**OCFD PEER SUPPORT**

**TEAM HANDBOOK**

**MISSION:**

***To be available to listen, support, refer, and assist department members and their families during professional and personal times of need.***

**SLOGAN:**

***HERE FOR OUR MEMBERS***

NEW MEMBERSHIP & TRAINING

* New candidates will complete a team member application found on the department website and city computers and place in Team Coordinator’s mailbox. The member will then interview with Team Coordinator and Assistant for team membership approval.

* Initial training will be approved by the Team Coordinator.  The training can include but it is not limited to: 16 hour IAFF Peer Support Training, Mental Health First Aid, Critical Incident Stress Management for Individuals and Groups, and in house OCFD Peer Support training.
* Initially, new peers will accompany trained peers to observe their skills and individual styles. It is good practice to observe, listen and learn.

* Training will occur every other month. Make every effort to attend.
* Continuing education will be provided on a regular basis and is essential to the success of the team
	+ Individual continuing education will be encouraged and approved by the team coordinator
	+ It is up to the individual member to submit to the team coordinator to get credit for the training.

LITERATURE

* Flyers and informational posters will be distributed to all fire stations.
* Team members’ contact information will be available on team posters displayed in each firehouse as well as on the department website
* A list of our approved peer support resource list for our members can be found on the website
* Additional literature will be provided upon request
* Each member will be distributed a team handbook and the OCFD Peer Support Outreach presentation
* Team members will be given Oversight Clinician’s contact information along with approved hours of availability

MEMBERSHIP

● Active and retired members of Ocean City Fire Department, to include and open to the Career, Volunteer, and Office of the Fire Marshal Divisions.

● Clinical associates, chaplains, and external resources who are requested by the Peer Support Team to participate.

ATTIRE

● Peer support shirts will be provided to members. There is no rank when it comes to supporting our members.

CODUCT

* It is important that the Peer Support Team and its members present themselves in a professional, approachable manner at all times, not only when engaging in peer support.
* Our conduct is a representation of the Team and we do not want any behavior by our members to deter someone in need asking for help
* Some behaviors unbecoming of peer support team member include gossiping, criticizing department members, openly judging the actions of others, and exhibiting a negative attitude.

CALL HANDLING and CONTACT PROCEDURES

● Once a member becomes a peer support member, it is important to check phone messages and emails regularly. Any member of the department can contact a member of the PST at any time.

● Peers will make contacts designated by the Team Coordinator, Assistant, or by assignment from other team members when appropriate. Every effort will be made to distribute the experiences to all team members evenly where appropriate.

● Members may request to speak to specific peers. If the requested peer is unavailable, the peer coordinator/designee(s) must notify the member and discuss other options.

● The Coordinator may interview members periodically concerning the process of providing support and not specific information.  This conference may be in person or on the phone.

● The conference call will serve only as a tool to ensure that we are continuing to provide the best possible service to our members and to detect systemic issues early.

PEER GUIDELINES

● Peers will do firehouse visits upon agreed upon dates/times through discussion with station officers/office staff.

● Call ahead and inform the OIC of your visit.

● Attempt to have two Peers perform visits but one Peer is ok. For regular station visits avoid large groups of PST members.

● Peers will inform the team coordinator (or designee) of firehouses visited via email.

● Peers may contact the team coordinator as needed.

● Peers will inform the team coordinator of notable contacts without providing specific information (name, assignment, demographics, etc.)

● Individuals receiving peer support may voluntarily choose or reject a peer by any criteria they believe are important.

● Team members may decide that they cannot assist a member for a multitude of reasons. Should this situation arise, notify the Team Coordinator at once so that support can be reassigned ASAP.

*Routine Visits*

*●* Draw out current concerns of the group.

*●* Help them specify problems.

*●* Identify areas where the Peer Support Team can assist.

*●* Update members on new programs and how to access them.

*●* If no problems can be identified, then don’t persist. Stay 10-15 minutes at most these visits are intended to feel relaxed.

*Requested Visits (*When notified of a situation where we can be of assistance)

● Ascertain the problem or situation before the visit if possible.

● Plan a strategy before arrival with peer coordinator (or designee).

● Contact firehouse to schedule the visit.

● Check with other peers who may have prior history with the station or personnel.

● Open up dialogue according to the plan established by the peers.

● Stay focused but be flexible if necessary.

● Assess problem and ensure members have resources and information to address the issue.

● Ascertain if follow-up visit is necessary and inform peer coordinator.

*Traumatic Events*

● Our interaction with members will be at the firehouse/group level whenever possible.

● Peers will visit stations during the aftermath of a traumatic event, including:

* LODD
* Critical injury of member
* Suicide of member
* Dead or severely injured children
* Mass-Casualty event
* Acts of terrorism
* Acts of abuse
* Pediatric calls
* Near Miss and other traumatic events

●Occasionally, the OCFD Peer Support Team will be requested to respond to other jurisdictions. Requests will be accommodated on a case by case basis and ultimate decisions will be made by OCFD Chief and the Peer Support Team Coordinator.

●All requests for outside deployment must be forwarded to the Peer Support Team Coordinator. *IAFF requested deployments*

● From time to time the IAFF may request the Peer Support Team to deploy to incidents throughout North America following major incidents

●These requests will come to the Peer Support Team through the coordinator

● Members will not self-deploy to any incident without the permission of the Peer Support Team coordinator

● Members will be required to complete additional training in order to be eligible to deploy for these types of requests.

● Remember that you are representing Ocean City Fire Department the entire time you are there.

PEER SKILLS

* + Establish your own style
	+ Make eye contact
	+ Have a calm presence
	+ Show interest, understanding and genuine concern
	+ Listen with your heart
	+ Use **empathy not sympathy**
	+ Convey respect and objectiveness
	+ Do Not Judge
	+ Know your facts about ***Active Listening***
	+ Take in information through body language – i.e. eye contact, head nodding, etc. to better understand the person’s situation and needs.

 SOLER technique

:

S: Sit SQUARELY on to the client, preferably at a 5 o’clock position to avoid the possibility of staring.

O: Maintain an OPEN posture at all times, Do not cross your arms or legs which can appear defensive.

L: LEAN slightly in towards the client.

E: Maintain EYE CONTACT with the client without staring.

R: RELAX. This should in turn help the client to relax.

* + Allow silence – Silence gives the person time to reflect and become aware of feelings. Silence can prompt the person to elaborate. Simply “being with” the person and their experience is supportive.

*Words of Caution*

* + - Peers may become overly involved and do too much for the member. This is not in the best interest of the member. When members are empowered to solve their own problems, they feel more capable and able to tackle the next challenge. Often members need our immediate assistance because they cannot help themselves. There comes a time in support, however, where the member should be as involved and engaged as the PST member.
		- Even if you share a similar experience with a member, it is important to remember that an individual’s experience is unique. It can be helpful for the member in need to relate to you, but avoid frequent interjections of personal stories. The focus should be on the member in need. Take note of how many times you say “I.”
		- Never give out phone numbers of other peers, or supervisors.
		- Leave your cell phone alone when meeting with a member.
		- Discuss facts, not rumors
		- Peers should avoid espousing personal values, moral standards, and philosophies.
		- Follow-up is critical. When you commit to getting information, do so as soon as possible.

*Program differences*

● Experience has shown that firehouse visits by trained peers are an effective way to identify the emotional needs of firefighters.

● **We are not CISM** (Critical Incident Stress Management). CISM is an established program utilized in the immediate aftermath of incidents.  Although team members may be asked to participate in CISM responses, the OCFD Peer Support team will focus primarily on the **PEER SUPPORT** model which emphasizes active listening and linking members with needed resources.  We stress the importance of employing health strategies that promote daily resilience and wellness

● **We are not an EAP** (Employee Assistance Program). EAP is a program offered by the Town of Ocean City to assist employees who are struggling with attendance, performance and behavioral issues.

● **We are the Ocean City Fire Department Peer Support Team**. We are here to support our members.

● The peer support program is not an alternative to discipline. A peer does not intervene in the disciplinary process, even at a member’s request.

*Proper Referral Protocol*

● Remember that you are not a clinician. Leave counseling up to the clinicians. You are a bridge between the firehouse and the professional.

● If a situation arises that you are not sure how to handle, call the team coordinator or Oversight Clinician immediately.

● Know the resource clinicians, including their skills and areas of expertise.

● Use discretion when discussing personal information.

PLACING MEMBERS OFF-DUTY

* If a peer feels that a member should be placed off-duty, they must contact the peer support team coordinator.
* If a volunteer member needs to be placed off duty, the PST Coordinator and Duty Chief should be notified.
* At the conclusion of the time off, a determination will be made by the Department whether the member will continue on FMLA leave (to continue treatment for an off-duty related issue) or use alternative leave.
* The peer will discuss these options with the member and assist them with their needs. The peer will discuss with outside parties only with consent of the member.

FEEDBACK ABOUT CLINICIANS

● Peers will follow-up with members who were referred to resource clinicians. The Peer should ask the member how effective the clinician was. It is optional for the member to answer. This will allow our team to determine effectiveness of our outside resources.

● The Peer Support Team will regularly assess our referral list and provide updates to it as necessary.

CALLS FROM PERSONS WHO ARE NOT MEMBERS OF OCFD

● Refer to appropriate resource

● We will not deny assistance to a person in need.

CONFIDENTIALITY – the degree to which data has not been made available or disclosed to unauthorized individuals, processes or entities.

● Peers will sign a confidentiality agreement. They are not disclose member information that is gained throughout the peer relationship.

● Licensed professionals have privilege under confidentiality law. Peers DO NOT benefit from this protection. Peers must advise members that information told to them is not protected by legal privilege, is administratively provided, and may not be recognized in court proceedings.

● It might be appropriate to discuss member information with another peer or team coordinator in order to come up with a strategy to help the member. The member must give consent, unless safety is an issue. It is often helpful to do this with the member present. This fosters an environment of shared coordination and empowerment.

● Be careful where you discuss member information. Do not discuss member information in the hallway, lunchroom, etc.

● Before sharing personally identifiable facts or similar information with others, secure the informed consent of the member, preferably in writing, except as authorized or required by law.

● Protect confidential paperwork: do not leave papers in public where names of members or other confidential information can be seen.

● Remember that your obligation of confidentiality extends beyond the period when the member is no longer receiving our help.

● Peers do not share information with co-workers and supervisors. They may advise supervisors of established confidentiality guidelines.

● ***Peers must inform members of the limits of their confidentiality and consider potential role conflicts (e.g. supervisor providing peer support). These should be consistent with law and department policy and may include:***

* ***Threats to self***
* ***Threats to specific people***
* ***Child, spouse, and elder abuse***

***●*** NOTE: If a peer encounters a member who is on-duty and may be impaired by alcohol or drugs, they are a danger to themselves and others. The peer has an obligation to report their suspicions to the member’s immediate supervisor. The peer may encourage the member to alert their supervisor while providing support and assistance.

PHILOSOPHY The goal of peer support is to provide members with emotional and peer support through times of personal or professional crises and to help anticipate and address potential difficulties. The peer support program must have a procedure for mental health consultation and training. The peer support program is developed and implemented by Ocean City Fire Department. *A Peer Support Person (Peer) is a specifically trained colleague, not a counselor or therapist. The peer support program is an outreach program. It does not replace individual counseling and treatment programs. Peers should refer cases requiring professional intervention to a mental health professional. A procedure should be in place for mental health consultations and training.*

SELECTION

● Peers are chosen from full time, active members as well as retired, gold badge or life members who are in good standing with the department and have received recommendations from their peers.

● Considerations for selection of peer candidates include, but are not limited to previous education and training, resolved traumatic experience, and desirable interpersonal qualities such as maturity, judgment and personal and professional credibility.

● When selecting PST members, the Team Coordinator will take into consideration candidate’s assignment and union involvement.

● Prospective members who are probationary firefighters (PFF) will not be considered for placement on the team.

RESIGNATION/DISMISSAL

● A peer may resign, in writing, anytime. Resignations will be given to the peer coordinator.

● Peers can be dismissed, with cause, at any time. Rule violations, breaching confidentiality, lack of attendance or participation may result in dismissal.

TRAINING

● Relevant introductory and continuing training for peers may include but are not limited to:

* Confidentiality Issues
* Communication Facilitation and Listening Skills
* Ethical Issues
* Problem Assessment
* Problem Solving Skills
* Alcohol and Substance Abuse
* Cross Cultural Issues
* Behavioral Health Emergencies
* Stress Assessment
* Suicide Assessment
* PTSD
* Depression and Burn-out
* Grief management
* Domestic Violence
* Crisis Management
* Nonverbal Communication
* Appropriate Mental Health Consultation and Referral Information
* Traumatic Intervention
* Limits and Liability
* Resiliency
* Spirituality
* Nutrition
* Wellness
* Meditation
* Physical Fitness
* Coping skills

Team Policy Development

● A formal policy statement should be included in the peer support policy manual that gives written assurance that, within the limits of confidentiality, a peer will not be asked to give information about members they support.

● The Manual and resource list is to be updated annually.

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