I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this General Order is to establish policy and procedure for the Loudoun County Sheriff’s Office Peer Support Team. The mission of the Peer Support Team is to aid agency or other public safety personnel involved with a critical incident to lessen the impact of the incident and to provide appropriate support service.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Loudoun County Sheriff’s Office to provide peer support assistance to agency personnel who have been involved in a critical incident.

III. CONFIDENTIALITY

A. All statements made by agency personnel and members of the Peer Support Team during a debriefing are strictly confidential within legal guidelines.

1. Section §19.2-271.4 of the Code of Virginia provides that communications between public safety personnel involved in critical incident stress management or peer support teams are confidential under specific guidelines.

   a. Agency personnel are strongly encouraged to familiarize themselves with this law and its provisions.

2. Peer Support Team Members shall review the legal guidelines and their limitations regarding the confidentiality of their communication prior to any debriefing activities.

B. Each Peer Support Team member will treat each contact with the highest level of confidentiality.

C. Unauthorized disclosure of information concerning specific incidents or employee involvement shall not occur unless such disclosure is required by exigent circumstances or ordered by a court of competent jurisdiction.

D. Peer Support Team members will not be interviewed by investigative authorities concerning matters in which the team member may have gained knowledge through peer support intervention.
1. Requests by investigating authorities to interview Peer Support Team members shall be directed to the Sheriff.

   E. Personnel not involved in a debriefing shall refrain from questioning Peer Support Team members on the facts surrounding any discussion with the individuals involved in a debriefing.

IV. **PROCEDURE**

A. Requesting Peer Support

1. The incident commander for any critical incident, as defined in this General Order, shall ensure that the Peer Support Team Coordinator and/or a Peer Support Team Leader is notified of a critical incident as soon as practical.

2. The incident commander or on-scene supervisor may request the response of a Peer Support Team Member through the Peer Support Team Coordinator or Peer Support Team Leader.

   a. Peer Support Team Members involved in a criminal or administrative incident or investigation giving rise to a request for Peer Support Team intervention shall not be assigned to provide Peer Support services to other involved employees.

3. The following incidents require the incident commander to contact the Peer Support Team Coordinator or a Peer Support Team Leader as soon as operationally feasible:

   a. The death or serious injury of a Loudoun County Sheriff’s Office employee

   b. The shooting of an individual by a Sheriff’s Office deputy

   c. A mass casualty incident

   d. Any act of violence, serious injury or death to a person that may reasonably lead to a traumatic stress reaction on the part of the employee. Special attention should be directed toward incidents involving young children.

   e. At the request of a deputy sheriff, regardless of the nature of the incident

4. This policy does not preclude any Sheriff’s Office employee from informally contacting any Peer Support Team Member for personal assistance.

B. Response by Peer Support Team Members
1. When responding, Peer Support Team Member(s) will respond to the command post, or other designated location, and advise the incident commander of his/her arrival.

2. Peer Support Team members are present to assist and monitor the individual(s) emotions as they cope with the critical incident. Team members will not interfere with operational decisions or procedures.

3. Peer Support Team members will be alert for signs of stress that may be severe and will make referrals for professional mental health assistance in those cases as appropriate.

4. Peer Support Team Members shall conduct a debriefing with the individual(s) involved with the critical incident.
   a. The purpose of a debriefing is to prepare the individual(s) for the emotional impacts that are likely to follow a critical incident.
   b. Debriefings may be conducted in a one-on-one or group setting.
      i. One-on-one debriefings are preferred; however, situations may arise where group debriefings are necessary.
   c. During a debriefing, individuals shall be offered additional resources for follow-up emotional support (i.e., Employee Assistance Program, police psychologist, etc.)
   d. Peer Support Team Members are not permitted to record or take notes during debriefings.
      i. It is recommended that Peer Support Team Members document the following information for tracking purposes only:
         (a) Date of the debriefing
         (b) Number of individuals involved (names excluded)
         (c) Length of the debriefing
   e. Information regarding the dates, times, and locations of debriefings shall not be released to the media.

C. Post-Incident Considerations

1. Peer Support Team members and incident supervisors must consider the impact
of stress as it relates to an individual’s ability to complete their current shift.

a. Supervisors shall consult with any Sheriff’s Office employees who are involved in a critical incident to determine their ability to complete their current shift and have the authority to release them for the remainder of their current shift, at their discretion.