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	SUBJECT		EFFECTIVE DATE
	<b>Virginia Beach Police Department General Order</b> <b>Chapter 2 - Personnel Information</b>		<b>03/24/2020</b>
			ORIGINATOR/REVIEW
DISTRIBUTION		CALEA: 22.1.4, 35.1.9 (A-H)	Chief's Staff
ALL			
BY THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHIEF OF POLICE: PWN			

## 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 their duties as team coordinator the coordinator shall report directly to the Chief of Police or their 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 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** - An incident that induces an abnormally high level of negative emotion in response to a perceived loss of control. Such an incident is most often related to a threat to the well-being of the public safety employee or to the well-being of another individual for who such employee has some obligation of personal or professional concern.

**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. Discussion of typical stress-related symptoms will also be included. The purpose of the debriefing is to facilitate normal recovery from the incident. The Critical Incident Stress Debriefing should not be considered a critique of the incident.

**Individual Consulting** - Individual consulting is available at any time, as needed. One on one support is available for any area 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 meets the requirements stipulated in State Code 32.1-111.3. The lead clinician will assist in developing and providing 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))**

An accredited 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 member’s well-being. It will be the responsibility of the peer support coordinator to maintain the team’s accreditation status with the Virginia Department of Health pursuant to State Code 32.1-111.3.

**Confidentiality Statement**

It shall be the duty and obligation of all peer support personnel to maintain strict confidentiality. Any statement or discussion with a peer support person while fulfilling their 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 acting in their 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.

However, there are some exceptions to this confidentiality.

It is important to realize that when the Peer Support services involve a group setting the privileges enumerated in State Code 19.2-271.4 will most likely **NOT** apply. The Peer Support member leading these sessions will discuss this as well as the administrative exceptions to confidentiality.

**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).

When the peer support services involve a critical incident, State Code 19.2-271.4 provides certain privileges. The peer support team member shall not disclose or be compelled to testify about any information communicated to them during peer support interactions with the following exceptions:

1. When criminal activity is revealed;
2. A member of the peer support team is a witness or a party to a critical incident prompting the peer support services;
3. A member of a critical incident stress management or peer support team reveals the content of privileged information to prevent a crime against any other person or a threat to public safety;
4. A member of a critical incident stress management or peer support team is not acting in the role of a member at the time of the communications.

**Peer support members should consider advising employees of these exceptions when conducting peer counseling.**

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

**Peer Support Activation**

It shall be the responsibility of the on-scene supervisor to contact the Emergency Communications and Citizen Services, who will notify the team coordinator or their 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 or death of a member or employee.
- d. Any mass casualty incident.
- e. Anytime deemed necessary by an employee and approved by a supervisor.

At any time if a member of this department recognizes signs or symptoms in their fellow employee indicating they could benefit from peer support services they should approach a supervisor or a peer support member for support.

The peer support coordinator will notify Emergency Communications & Citizen Services who will be covering peer support team management when they are not available to coordinate services. Once activated, the responsible peer support person will respond and report to the ranking scene supervisor of their arrival and coordinate the peer support activities. Regardless of rank, the peer support person exercises no command authority when performing their duties as peer support.

The role of the peer support person is to provide support to the member(s) and should not provide legal counsel. Peer support personnel should attempt to focus their attention toward members or employees of this Department. Peer support persons should consider calling out a police chaplain and other appropriate supporting assistance if the employee desires their support. When possible, the peer support person should be the same rank as the member being assisted.

**One to One Contacts**

Any member of the Department may approach a peer support person at any time. Individual support conducted 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 the involvement with a peer support person be fully 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 member. 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 timely in an effort to hold the session within 24 to 72 hours of the incident.

Debriefings will be made available for all personnel involved in the incident. Any member involved in the incident may be required to attend the debriefing, but they will not be required to participate. 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.

The peer support member that coordinates the debriefings shall be responsible for working with the precinct/command to assure all of the involved officers are notified of the location and time of the debriefing. When the incident involves a criminal investigation the scheduling of these briefings will be made after consulting with the detective bureau.

Members attending debriefings are eligible for overtime compensation in accordance with the Department's overtime policy.

### **Demobilizations**

These exercises are short debriefings conducted, by trained peer support members, to determine if any member is in need of immediate additional support. Should such immediate support be needed then the peer support member will make the necessary arrangements with the peer support coordinator.

### **Entry into the Unit**

The unit is open to all officers, regardless of rank, seniority, or assignment.

Officers who are interested in becoming a peer support member 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 reflect the demographics of the entire police department and for this reason the members will be diverse with assignment across the entire organization.

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 and an employee can be removed from the team if they have disciplinary or performance issues.

Peer support personnel are not on standby and are not required to respond to any situation. The decision to respond when requested 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.

All peer support members will be trained prior to joining the team and 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 Emergency Communications & Citizen Services. They will also be responsible for updating the peer support listing distributed to the entire department.

**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 provide an excellent resource and the team coordinator will serve as a liaison between the Peer Support Team and the Chaplains Program.