

PEER COUNSELING & CRITICAL INCIDENT SUPPORT UNITS	Document Number	GO 533
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1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide all department personnel with a voluntary and confidential resource of support and assistance relating to personal, work, and/or critical incident stress.

2. PERSONS AFFECTED

All department personnel.

3. POLICY

3.1. The Peer Support Unit is a voluntary and confidential resource for all departmental personnel, which provides support and assistance for work-related problems.

3.2. The Critical Incident Support Unit is a voluntary and confidential resource for all departmental personnel, which provides debriefings and defusing for critical incidents and/or other situations.

3.3. The Peer Support Unit and Critical Incident Support Unit provides assistance when the employee is in immediate danger of hurting themselves or others due to substance abuse.

4. DEFINITION

4.1. Administrative Liaison – The member of the Peer Support Unit designated to coordinate training, policies, practices, and other administrative issues through the office of the Police Chief.

4.2. Critical Incident – Any significant event that may result in a strong emotional reaction and which has potential to affect an employee’s ability to cope. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- 4.2.1. Line-of-duty deaths.
- 4.2.2. Line-of-duty serious injuries.
- 4.2.3. Employee suicides.
- 4.2.4. Disasters/multi-casualty incidents.

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- 4.2.5. Officer-involved shootings.
- 4.2.6. Significant events involving children.
- 4.2.7. Incidents involving victims who are relatives or friends.
- 4.2.8. Events with excessive media coverage.
- 4.2.9. Events life-threatening to responders.
- 4.2.10. Civilian deaths that occur during police operations, and cumulative significant events that occur within a short time period.

- 4.3. Critical Incident Support Unit – A group of Peer Support Unit Members who have received training in counseling and in providing emotional and moral support to law enforcement officers or emergency services personnel who have been involved in emotionally traumatic incidents by reason of their employment and are certified and approved by the Police Chief to respond to critical incidents for the purpose of debriefing and defusing.
- 4.4. Debriefing – A group meeting (preferably within 48-72 hours) to relieve the impact of a critical incident; this is not an operational critique.
- 4.5. Defusing – A group meeting (preferably within 3-4 hours), shortened version of a debriefing, offering information, support, an initial venting of feelings, and the assessment of the need for a debriefing.
- 4.6. Peer Support Unit – A group of peers trained in providing support and assistance for work related problems.
- 4.7. Steering Committee – Designated members from the Peer Support and Critical Incident Support Units that meet to discuss issues pertaining to the operation and practices of the units.

5. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

- 5.1. The units are tied administratively to the Police Chief through an Administrative Liaison. However, the Peer Support and Critical Incident Support Units are autonomous elements recognized and supported by the department.

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- 5.2. Participation in the Peer Support and Critical Incident Support Units are voluntary and open to department personnel, retirees, Police Reserve Officers, and Police Chaplains.
- 5.3. The Peer Support and Critical Incident Support Units are governed by a Steering Committee and managed by a Peer and Critical Incident Support Unit Coordinator who also serves as the Steering Committee Chairperson.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVILEGED COMMUNICATION

- 6.1. Peer and Critical Incident Support Unit members shall adhere to the strictest standards of confidentiality and not discuss any information divulged in support, debriefing and defusing sessions, except as required by section 7. Duty To Report.
- 6.2. Trained peer support personnel are bound by privileged communication as established by existing statutes at the time of disclosure.

7. DUTY TO REPORT

- 7.1. Peer and Critical Incident Support Unit members shall immediately report to the Police Chief or designee:
 - 7.1.1. Any threat of suicide or homicide made by a participant in a peer support counseling session or any information conveyed in a peer support counseling session relating to a threat of suicide or homicide;
 - 7.1.2. Any information relating to abuse of spouses, children, or elderly, or other information that is required to be reported by law;
 - 7.1.3. Any admission of criminal conduct;
 - 7.1.4. When there is reason to believe that the person intends serious self-injury or injury to another person; or
 - 7.1.5. When the employee is in immediate danger of hurting themselves or others as evidenced by the display of abnormal behavior, including (but not limited to) delusional or threatening verbalization as a result of substance abuse or personal/emotional issues.

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8. PROVISIONS FOR PEER SUPPORT ASSISTANCE

- 8.1. The initial contact can be made either by the person seeking support or by unit members through peer referrals.
- 8.2. Persons have the right to refuse peer assistance.
- 8.3. No compensation for support sessions will be given to the peer members or the person seeking assistance.
- 8.4. The role of members of the Peer/Critical Incident Support Unit is to render emotional support.
- 8.5. When problems are acute or appear to require specialized assistance, information on referral resources will be made available to those seeking help.
 - 8.5.1. Resources include those available through the County Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or other Professional Services contracted by the Department.
- 8.6. Supervisors who are on duty and who are peer volunteers cannot abdicate their supervisory responsibilities, but may make referrals to other peer support members.

9. CRITICAL INCIDENT PROCEDURES

- 9.1. The Critical Incident Support Unit Coordinator shall be notified as soon as possible whenever a critical incident occurs.
 - 9.1.1. The supervisor in charge of the incident through the dispatch supervisor is responsible for the notification.
 - 9.1.2. Notification may be made by the responsible field supervisor, unit supervisor, communications supervisor, or by any employee who feels that a critical incident has occurred.
- 9.2. The Critical Support Unit Coordinator or designee will assess the situation and apprise the element commander of the recommended course of action.
 - 9.2.1. It shall be the duty of the Commander to determine if a defusing or debriefing session is immediately necessary.

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- 9.3. If a defusing or debriefing is necessary, all employees involved in the incident will attend.
- 9.3.1. Defusing should be conducted within three or four hours of the incident, before personnel leave for the day.
- 9.3.2. Debriefing should be conducted between 48 and 72 hours after the incident.
- 9.3.3. If any part of the approved defusing or debriefing for a critical incident is conducted after the regularly scheduled tour of duty, overtime will be paid to attendees.