

	Administrative General Order	2.15 Peer Support	PAGE 1 OF 4
	SUBJECT		EFFECTIVE DATE
	Virginia Beach Police Department General Order Chapter 2 - Personnel Information		09/01/2009
			ORIGINATOR/REVIEW
DISTRIBUTION		CALEA: 22.1.4, 35.1.9 (A-H)	Chief's Staff
ALL			
BY THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHIEF OF POLICE:		<i>James A. Coonan</i>	

Purpose

To establish guidelines for the establishment of peer support personnel who are trained to act as informal support persons and are capable of working with a trained clinician in a critical incident stress debriefing.

Definitions (CALEA 22.1.4, 35.1.9 (A-H))

Team Coordinator - A member of the team designated to perform the administrative duties of the team. The team coordinator will be responsible for managing the team's use, funding, and training. The Chief of Police will select the team coordinator. In his duties as team coordinator the coordinator shall report directly to the Chief of Police or his designee.

Peer Support Personnel - A member of the Department who is trained to identify the normal stress reactions associated with critical incidents and in the techniques that are helpful to resolve these situations. Support personnel are also trained in department, city, state, and federal benefits available to surviving spouses and/or family. They also provide a source of informal support to members.

Critical Incident - Any situation faced by personnel that causes them to experience unusually strong emotional reactions which have the potential to interfere with their ability to function either at the scene or later. All that is necessary is that the incident, regardless of the type, generates unusually strong feelings in the personnel.

Critical Incident Stress Debriefing - Formal critical incident stress debriefings are preferably conducted after 24 hours and within 72 hours of the incident but may be done at a later time if circumstances necessitate. These meetings are confidential to the participants and include discussions of involvement, thoughts, and reactions resulting from the incident. Also discussion of typical stress-related symptoms will be included. This is not a critique of the incident. The purpose of the debriefing is to facilitate normal recovery from the incident.

Individual Consulting - Individual consulting is available at any time, as needed. One to one support is available for any area that is of concern to the initiating employee.

Lead Clinician - A mental health professional responsible for conducting liaison with health services. All clinical activities are led by a mental health clinician who has postgraduate education in the behavioral sciences and has been trained in the critical incident stress review process. Part of the responsibilities of the lead clinician is to assist in arranging and coordinating critical incident stress debriefings. The lead clinician may provide and coordinate peer support training.

Demobilization - A type of debriefing done at the scene of a critical incident. This is a quick overview of the incident designed to identify those members who may be in need of immediate additional support. A demobilization does not take the place of a critical incident stress debriefing.

Policy (CALEA 22.1.4, 35.1.9 (A-H))

A Peer Support Team has been established within the Virginia Beach Police Department. The team is established for the express purpose of assisting members of the Virginia Beach Police Department who, in the course of their duties, may become involved in a “critical incident,” to assist members in availing themselves to the Employee Assistance Program or other suitable programs necessary, and to provide informal counseling for the members well being.

Confidentiality Statement

It shall be the duty and obligation of all peer support persons to maintain strict confidentiality. Any statement or discussion with a peer support person while fulfilling his role on the Peer Support Team will remain confidential except as enumerated below. Peer support personnel are prohibited from making any notes or records while providing support.

Communication between a peer support person and an individual is considered privileged by the Department. It will be the policy of this Department not to question peer support persons for the facts surrounding a critical incident debriefing or which individuals attended. The Department will not seek any information from a peer support person in his role as peer support. Peer support persons should be of equal rank to the member being assisted. Supervisors can be a peer support person to a subordinate in certain circumstances, however, not for an incident in which the supervisor is involved in any capacity.

All Department members are to treat all discussions and attendance at a critical incident stress debriefing as confidential. Department members who violate confidentiality will be subject to disciplinary action.

Peer support persons who violate confidentiality will immediately be dismissed from the Peer Support Team and will be subject to additional disciplinary action.

Exceptions to Confidentiality

The following situations are not considered confidential and the peer counselor must report this conduct to the proper authorities:

- a. Threats of suicide.
- b. Admissions or threats of serious unlawful conduct.
- c. Admissions of child abuse.
- d. When legally served with an order to do so (court system, not from members of the Department).

Peer Support Activation

It shall be the responsibility of the on-scene supervisor to contact the E911 Emergency Communications Division supervisor, who will notify the team coordinator or his designee for the following types of incidents:

- a. Any police shooting of a serious nature.
- b. Any Department response to a serious injury or death of any member or employee.
- c. Suicide of a member or employee.
- d. Any mass casualty incident.
- e. Any time deemed necessary by the ranking supervisor on the scene.

Once activated the peer support person will respond and report to the ranking officer on the scene where he will advise the ranking supervisor of his arrival and coordinate support. Regardless of rank the peer support person exercises no command authority when performing his duties as peer support.

The peer support person will avoid direct involvement in the incident. At scenes, the peer support person exercises no command authority. The role of the peer support person is to provide support to the member(s). He does not provide legal counsel. Peer support personnel should attempt to focus their attention toward members or employees of this Department. Peer support persons should call out a police chaplain for assistance. The peer support person will be the same rank as the member being assisted.

One to One Contacts

Any member of the Department may approach any peer support person at any time. Individual support done off duty is encouraged but such meetings are purely voluntary on the part of the support person and individual. These meetings must be mutually agreed upon by both parties.

Peer support personnel may approach any member of the Department during the member's normal tour of duty. The decision to speak with a peer support person rests solely with the Department member. It is of paramount importance that involvement with a peer support person be voluntary.

All contacts and conversations with peer support personnel are strictly confidential except as previously enumerated.

Critical Incident Stress Debriefings

Any member or employee of the Department can initiate a debriefing by contacting a peer support person. Supervisors and peer support persons are responsible for identifying the need for a debriefing and shall contact the team coordinator. Requests for a debriefing should be made within 24 to 72 hours of the incident. The lead clinician shall determine if Department members should be utilized in the debriefing. If other counselors other than Department members are used then the lead clinician shall be responsible for notifying these individuals.

Debriefings will be made available for all personnel involved in the incident. All personnel involved in the incident have a valuable contribution to make to the recovery process. Although each individual's need for a review may vary, the participation of all is an important aspect of this psycho education process. Members who attend the debriefing may leave at anytime during the debriefing.

Commanding officers and peer support persons in each precinct/command/division shall be responsible for notifying personnel of the debriefing.

Members attending debriefings are eligible for overtime compensation in accordance with the Department's overtime policy. Peer support persons can sign overtime slips for attendance.

Demobilizations

These exercises are short debriefings done to determine if any member is in need of immediate additional support. Should such immediate support be needed then the peer support person will make the necessary arrangements. If additional peer support is needed, then the peer support person will contact the team coordinator and make the necessary arrangements.

Entry Into the Unit

The unit is open to all officers, regardless of rank, seniority, or assignment. To assure that there are sufficient peer support persons in each command the suggested minimum is set as following:

<u>Command</u>	<u>Suggested Minimum Number of Peer Support Personnel</u>
First Precinct	3 Officers, 1 Supervisor
Second Precinct	4 Officers, 1 Supervisor
Third Precinct	4 Officers, 1 Supervisor
Fourth Precinct	4 Officers, 1 Supervisor
Special Operations	2 Officers, 1 Supervisor
Special Investigations	2 Officers, 1 Supervisor
Staff/Admin.	2 Officers, 1 Supervisor
Detective Bureau	5 Detectives, 2 Supervisors
Animal Control	2 Officers
Communications	6 Officers, 1 Supervisor
PDO's	1 Officer
Community Relations	2 Officers, 1 Supervisor
PD&T	2 Officers

Officers who are interested in becoming a peer support person shall submit their request via the chain of command to the team coordinator. Interviews with at least the team coordinator will be required prior to appointment to the team. It is desired to have the Peer Support Team as a whole be a reflection of the whole Department.

Serving on the team is a purely voluntary assignment. Officers may resign from the team at any time for any reason. Officers may be removed from the team if their duties, assignment, or any other reason creates an inability to function with the team. Resignation or removal from the team shall not be viewed by superior officers as a failure on the part of the officer. This is a purely voluntary assignment.

Peer support personnel are not on standby. They are not required to respond to any situation. The decision to respond when called rests solely with the individual called.

Peer support persons who do respond to any off duty callout shall be eligible for overtime compensation in accordance with Department policy.

Peer support personnel must be trained to minimum state standards prior to their use as peer support as determined by the lead clinician.

Peer support personnel must maintain minimum state standards of training to remain in the assignment. It is the responsibility of the team coordinator to assure that all peer support personnel meet training standards. The team coordinator will supply a current list of all peer support personnel to the Communications Division.

Police Chaplains

The police chaplains will be considered a part of the Peer Support Team. On a voluntary basis they will be invited to participate in team training, including the techniques of critical incident stress debriefing. Chaplains are authorized to participate in all critical incident stress debriefings. Chaplains provide an excellent resource; the team coordinator will liaison between the Peer Support Team and the Chaplains Program.