

IDAHO STATE POLICE PROCEDURE

05.09 Peer Support Program

A. General

The purpose of this procedure is to establish guidelines for the establishment and participation in a program of support to personnel involved in stressful incidents which may negatively affect the individual(s) involved (“Peer Support Program”).

Peer support teams offer assistance and appropriate support resources to employees when personal or professional problems negatively affect their work performance. Team members are trained to help peers with day to day stressors and high stress environments. Team members provide an organized approach to cope with stress in the work place. These teams can also be utilized directly after high stress events such as officer involved shootings, fatality crashes, etc. These teams do not replace professional mental health services, but provide education about what stressor(s) an employee may be experiencing after an incident and how best to deal with them over a short amount of time after an event which may include engaging professional mental health services.

The Peer Support Program is not part of any formal Employee Assistance Program (EAP) referral or any administrative action taken by the agency. While assistance may be requested or provided under the Peer Support Program in conjunction with the EAP, it is not a replacement.

B. Definitions

“Critical Incident” means any situation that may cause unusually strong emotional reactions, and have the potential to interfere with the ability to function either at the incident scene or at a later time. Note: What is a Critical Incident for one person may not be for another.

“Debriefing” means an organized, confidential group discussion with employees who have experienced a Critical Incident guided by the Peer Support Team and is designed to help an employee identify and mitigate Stress Reaction Symptoms. Participants may discuss physical and emotional reactions to the Critical Incident. **A Debriefing is not an After Incident Review, or critique of the agency operations or of an individual’s performance during the incident which shall not be discussed.** After Action Reviews are covered in ISP procedure [02.01 After Incident Review](#).

“Peer Support Team Member” means a volunteer who has been trained to provide support to employees after a Critical Incident. Most volunteers will have experienced similar pressures and job experiences as those they seek to help. The Peer Support Team Members are primarily co-workers (Peer Support Counselors), but may also include mental health professionals.

“Peer Support Counselor” is a co-worker who has agreed to volunteer to participate in the Peer Support Program and has received the training necessary for certification as a Peer

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Support Counselor. Peer Support Counselors represent all levels of employees and different assignments within ISP.

“Peer Support Team” means a multi-disciplinary team that includes district Peer Support Team Members and may also include trained mental health professional(s).

“Peer Support Team Coordinator” is appointed by the director and will be the lead for the state Peer Support Program.

“Peer to Peer Debriefing” is a conversation related to a Critical Incident usually initiated by an employee and that does not necessitate involvement of the full Peer Support Team.

“Stress Reaction Symptoms” means physical and emotional symptoms that originate with a specific Critical Incident that may include nightmares, flashbacks, fatigue, nausea, concentration and memory problems, anxiety, depression, intestinal problems, etc.

C. Structure

1. Peer Support Team Coordinator

- a. The Director appoints the Peer Support Team Coordinator.
- b. Responsibilities
 - 1) Supervises the Peer Support Program;
 - 2) Recruits and coordinates the screening of the applicants;
 - 3) Identifies team leads in each district;
 - 4) Coordinates training of team members;
 - 5) Develops resources to assist individuals when problem areas are identified;
 - 6) Maintains an accounting of resources used by the program; and
 - 7) Offers guidance to team members when problems occur.

2. Peer Support Team

- a. Composition
 - 1) Each District will have a Peer Support Team which includes a Team Lead and Peer Support Counselors, the number of which depends on availability in the district. Participation in the Peer Support Team is in addition to the employee’s normally assigned duties and must have supervisor approval.
 - 2) Mental health professionals (psychologist and/or counselor) may be part of a particular district’s Peer Support Team, based upon availability.
- b. Duties
 - 1) Attend all required approved Peer Support Program training;
 - 2) Serve as a primary referral resource; and
 - 3) Regularly attend Peer Support Program meetings.
- c. Selection—Peer Support Team members will:
 - 1) Be trustworthy;
 - 2) Be good listeners;
 - 3) Have experience in issues that surround a career in law enforcement;

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- 4) Have demonstrated the ability to handle high-stress and cumulative-stress situations successfully;
 - 5) Maintain confidentiality;
 - 6) Be willing to share personal experiences about coping mechanisms;
 - 7) Be able to successfully complete approved professional Peer Support Program training;
 - 8) Have the respect of their peers;
 - 9) Be recommended by their peers; and
 - 10) Be approved by district command staff.
3. Training
- a. ISP shall provide team members with approved Peer Support Program training to identify and manage the negative physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioral reactions that may occur following a Critical Incident.
 - b. Supervisors are responsible for making available to their personnel information about ISP's Peer Support Program along with other available mental health resources.

D. Post Incident Debriefing

The District Peer Support Team Lead, in conjunction with the District Command Staff, is responsible for determining if a Debriefing is needed for an employee, and when it will take place, based upon the circumstances including the reaction(s) of personnel involved.

1. A Debriefing will be coordinated by the Peer Support Team Lead and supervisor(s) of involved personnel.
 - a. All involved personnel shall be required to attend the Debriefing;
 - b. Will include only involved personnel and the Peer Support Team.
 - c. Active participation cannot be required;
 - d. Will be held off campus; and
 - e. ISP encourages the families of the involved personnel to take advantage of EAP counseling services.
2. All Debriefings are confidential in order to promote trust and confidence in the participants to allow full participation for the full benefit of the individual(s) involved. No record or notes of discussions in the Debriefing may be taken by any person.

E. Peer to Peer Debriefing

1. A statewide list of Peer Support Team Members will be made available to all employees. Employees may request Peer to Peer support from any member listed, and are not limited to district boundaries. Any member of the agency may approach any Peer Support Team Member for support.

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2. Peer Support Team Members called out for Peer Support Program activities while off duty will notify their supervisors to be placed on “on duty status” while participating in the Peer Support Program activity.
3. Employees should be permitted to participate in Peer Support Program functions as workloads allow.
4. Due to the area-wide responsibilities of the Peer Support Program Team, members, with the approval of their supervisors, may respond as needed to debriefings for other agencies or districts upon their request.