



Ithaca Police Department

120 East Clinton Street
Ithaca, New York 14850

General Order Number: 260

Title: Peer Support Program

Issuing Authority: Chief John Barber

Effective Date: May 11, 2015

Rescinds/Supersedes: All previously issued directives

Review Date: May 2016

Applicable NYSLEA Standards

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I. Purpose

- A. The Ithaca Police Department has recognized the value of providing an appropriate way for its employees and their families to deal with personal/professional problems. A successful method of assistance has been to provide a program which offers a non-professional peer support program in conjunction with Employee Assistance Programs (EAP).
- B. The Peer Support Program is comprised of a group of employees that have volunteered to make themselves available to any member of the department. This program shall provide an appropriate way for employees to talk about their problems with someone who understands and cares.
- C. The goal of the program is to assist employees of the Ithaca Police Department in managing stresses caused by personal or professional problems and help them continue to be productive members of the Ithaca Police Department.
- D. 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 or family. This assistance is strictly confidential, providing that it does not violate any law or department policies.

E. The Peer Support Program is intended to:

1. Provide emotional support during and after times of personal or professional crisis to employees who express the need for assistance
2. Promote trust, allow appropriate anonymity, and preserve confidentiality for people utilizing the program within the guidelines of the program
3. Develop Peer Supporters who can identify personal conflict and provide assistance or referral to alternative/professional support
4. Maintain an effective Peer Supporter training and response program
5. Support those who have experienced family tragedies
6. Check on status of illness and line of duty injuries and provide support when desired

II. Definitions

A. Critical incident – Any incident that could cause severe physical or mental injury. Critical incidents could include the following, but are not limited to:

1. Employee involved in the use of deadly force
2. Assault on an employee involving a deadly weapon
3. Hostage situation where an employee is the victim
4. Injury, illness or death of an employee or family member of an employee
5. Assisting family members with an employee's death
6. Catastrophic incidents or natural disasters
7. Cases involving the death of a child
8. Personal problems
9. Any incident that is likely to affect the employee's ability to interact with the public or perform his/her professional duties

10. Any other incident deemed appropriate by the on duty Shift Commander
 - B. Defusing – A confidential group or individual initial discussion between personnel present at a critical incident and a Peer Supporter(s). This discussion focuses on the emotional reactions of the affected personnel to the critical incident. The Peer Supporter(s) shall provide suggestions as to how to manage the critical incident stress and determine whether a debriefing is required. If a debriefing is determined to be required, date, time, and location should be given to the personnel, if practical.
 - C. Debriefing – A confidential group or individual meeting between affected personnel and Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) qualified personnel. Peer Supporters can be present at the debriefing to facilitate the discussion. A debriefing is not a finding of facts from the incident, but a method to assist personnel in managing the effects from the critical incident. Confidentiality will be maintained and access to both the defusing and debriefing will be restricted to personnel involved, Peer Supporters, and CISM qualified personnel.

III. Policy

- A. Peer Support personnel are intended to be a resource available to the department in the event of a critical incident. Peer Support personnel will be available to:
 1. Listen to another employee's reactions after a critical incident
 2. Provide information on other resources available to employees
 3. Conduct or assist in a defusing
 4. Conduct CISM debriefings
 5. Respond to an employee's request for assistance
 6. Provide peer support information to new employees
 7. Coordinate the new employee orientation/ family orientation program
- B. The Peer Support Program Coordinator shall be notified about the occurrence of any critical incident, as soon as practical, and a response will be at the discretion of the Program Coordinator.

- C. Defusing immediately follows the critical incident, when practical, and is mandatory for involved personnel. Defusing provides an over view of the event to all involved personnel and also provides suggestions on how to manage the emotions from the critical incident. A defusing may eliminate the need for a formal debriefing, or may enhance the debriefing. The Peer Support Coordinator will consult with the Chief of Police or his/her designee on the need for a debriefing.
- D. If a debriefing is determined to be required, it should occur 24 to 72 hours after the critical incident and is mandatory for all personnel involved. CISM qualified personnel shall do the debriefing and Peer Supporters may be present.
- E. Peer Support members shall not be questioned by any member of the department or otherwise, regardless of rank, on the content, nature, or outcome of any conversation/interaction between a peer and a Peer Supporter.

IV. Duties and Responsibilities

A. The Peer Support Program Coordinator shall:

1. Act as a liaison between Peer Supporters and the Chief of Police
2. Provide general supervision of the program
3. Recruit and screen Peer Supporter applicants
4. Ensure all employees are aware of the program through training and dissemination of information
5. Identify and coordinate appropriate training for the selected Peer Supporters, and maintain all records pertinent to the training
6. Act as liaison for peer support referrals, and be responsible for assigning Peer Supporters to assist peers consistent with the particular need
7. Provide guidance and assistance to Peer Supporters
8. Develop resources to assist employees when problems are identified
9. Perform outlined responsibilities in conjunction with normal assigned duties

B. Peer Supporter responsibilities shall include:

1. Advising peers seeking assistance that a Peer Supporter is not exempt from laws, rules, regulations, or policies; but any exchange of information not in violation shall be confidential
2. Advising peers that any acts or intent to harm self or others cannot go unreported
3. Advising other parties seeking information about discussions shared between a peer and Peer Supporter that the information is confidential
4. Providing short-term supportive assistance and or referral for employees, within the scope of training, knowledge, and this policy
5. Making additional referrals for assistance when deemed appropriate
6. Maintaining contact with the Peer Support Program Coordinator regarding program activity and training
7. Making contact with, and offer assistance to, employees who self-refer, or are referred by a supervisor
8. Responding at any hour, if necessary, when contacted by the Program Coordinator, and intervention is needed or requested
9. Responding to the scene of a critical incident, if requested by the Incident Commander, Shift Supervisor, Program Coordinator, or Chief of Police
10. Notifying the Program Coordinator should a peer voluntarily withdraw from the program
11. Abiding by the program policy and objectives, or be removed from participation in the program
12. Making appropriate notification to the Program Coordinator, when a Peer Supporter opts to withdraw from the program
13. Notifying the Program Coordinator should a conflict of interest arise

C. Peer Selection Process

1. Peer Supporters are recruited from the department at large.
2. The recruiting process shall consist of identifying those individuals who meet the following criteria:
 - a. Have a minimum of three (3) years of police service, and be off probation
 - b. Agree to maintain confidentiality as provided in the Peer Support Program
 - c. Be empathetic and possess interpersonal and communication skills
 - d. Be motivated
 - e. Must successfully complete the selection process
 - f. Be willing to attend and successfully complete all trainings associated with the Peer Support Program
 - g. Must be willing to attend meetings
 - h. Must be willing to respond at any hour to a critical incident

V. Referral Program

- A. The referral program is established to assist employees in dealing with the effects of stresses that may arise from personal or professional problems, and to enable the employee to recognize and resolve the unfavorable reactions to that emotion or stress.
- B. Referrals may occur as follows:
 1. An employee may personally contact any Peer Supporter, or the Program Coordinator for referral to either professional counseling or a Peer Supporter.
 2. Any employee aware of another employee who may need assistance can initiate a referral by contacting a Peer Supporter, Program Coordinator, or Supervisor. The referred employee shall be contacted to assess his/her receptiveness to the Peer Support intervention.

3. Supervisory personnel have the authority and the responsibility to recommend a Peer Supporter to an employee, when appropriate. It is to be understood that the employee's participation in the program is voluntary and he/she cannot be ordered to participate. The employee shall be assured that his/her participation in the program will remain confidential.
4. Referrals shall not be used as a disciplinary action.
5. A family member or associate of the employee may make a referral; however, participation shall remain voluntary.

VI. Confidentiality

- A. The success and acceptance of the Ithaca Police Department's Peer Support Program will be determined, in part, by the observance of confidentiality. It is imperative that each Peer Supporter maintains strict confidentiality of all information learned about an individual within the guidelines of this program.
- B. The policy of the Ithaca Police Department's Peer Support Program is to maintain the confidentiality. Communication between peers and Peer Supporters is considered confidential, except in the following matters:
 1. The peer is deemed to be a danger to self/others
 2. There is information concerning the commission of a crime
 3. In cases where law requires divulgence
 4. When the peer requests divulgence
- C. A practice for Peer Supporters to follow is to advise the peer, prior to discussion, what the limitations and exceptions are regarding the information revealed. In those cases where a concern or question regarding confidentiality arises, the Peer Supporter shall immediately contact the Program Coordinator.
- D. At no time shall notes of any type be taken or maintained by a Peer Supporter, any member of the Peer Support Program, or by the Peer Support Program as a whole.

VII. Resources

- A. Peer Supporters may utilize departmental resources for the purposes of training and fulfilling the duties outlined in this policy, with prior notification and approval.

- B. Peer Supporters may utilize any outside resources, at their discretion.