
Peer Support

1028.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of the Peer Support Program is to prevent and/or lessen the potential negative impact of stress upon members by providing emotional support, information and assistance.

Peer Support Team Members (Peer Supporters) are fellow employees with experience and training in stress management, critical incident stress, and crisis intervention techniques.

1028.2 POLICY

Peers can be of unique help to each other. The Kitsap County Peer Support Program is an objective, confidential, and non-judgmental resource for employees.

Peer Supporters are intended to complement services provided by the Kitsap County Employee Assistance Program and other services within our community.

Peer Supporters are not a replacement for professional care.

1028.3 PEER SUPPORT OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Peer Support Program are:

- To provide a readily accessible network of employees who are trained and willing to be of service to their fellow employees in need of assistance or support.
- To help employees through a temporary crisis.
- To help employees through work related critical or traumatic incidents.
- To develop awareness among employees that they are not alone, that people care, and that others are willing to listen, assess, and refer as needed.
- To develop an awareness of available professional and self-help opportunities.

1028.4 CONFIDENTIALITY

A Peer Supporter shall maintain the confidentiality entrusted to her/him and not divulge or discuss any information developed in a peer support session. No member of any rank shall ask a Peer Supporter to divulge any information acquired in their Peer Support capacity.

RCW 5.60.060 defines privileged communications between authorized Peer Supporters and law enforcement officers in the State of Washington.

The Peer Supporter shall advise the person at the onset of contact that confidentiality is to be strictly maintained except in the following instances:

- Other laws may require that a law enforcement divulge information gathered in a peer support session, such as mandatory reporting of domestic violence or other criminal conduct.

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- The Peer Supporter shall divulge information where there is reason to believe that the person intends to seriously injure his/herself or another person. The Peer Supporter shall immediately notify an appropriate supervisor in the above circumstances. That supervisor shall make reasonable efforts to advise any intended victims in those cases.
- The Peer Supporter has consent of the employee to divulge the information to another specific person or group.

1028.5 SELECTION OF PEER SUPPORTERS

Peer Supporters are selected by the Sheriff and serve at the will of the Sheriff. The Sheriff shall select Peer Supporters using the following criteria:

- Members who demonstrate maturity, empathy, compassion, discretion, and good active listening skills
- Submission of a letter of interest in membership
- Department needs, such as adequate staff representation
- Personnel and Supervisory File Review
- Interview with the Peer Support Selection Committee
- Approval of the Division Chief

1028.6 PEER SUPPORT REQUIREMENTS

In order to remain a Peer Supporter, the member shall:

- Attend and successfully complete the required training as specified in RCW 5.60.060 and approved by the Sheriff.
- Attend yearly update meeting/training as set by the committee.
- Maintain confidentiality
- Adhere to the policies and procedures of the Employee Support Program and the Kitsap County Sheriff's Office.

If a Peer Supporter fails to adhere to the requirements of the program, s/he shall lose active status. A member who loses active status must reapply to the program following all procedures for selection of Peer Supporters.

1028.7 SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

The Sheriff shall appoint a Lieutenant and a Sergeant to supervise the Peer Support Program. The supervisors should, if feasible, be members of the Peer Support Program prior to appointment and possess the desired traits for selection as a Peer Supporter.

The Lieutenant shall:

- appoint Peer Supporters during critical incidents

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- approve overtime compensation requests
- ensure Peer Support Program meetings or trainings are held annually
- be the primary liaison with outside agencies providing Peer Support to our members
- be the primary liaison with outside agencies requesting Kitsap County Sheriff's Office Peer Supporters
- ensure ongoing training and examinations of best practices for the Peer Support Program
- ensure training requirements are met by Department Peer Supporters and outside agency Peer Supporters used by Department members

The Sergeant shall:

- advise of any legal changes for Peer Supporters
- plan and facilitate annual Peer Support training
- coordinate responses for department-wide events (e.g. death or illness of a member)
- maintain an active roster of Peer Supporters
- assist as a liaison with outside agencies providing or using Peer Supporters.

1028.8 USE OF PEER SUPPORT

Peer Supporters may be contacted by a member requesting assistance without authorization or appointment by the department. Appointment is only required to deem communication related to a critical incident as privileged (see Critical Incident Appointment). Peer Supporters may support a member subject to an internal investigation. Any order directing a member not to talk about any aspects of the internal investigation shall not apply to communication with Peer Supporters. All communications shall be confidential as outlined in the Confidentiality section of this policy.

1028.9 CRITICAL INCIDENT APPOINTMENT

A Critical Incident is any event, on duty or job related off-duty, involving actual or threatened death or serious injury, which has the potential to create a sense of fear, helplessness, horror or general distress, or an event that is overwhelming to the natural defenses of an officer.

A Peer Supporter shall not provide Peer Support if that Peer Supporter is a witness, participant, or investigator in the same critical incident.

Only those holding the rank of Lieutenant or higher are authorized to assign Peer Supporters to an employee regarding a critical incident. The Lieutenant shall make the appointment in writing to their Division Chief and the Sheriff as soon as practical.

In cases of emergencies, where it is necessary to make the appointment of a Peer Supporter immediately and no Lieutenant is available, a first level supervisor may appoint a Peer Supporter. The supervisor will put this appointment in writing as soon as practical, but no longer than 24 hours

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from the original appointment. This appointment must be authorized by a Lieutenant or higher rank within 24 hours of the critical incident.