

City of Johns Creek Police Department

<i>Subject:</i> Peer Support Team Assistance Program		<i>Number:</i> 04-29
<i>Reference:</i> See also Specialized Assignments		<i>Amends:</i>
<i>Effective:</i> 09/21	<i>Review Date:</i> Annually	<i># of Pages:</i> 11

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish an “In-House” Peer Support Team Program to provide peer-support for employees and their families. The City of Johns Creek Police Department Peer Support Team is available to listen, support, refer, and assist employees during professional or personal, stressful, or difficult periods in life.

SCOPE

This policy is applicable to all personnel.

DEFINITIONS

Critical Management Briefing (CMB): An information group crisis intervention technique for small or large groups. The goals of the CMB is to provide information, guidance, instructions, control rumors, reduce chaos, coping suggestions, facilitate follow-up care, and provide referral information.

Critical Incident: Any incident, action, or event, which has the potential for producing significant emotional trauma that may adversely affect the psychological well-being of personnel. A Critical Incident may include, but is not limited to:

- Officer involved shooting that results in death or serious injury to anyone
- Officer involved vehicular pursuit/crash that results in death or serious injury to anyone
- Any other employee involved incident that results in death or serious injury to anyone
- Traumatic death of an employee
- Critical incidents involving children
- Any other incident where employees witness or are involved in a traumatic event
- Incidents involving:
 - Unusually large numbers of victims

- Victims who are familiar to or have a special relationship with involved employees
- Prolonged, stressful involvement of employees
- Special or unusual media attention

Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM): A collection of recognized psychological techniques used by both trained lay personnel (Peers) and professionals (MHP) to provide care for personnel exposed to potential or actual traumatic incidents. It emphasizes both individual and facilitated small group discussions among impacted persons and caregivers.

It is a strategic intervention system that possesses numerous tactical interventions. CISM has foundations in Incident Command Systems in that there is common terminology, dispatch/deployment logistics, integration of tactical operations, and incident management.

Critical Incident (Peer) Support: Available to all Police Department personnel and their immediate families after a Critical Incident. The techniques are recommended for all persons exposed to traumatic situations.

Peer Counselor: An employee of a law enforcement agency who has received training to provide emotional and moral support to a client and was designated by a sheriff, police chief, or other head of a law enforcement agency to counsel clients.

POLICY: (04-29)

The City of Johns Creek Police Department recognizes the value of providing an “in-House” resource for employees and their family members to support them in managing both professional and personal crisis. The Peer Support Team Assistance Program is a program that offers assistance and appropriate support resources to employees when personal or professional problems negatively affect their work performance, family unit or self. Communications between the support team and employees will be confidential in accordance with section 04-29-06 of this policy.

When approved by the Chief of Police, the Peer Support Team will work in cooperation with Peer Support Teams of other agencies and/or departments in multi-agency and/or multi-departments incidents.

The Peer Support Team Assistance Program is established to:

1. Provide emotional support during and after times of personal or professional crisis to employees who need assistance;
2. Promote trust, allow anonymity, and preserve confidentiality for persons using peer support within the guidelines of the program;
3. Develop members who can identify personal conflicts and provide guidance or referral to professional/alternate resources as required; and
4. Maintain an effective peer support training and response program.

PROCEDURES

A. Staffing (04-29-01)

The Peer Support Team will consist of the following members:

1. Team Commander:

The Team Commander will be selected by the Chief of Police and should be the rank of Captain or higher. The Team Commander oversees the administrative duties of the program.

2. Team Leader

The Team Leader should be the rank of Sergeant or higher. The final selection will be made by the Chief of Police. The Team Leader is responsible for the day to day operations of the Team. He/she will ensure all team members are properly trained and have the necessary equipment/supplies to perform their duties.

3. Mental Health Professional (MHP)

The (MHP) will be a licensed Clinician with exceptional experience dealing with police and/or first responder issues. His/her duties shall consist of:

- a. Assist in training and selection of Peer Support Team Members
- b. Provide continued training in the techniques of Peer counseling;
- c. Provide guidance at debriefings

4. Team Members

Team Members will be selected and trained as described in this policy, and should be the rank of Sergeant and/or below.

B. Team Leader and Member Selection (04-29-02)

1. The Chief of Police will post a Department wide notice of vacancy for positions in the Peer Support Team.
2. Department members will submit a memorandum to the Chief of Police through their chain of command which indicates their interest in the Team.
3. The Team Commander will convene a Board which will review each candidate's work history and will consider any supervisory comments, awards, quality recognitions, commendations, disciplinary actions or other enclosures that reflect upon the candidate's judgement, maturity, and ability to communicate with people. The Board shall be composed of personnel ranking Sergeant or above; along with the Mental Health Professional.

4. The following minimum requirements must be met for personnel to be eligible for the Peer Support Team:
 - a. Completion of the probationary period with the Johns Creek Police Department
 - b. No formal disciplinary actions for a period of 12 months
 - c. Letter of recommendation from the employee's Unit Commander
5. Specific criteria for consideration will also include, but are not limited to the following:

The candidates:

 - a. Basic Listening and empathy skills
 - b. Exposure to critical incidents
 - c. Motivation for becoming a Team Member
 - d. Standing in the Department
 - e. Ability to maintain Confidentiality
 - f. Non-judgmental approach to personal behavior, lifestyles and personal problems
 - g. Ability to recognize common crisis indicators (e.g.: depressions suicidality and substance abuse)
 - h. Willingness and availability to attend training sessions and regularly scheduled meetings
 - i. Patrol or equivalent field experience
 - j. Willingness to respond to a call-out after normal duty hours
6. The date the oral interview is administered shall serve as the cut-off date for all minimum eligibility requirements.
7. The Team Commander will consult with the MHP and then forward the Boards' findings/recommendations to the Chief of Police who will make the final selections.

C. Training (04-29-03)

1. Team Members shall complete a course of formal training and shall attend regular training sessions as necessary but at a minimum bi-annually. In addition, Team Members should receive training in the following areas:
 - a. Effective Listening;
 - b. Critical Incident Stress;
 - c. Debriefing and Defusing Techniques;
 - d. Post-Traumatic Stress;

- e. Problem-Solving Skills;
 - f. Relationship Termination;
 - g. General Assessment Skills;
 - h. Referral Follow-up; and
 - i. Other Training as Specified During Quarterly Meetings.
2. The City of Johns Creek Police Department will provide all employees with training pertaining to the negative physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions that may occur following a Critical Incident and the uniform procedures contained in this policy. This training will be provided to new employees during orientation period and updates will be offered every two years for all personnel.
 3. Supervisors will be trained to identify physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioral reactions to Critical Incidents.
 4. Supervisors are responsible for making available to their personnel information about the department's peer support and chaplain's services.

D. Peer Support Team Response (04-29-04)

It is the duty and responsibility of every employee to be alert to the need for a colleague to be referred to the program so that timely peer support and /or professional assistance may be offered.

1. Interventions:

- a. **One on One:** When an employee is experiencing signs or symptoms of Critical Incident Stress, or when an employee wishes to speak to a Team Member for any reason. One on One counseling is a structured, peer driven individual discussion of a Critical Incident that integrates crisis intervention strategies with the educational techniques for coping with stress. Critical Incident one-on-one support is not a critique of the Police Department's operations. Performance issues will not be discussed. The one-on-one process provides a format in which personnel can discuss their feelings and reactions and thus reduce the stress resulting from exposure to Critical Incidents. All one-on-one support sessions will be strictly confidential except in rare cases where state law does not allow (see O.C.G.A. 24-5-510). One-on-one support should normally be conducted within a week after an incident. The support session is confidential and voluntary.
- b. **On-Scene Support:** When a Team Member is called to assess the on-scene personnel for possible signs and symptoms of Critical Incident Stress. The Team Members should evaluate the need for demobilization, defusing, debriefing or other related services.

- c. **Demobilization/Crisis Management Briefing (CMB)**: For major events with prolonged on-scene times or large deployments of personnel. The goals of the CMB is to provide information, guidance, instructions, control rumors, reduce chaos, coping suggestions, facilitate follow-up care, and provide referral information. A brief informational session may be held before personnel are returned to normal status. The secondary function may be to assess the need for further debriefings and other related services.
- d. **Defusing**: Primarily an informational meeting that provides an update on the incident in a group setting and involves those closely involved with the incident. The discussion may include information on injuries, as well as a brief review of stress-related symptoms and how to manage them. The Defusing takes place immediately or relatively soon after a Critical Incident (usually within 8 hours of the incident). Defusing is not a critique of Department operations. The defusing process provides a format in which personnel can discuss their feelings and reactions and thus reduce the stress resulting from exposure to Critical Incidents. All Defusing sessions will be strictly confidential. Although attendance may be mandatory, participation for those involved is voluntary. All matters discussed with involved employees will be kept strictly confidential. No notes or other records will be made of any defusing and no reports or communication will be made.
- e. **Debriefing**: May be used to mitigate the impact of a crisis or other traumatic event. Debriefing can also be useful in accelerating the recovery process of personnel and to identify any need for follow-up action, or referral to other providers. The need for a debriefing should be determined by a Team Member and provided within 72 hours of an incident.

Debriefing is meant to be a structured, peer driven, group discussion of Critical Incident crisis intervention strategies with educational techniques for coping with stress. It is a format that allows personnel to discuss their feelings and reactions, and thus reduce the stress resulting from an exposure to a critical incident. It is not a critique of Police Department operations, and performance issues will not be discussed. Debriefing will be strictly confidential and while attendance may be required, participation is voluntary.

2. Team Response Procedures (04-29-05)

The Peer Support Team will make every effort to respond to every Critical Incident, as described above, involving Department personnel. The Team Leader will determine the nature of the initial response and the nature of any additional or ongoing response based on the best available estimate of the situation. Unless it is clearly unnecessary, face to face contact between a Peer

Support Team member and a potentially impacted employee will be the preferred means of first response. Peer Support Team members will inform supervisors that support was offered to an employee, but details of the situation will not be discussed. Confidentiality between the Peer Support Team and the employee are a priority.

Supervisors who are notified of or become aware of a need should begin the Peer Support Team response process during or as soon as possible after a Critical Incident. Supervisors should arrange for Peer Support Team response by contacting the Team Leader while impacted personnel are on-duty or minimally within 24 hours of the incident.

***Note:** It is best to conduct the initial meeting with an impacted person within 24 hours and not later than 72 hours following the incident for maximum benefit.*

Any employee who identifies a Critical Incident may initiate a response by contacting their supervisor. The supervisor should contact the Team Leader to assist in evaluating the need for Peer Support and/or professional support.

If an employee, who is a direct report to the Team Leader requests assistance from the Peer Support Team, the Team Commander will assume the duties of the Team Leader.

Peer Support Team members involved in a Critical Incident shall not be utilized to provide Peer Support for that incident. Adherence shall avoid any conflict with O.C.G.A. 24-5-510 (c) (3).

The Team Leader shall summon Peer Support Team members determined to be the best suited to respond to the incident. This may include requesting Peer Support from another law enforcement agency.

Supervisors shall request Peer Support Team assistance to Critical Incidents as defined above.

Team Members shall not interfere with the investigation or incident management. Team Members shall confer with the on-scene commander or primary investigator prior to meeting with the impacted parties.

The purpose of Team Members is not to investigate the facts surrounding a Critical Incident. The purpose of Team Members is to try to understand the emotional impact that the Critical Incident has had on the participants and other impacted persons and to explore ways to lessen that harmful impact.

Anytime MHP's are asked to meet with a group of Department employees as a result of a Critical Incident, Peer Support Team members will be present to facilitate and learn. If a MHP is working with a Department employee

subsequent to a Critical Incident and if the MHP requests assistance from Team Members, that assistance will be provided.

The Team Leader shall maintain a current Team roster and distribute updated copies containing the Team Members' names, assignments, and contact number to all Department employees. The strongly preferred method for obtaining Peer Support Team services is to contact the Team Leader.

Department employees shall contact their supervisor, if they believe that they or another person should be referred to the Peer Support Program. Except in exigent situations, a response must be authorized by the Team Leader.

If a Team Member receives a Peer Support Team Program request from anyone other than the Team Leader, the Team Member should contact the Team Leader for a determination of who should respond. A response which is neither directed nor approved by the Team Leader should be a very unusual occurrence.

Follow-up meetings will be scheduled by the Peer Support Team. It will be the responsibility of the participating Team Member and the Team Leader to determine the nature of follow-up to be prescribed. If any employee needs referral to a MHP, the Team Member will notify the Team Leader who will consult with the MHP and make the referral. An employee's insurance provider may also be used if wanted by the participating employee.

With the exception of an active emergency response to a Critical Incident, all utilization of personnel for Peer Support will be with the permission of the Team Leader. Team Members are selected for a particular assignment based on their ability, training, experience and suitability for a specific assignment. For that reason, Unit Commanders are encouraged to supply the individual who has been requested, where possible.

The Peer Support Team Member who made the contact or the lead in a group response will give a detailed out-briefing to the Team Leader after all responses. The Team Leader will be briefed on all but the most routine responses. Guidance may be sought from a MHP at any time. Referral to MHP may be necessary in some situations.

When approved by the Chief of Police, City of Johns Creek Police Department Peer Support Team Members may be utilized to assist and support, in the event of a Critical Incident or natural disaster, the following:

- a. Other Police Departments
- b. Other City of Johns Creek Employees
- c. Community Members
- d. Other Persons as Directed by the Chief of Police

E. Peer Support Team Conduct (04-29-06)

1. The privacy of those who received assistance or support from the Peer Support Team Program must be protected.

A Peer Support Team Member will not divulge the identity of an employee who requests support, or discuss information obtained while acting in a peer support capacity with anyone other than the participating Team Members, Team Leader and/or MHP's. If the Team Leader is a direct supervisor of an employee seeking assistance, the Team Commander will assume the duties of the Team Leader who will not be briefed on details of the assistance.

Peer Support Team Members shall not be compelled by anyone, regardless of rank, to divulge information regarding details obtained as a Peer Support Team Member. Peer Support Team Members shall not be compelled to divulge information regarding details obtained as a Peer Support Team Member in an administrative investigation or criminal investigation unless required by law. Confidentiality is a priority and the Peer Support Team will operate in accordance with O.C.G.A. § 24-5-510 which states:

(a) As used in this Code section, the term:

- 1) *"Client" means a law enforcement employee or a law enforcement officer's immediate family.*
- 2) *"Immediate family" means the spouse, child, stepchild, parent, or stepparent.*
- 3) *"Peer Counselor" means an employee of a law enforcement agency who has received training to provide emotional and moral support to a client and was designated by a sheriff, police chief, or other head of a law enforcement agency to counsel clients.*

(b) Except as provided in subsection (c) of this Code section, communications between a client and a peer counselor shall be privileged. A peer counselor shall not disclose any such communications made to him or her and shall not be competent or compellable to testify with reference to any such communications in any court.

(c) The privilege created by subsection (b) of this Code section shall not apply when:

- 1) *The disclosure is authorized by the client, or if the client is deceased, by his or her executor or administrator, and if an executor or administrator is not appointed, by the client's next of kin;*

- 2) *Compelled by court order;*
 - 3) *The peer counselor was an initial responding officer, witness, or party to an act that is the subject of the counseling;*
 - 4) *The communication was made when the peer counselor was not performing official duties; or*
 - 5) *The client is charged with a crime.*
- (d) *The privilege created by this Code section shall not be grounds to fail to comply with mandatory reporting requirements as set forth in Code Section 19-7-5 or Chapter 5 of Title 30, the Disabled Adults and Elder Persons Protection Act.”*
2. The Chief of Police designates members of the Peer Support Team as recognized “peer counselors” in accordance with O.C.G.A. § 24-5-510 (a) (3).
 3. A Team Member may be removed from the program or otherwise subject to disciplinary action pursuant to the Johns Creek Police Department’s Code of Conduct, by the Chief of Police for actions including but not limited to the following:
 - a. Breach of Confidentiality
 - b. Lack of Satisfactory Participation
 - c. Poor Performance (Regular Duty or as a Team Member)
 - d. As otherwise determined by the Chief of Police
 4. Pursuant to SOP 01-10-12 regarding Specialized Assignments, the employee may also request voluntary removal from the Peer Support Team.
 5. Any personnel removed from a specialized position shall be notified, in writing, by the Chief of Police, or designee, of the reasons for the reassignment. No officer shall be reassigned for arbitrary or discriminatory reasons.

F. Record Keeping (04-29-07)

Notes, records or recordings detailing the information shared in any Peer Support Team Activity shall not be kept.

Statistical reporting information will be maintained as part of the program. However, all information shall be kept in a manner that will not identify the employee so that the privacy of the impacted employee may be protected to the

extent possible. The Team Commander shall submit the quarterly statistical reports to the Chief of Police.

The Peer Support Team will provide evaluation forms to persons who participate in the Peer Support Program. Such forms will be submitted anonymously. The Team Leader will use the evaluations to judge the effectiveness of this program. Evaluation forms should be provided no earlier than 30 days but no more than 90 days after support services are provided or immediately upon the request of an Officer.

G. Time-Keeping Scheduling (04-29-08)

Peer Support Program activities of Team Members are work activities and will be reported and compensated just like any other time worked. This will avoid any conflict with O.C.G.A. §24-5-510 (c) (4).

If a Team Member is needed to respond to an active emergency, the Team Member will make every reasonable effort to respond.

H. Notification of Family Members (04-29-09)

When an employee is involved in a Critical Incident, especially an officer-involved shooting, the involved employee shall be given ample and sufficient time to notify his/her family of the employee's involvement. It shall be the on-scene supervisor's duty to ensure that this contact takes place between the involved employee and family. The on-scene supervisor shall also make resources available to the family, i.e. transportation, if needed and requested. In the initial aftermath of a Critical Incident, all efforts should be focused on the well-being of the involved employee and his/her family.

I. Employee Participation (04-29-10)

The purpose of the Peer Support Program is to provide peer intervention to lessen the impact of major events on police personnel. As a reactive service, the Peer Support Team will provide support to personnel at the scene or soon after a Critical Incident. Although an employee may be required to attend a Peer Support crisis management debriefing, defusing, or one-on-one counselling, the employee will not be required to participate. Communication with Peer Support Team Members by employees is completely voluntary. Peer Support Team Members will reach out to employees as needed and required. An employee may follow-up with professional counseling services via independent professional mental health service providers or clergy of their own choosing. The Peer Support Team Assistance Program does not replace or prevent personnel from utilizing the City of Johns Creek's Employee Assistance Program or any other professional assistance available to Police Personnel and their families.