. Post-critical incident support
5. EAP referrals

PSCs shall also be available to assist on any other incident at the discretion of the Chief or their designee.

PSCs who may be involved in conducting any criminal or internal investigation of another employee shall remove themselves from the peer support role on that incident to avoid any conflict of interest.

## **VI. Confidentiality**

The acceptance and success of the Peer Support Program are largely dependent upon the observance of strict confidentiality. It is imperative that PSCs maintain confidentiality of all information learned about an individual within the guidelines of this program.

Limits to confidentiality must be consistent with state and federal laws as well as Departmental policy. It is essential that PSCs advise employees, prior to any discussion, what the limitations and exceptions are regarding information revealed.

Recipients of peer support should be advised that there is no confidentiality for the following:

1. Threats to self
2. Threats to others
3. Suspected abuse or neglect of a child or vulnerable adult
4. Domestic violence
5. Where law or policy requires divulgence
6. Where divulgence is requested by peer

Disclosures under these exceptions will be made directly to the Chief or designee.

In cases where a question regarding confidentiality arises, the PSC shall immediately contact the Peer Support Team Coordinator and/or the Peer Support Clinical Lead, who will then take appropriate action.

PSCs must not provide information to supervisors or fellow peer support members obtained through peer support contact and should educate supervisors on the confidentiality guidelines established by the Department.

A PSC must not keep formal or private records of supportive contacts other than non-identifying statistical records that help document the general productivity of the program (such as the number of contacts).

PSCs will sign a confidentiality agreement, indicating their agreement to maintain confidentiality as defined above. The agreement should also outline the consequences to the PSC for any violation of confidentiality.

## **VII. Internal Investigations**

The PSC's role in disciplinary situations is one of support and assistance to the employee during the stress they may face during the disciplinary process.

PSCs assisting an employee who might become the subject of a disciplinary investigation should be guided by the confidentiality section of this policy. The PSC should not volunteer any information received in confidence. The PSC may not interject within an actual investigation, nor may they attempt to shelter the employee from the Department's investigation.

All employees of this Department charged with conducting the internal investigation of another employee shall respect the confidential conversations between PSCs and the employee being investigated. If a PSC has any questions regarding these situations, they should consult with the Peer Support Team Coordinator.

## **VIII. Role Conflict**

PSCs refrain from entering relationships if it could reasonably be expected to impair objectivity, competence, or effectiveness in performing his or her role or otherwise risk exploitation or harm to the person with whom the relationship exists. For example, PSCs avoid religious, sexual, or financial entanglements with receivers of peer support. PSCs must receive training related to handling the complexities that can develop between PSCs and receivers of peer support.

Supervisors may have additional requirements regarding the reporting of issues such as sexual harassment, racial discrimination, and workplace injury that may place the supervisor or the agency in jeopardy if the procedures are not followed. PSCs cannot relinquish their job responsibility by participating in the program. Because of potential role conflicts involved in providing peer support, including those that could affect future decisions or recommendations concerning assignment, transfer, or promotion, PSCs should not start peer support relationships with direct supervisors or direct subordinates.

A trained PSC knows when and how to refer peers, supervisors, or subordinates to another PSC member, chaplain, or mental health professional to avoid any potential conflicts of interest. This includes the recognition that many contacts between a PSC and any one individual may be an indication that a referral is needed.

If a PSC is found to have breached confidentiality, they shall be immediately dismissed from the team and be subject to disciplinary action.

## **IX. Selection Process**

PSCs are recruited from the Saint Paul Police Department's personnel at large. Personnel from all rank structures and professional staff will be considered and encouraged to apply. The recruiting process shall consist of identifying those employees who meet the following criteria:

1. Agree to maintain confidentiality as provided in this policy.
2. Be empathetic and possess above-average interpersonal and communication skills.
3. Be motivated to assist co-workers.
4. Be willing to be called out after hours to respond to critical incidents.
5. Successful completion of PSC training and evaluation by clinical lead, coordinator, and any current PSCs.
6. Be willing to attend PSC meetings.
7. Be off probation.

Employees interested in becoming a PSC must:

Submit a Peer Support Team application, two letters of recommendation, and a letter of interest. The letter of interest should include examples of times they've helped others, observations of their peer support skills, and why peers would seek out their assistance when in need of support.

Candidates must complete a screening process with the Peer Support Team Coordinator to include follow-up with the references and current supervisor.

Candidates must complete an interview with the Clinical Lead and receive a letter of support from him/her.

## **X. TRAINING**

PSCs are required to attend a PSC training course approved by the Department of Public Safety.

PSCs may be required to advance their skills through continuing training as scheduled by the Peer Support Team Coordinator.

*Effective January 17, 2025*