
Peer Support Team

1052.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The mission of the Peer Support Team is to provide information and emotional support to employees and their families when personal or professional problems may affect them. Official interactions are confidential, providing it does not violate any law or Department regulation. The Peer Support Team may supplement the Department psychologist. The Team is specifically trained for support with Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM), but is not a substitute for mental health professionals.

1052.2 DEFINITIONS

Critical Incidents – A significant situation or traumatic event faced during the course of law enforcement duties that may cause unusually strong emotional reactions, which may overwhelm an individual's coping skills and has the potential to interfere with their ability to function either at the scene or at a later time.

Examples of critical incidents include, but are not limited to; officer involved shootings, line of duty deaths, serious injury to self or other officers in the performance of their duties, suicide of an officer, mass casualty (disaster) event, death of children, hostage taking, barricaded subject with a specific danger to personnel, a prolonged event that ends in a loss of life, or any other events identified by the Chief of Police, or designee, as a traumatic critical incident under this policy.

Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) – The CISD is a structured group discussion designed to mitigate or resolve the psychological distress associated with a critical incident. The process provides information on potential stress symptoms and coping techniques and helps personnel work through their own thoughts, reactions and symptoms. The CISD is facilitated by a specially trained team that includes mental health professionals and peer support personnel.

Peer Support Counselor/Personnel – Personnel who have been specially trained in crisis intervention and stress management techniques to provide emotional and moral support and counseling to other Department personnel and to know when and how to intervene in crisis situation or when to make referrals to a qualified mental health professional. Support may be provided when an officer needs those services due to involvement in a critical incident, day-to-day stressors or working in a high stress environment. Services include one-on-one peer support, crisis intervention group meetings and on-scene support.

1052.3 CONFIDENTIALITY

RCW 5.6.060 (6)(a) states, "A peer support group counselor shall not, without consent of the law enforcement officer or firefighter making communication, be compelled to testify about any communication made to the counselor by the officer or firefighter while receiving counseling. The counselor must be designated as such by the Sheriff, Police Chief, Fire Chief, or chief of the Washington State Peer Support Team, prior to the incident that results in counseling. The privilege only applies when the communication was made to the counselor while acting in his or her capacity

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as a peer support group counselor. The privilege does not apply if the counselor was an initial responding officer or firefighter, a witness, or a party to the incident which prompted the delivery of a peer support group counseling services to the law enforcement officer or firefighter.”

Team members must inform Department members of the limits of their confidentiality and consider potential role conflicts (e.g., supervisor providing peer support). Exceptions to confidentiality may include the following:

- Threats to self
- Threats to others (specific)
- Crimes
- Child, spousal or elder abuse

1052.4 GOALS

- Provide a timely onsite response to support members involved in a critical incident.
- Provide post-incident support to affected members.

1052.5 PEER SUPPORT TEAM STRUCTURE

The team shall consist of:

1. A Lieutenant will have administrative responsibility for the team and report to the Chief of Police. The Lieutenant will serve as the chair of the Team.
2. A Sergeant will have supervisory responsibility of the Team. The Sergeant will serve as the co-chair of the Team.
3. The Peer Support Team Psychologist will maintain clinical oversight, facilitate demobilizations, defusing and debriefings. The Psychologist will provide evaluations and assist the team supervisors in team functions, training and meetings.
4. Team members who have received the mandatory, certified CISM training to assist affected officers. The number of sworn and civilian members of the Team may vary depending on the needs of the Department.
5. Steering committee team members are chosen based on training and experience in critical incident stress management. The steering committee is separate from the Team, but can become members by following the same selection process listed in this policy. The steering committee is responsible for the management and monitoring of the Peer Support Team over the long term. The steering committee will meet as often as needed to review after-action incidents, policy updates, legal updates or any strategic planning the unit needs.

1052.6 PEER SUPPORT TEAM RESPONSIBILITIES

In the event of an Officer-Involved-Shooting (OIS) incident, the Peer Support Team is able to assist officers.

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1. A Peer Support Team member may be assigned to assist with the involved member throughout the entire OIS process.
2. Ensure the officer is comfortable and provide them with food and drink.
3. Remind involved officer to make appropriate family notifications.
4. Visually inspect the involved officer for injuries or other damage to uniform or equipment that occurred during the incident.
5. Coordinate with the investigation for retrieval and return of any personal property left at the scene belonging to the involved officer.
6. Coordinate replacement of the officer's clothing if taken as evidence.
7. Explain the post OIS process to the involved officer in accordance with **Policy 309 - Officer Involved Shooting**.
8. Arrange for transportation for the involved officer and the officer's family as needed.
9. Coordinate and provide individual and group debriefs as necessary.
10. Work with District/Division Lieutenant to ensure reasonable notice for all scheduled appointments.

1052.7 PEER SUPPORT TEAM ACTIVATION

When a situation occurs which has a high probability of creating critical incident stress, a Peer Support Sergeant, Incident Commander or command level officer may activate the Team.

A Peer Support Sergeant, or designee, shall notify the Team lieutenant and the necessary team members. A Peer Support Sergeant, or designee, shall provide oversight of all Team assignments and coordinate with the Incident Commander.

1052.8 ADMINISTRATION

1. Individuals receiving peer support may voluntarily choose or reject a team member by using any criteria they believe is important. They may also decline services provided by the Peer Support Team.
2. The team may not hamper or impede a disciplinary process of an affected employee.
3. Candidates for Peer Support Team should be selected based on their ability to actively listen, level of credibility with their peers, experience, maturity, judgement, motivation and recommendation by their supervisor.
4. The selection process will follow the specialty unit selection policy of the Vancouver Police Department.
5. Team members should be allowed a leave of absence from the Team when personal or professional conflicts arise.

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6. Team members should avoid conflicting peer support relationships.
7. Team members will be compensated per the Vancouver Police Officer's Guild contract for training, meetings and call-outs by approval of a command level officer.
8. Peer Support Team members will not be issued take home vehicles for this collateral duty.

1052.9 TRAINING

All team members shall attend and receive the basic International Critical Incident Stress Foundation certified training prior to actively counseling or coordinating a critical stress incident.

Ongoing training will be conducted for Team members as necessary. The training should involve continued education in topics such as, but not limited to:

- Officer Involved Shooting Peer Counseling
- Enhancing Interpersonal Communication Skills
- Stress Management Techniques
- Dealing with Depression
- Developing Healthy Relationships
- Drug and Alcohol Abuse
- Compulsive Behaviors
- Critical Incident Stress
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Grief and Bereavement
- Suicide Prevention