



Rogers Fire Department Standard Operating Procedures

Policy Title:	Peer Support Program		
Policy Number:	320	Volume:	Safety
Approved By:	Tom Jenkins	Last Updated:	July 2021
CFAI Reference:	N/A	CAAS Reference:	N/A
Revision Summary:	Created – July 2021		

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide the formation of a Peer Support Team and activation guidelines. This team shall function to provide support to members and their families.

The mission of the Peer Support Team is to provide the Rogers Fire Department personnel, both sworn and non-sworn, psychological and emotional support through pre-incident training, family support, on-scene support, and post incident support as needed.

POLICY

The Peer Support Team (PST) will be comprised of personnel trained in peer support techniques who are approved by the Department to work in conjunction with mental health professionals in providing support to public safety personnel.

Goals

1. Provide a program comprised of trusted peers that will support personnel in finding a resolution to situations affecting their personal and professional environments.
2. Encourage and promote the physical, emotional, and social health of all employees.
3. Provide information, educational materials, and resources pertaining to the various aspects of peer support.
4. Act as a liaison between the employee and the department to identify and assist with resources available to employees.
5. Implement and support an annual training program to develop peer support team members and to increase organizational resilience.
6. Work closely with regional peer support teams to promote dissemination of resources and establish working relationships with other public safety peer support teams.
7. Provide annual "awareness" training to Company Officers to assist with identification of situations that require intervention.

The purpose of the peer support program is to increase organizational resilience to the adverse effects of post-traumatic stress by providing education, emotional support and assistance.

The program will support employees emotionally and psychologically through the use of one-on-one discussions, pre-incident education including stress management, on scene support, and post incident support to include responder families when necessary.

The peer support team will be comprised of members from any rank or position who have been specially trained in peer support and crisis intervention techniques. The peer support team is supported by the Rogers Fire Department as peer support members. Team members will work closely with designated mental health professionals to ensure continuity of care for all personnel.

Team Composition

The PST will be comprised of the following members:

A. Deputy Chief

The functions of the Deputy Chief are to:

1. Provide program oversight and act as a liaison for their operation.
2. Develop and advise the Fire Chief on PST program activities, concerns and questions
3. Approve program activities and expenditures involved with training, travel, and outreach
4. Provide administrative support to the team
5. Act as the liaison between the clinical consultant, peer support team and the organization
6. Authorize and appoint members to the PST
7. Authorize the activation of the PST for large scale or regional events
8. Approve all requests for assistance from outside agencies

B. Clinical Consultant

The clinical consultant will manage the psychological and clinical aspects of the program. The clinical consultant will be a licensed mental health care professional affiliated with the department. The functions of the clinical consultant are to:

1. Provide consultation and advice on all clinical aspects of the program.
2. Provide clinical support and guidance to the team leader.
3. Assist in the procurement and delivery of continuing education for the peer support team.
4. Assist in the development of program policies and procedures.

5. Act as the liaison between the peer support team and other members of the mental health professional's community.
6. Supervise and conduct peer support activities under the direction of the Rogers Fire Department when requested.

C. Team Leader

PST members wishing to be team leaders will be interviewed by the Deputy Chief and the Clinical Consultant prior to being considered for the position. This position is not associated with rank. Team leaders will be selected based on reputation, leadership skills, and a willingness and desire to serve in the team leader capacity. The functions of the team leader are to:

1. Manage assigned PST members
2. Assist in deploying and implementing peer support activities
3. Maintain records of team activities
4. Facilitate new member recruitment
5. Assist in disseminating educational material and developing team training
6. Act as the point of contact for outside agency requests in the absence of the Deputy Chief
7. Continue to provide peer support while performing the additional team leader duties

D. Team Member

PST members are the primary resources and providers for employees seeking assistance from the peer support program. Peer support team member functions are to:

1. Provide crisis intervention and basic support for employees and their families
2. Provide referrals through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or the clinical consultant
3. Triage and consult the clinical consultant in a crisis event to make recommendations and determine the crisis interventions needed
4. Participate in educating employees about peer support and psychological support services
5. Deploy and implement peer support techniques and strategies

Participation

The PST will consist of departmental personnel that have been approved for membership on the team through the recruitment process. Peer support team members will be added on an as needed basis resulting from organizational growth or turnover of the existing members. All sworn or non-sworn members of the Rogers Fire Department are eligible for selection to the peer support team.

In the event of openings on the team, member interest will be solicited and a selection will be made following candidate interviews to ensure the member understands the roles and responsibilities of the peer support team and is willing to work within the established parameters.

1. Prior to assisting in peer support operations, members must complete peer support training and sign the Peer Support Agreement.
2. Peer support members are not trained mental health professionals and therefore will not diagnose or treat mental health conditions. Peer support is not a substitution for professional counseling but a mechanism for referral when further assistance is needed.
3. Peer support activities and contacts are voluntary. All employees may choose to participate or decline peer support.
4. Peer support members involved in the following circumstances will not be allowed to serve in a peer support capacity until the situation described is resolved.
 - a. Failure to meet departmental expectations.
 - b. Engaged in a performance improvement plan.
 - c. Administrative Leave
 - d. Under Investigation

Contact Guidelines

The following list provides context regarding the use of the Peer Support Program and the parameters for contact by a peer support team member.

1. Peer support interactions must always be voluntary.
 - a. Peer support may be suggested for members but may never be ordered or forced by a superior.
 - b. Peer support contact may not be part of a performance improvement plan.
 - c. Referrals to the Peer Support Program will never be a condition of disciplinary action.
2. Peer support will only be provided upon expressed consent of the individual seeking assistance.
3. Peer support team members may initiate contact with an individual on the basis of good faith for an incident identified as a high stress event or requests by a third party.
 - a. Unsolicited contact will consist of providing the individual with the information required to contact peer support if they choose to do so.
 - b. Requests for information regarding an unsolicited contact will result in the response "The member was given the information on how to contact the peer support team if they desire to do so."
4. Peer support contact information will be provided to members in the following circumstances:
 - a. Sustain a significant on the job injury or near miss.
 - b. Request FMLA
 - c. Request the use of the Sick Leave Bank

- d. Involved in an internal investigation
 - e. Placed on Administrative Leave
5. Peer support team members who feel an on-duty member is a hazard to themselves or others will immediately contact the Deputy Chief over the Peer Support Program or their designee to request the individual be removed from operations.
 6. While not required, Citywide Tour Commanders should consider activating the peer support team by contacting a team leader for calls involving:
 - a. Traumatic events involving children
 - b. Mass casualty events
 - c. Significant incidents involving personnel or their families
 - d. Unusual events that have a powerful impact

Activations requested by Citywide Tour Commanders will be managed by the team leader receiving the request.

Confidentiality

Trust in the Peer Support Program is vital to the use and success of the team. It is necessary that a strong presence of trust is established and maintained among all personnel who would seek assistance in a time of need. The Rogers Fire Department has established the following guidelines to protect the confidentiality of personnel utilizing the Peer Support Program and regards all information as "Privileged Communications" as noted in ACT 555 of the 92nd General Assembly of the State of Arkansas.

1. No records identifying personnel who utilize the program will be maintained.
2. PST members shall not discuss information obtained while acting in a peer support capacity without consent of the member involved, with anyone other than the clinical consultant, other mental health professionals, or other peer support team members for the purpose of mental health support unless otherwise required by law.
3. Peer support team members shall not divulge any shared information with other personnel, family, friends, supervisors, command staff, or the general public.
4. Peer support team members will not be found as insubordinate or in violation of city and/or departmental policy for refusal to release or share information regarding an employee under investigation, obtained as a peer support member, or acting in an official capacity, unless otherwise required by law.
5. Members seeking assistance through the Peer Support Program will be advised that confidentiality will be maintained except in the following situations:
 - a. Information is shared that leads the peer support team member to believe the employee is an imminent threat to themselves or others.
 - b. Sharing information about suspected or alleged child abuse or elder abuse.

- c. Employee discloses information about criminal activity that would impact employment.
 - d. Any other instances required by law.
6. If the peer support team is utilized in an incident involving a member of the department, the entire peer support team will refrain from any social media regarding the incident.
7. If an incident occurs involving any other public safety agency, peer support team members will not engage in any social media activity until a minimum of twenty-four hours after an official release of information regarding the incident.
8. Peer support team members will refrain from making negative or derogatory comments toward the department or the peer support team on social media.
9. Peer support team members shall also abide by the Rogers Fire Department's existing social media policy. (SOP – 133)

Training

Initial and ongoing training is vital to the team's ability to effectively and confidently interact with personnel seeking peer support. Organizational training is important to build resilience and pre-educate all members to reduce the impact of high stress events and to aid in the identification of stress responses that require peer support or further intervention.

1. All new members of the peer support team will receive initial training prior to engaging in any peer support activities.
2. Continuing education will be provided to all peer support team members on an annual basis. Members missing annual training will consult with other team members or the clinical consultant to obtain the information missed during their absence.
3. Annual training will be provided to the entire department with the intent of increasing awareness, resilience, and to provide opportunities for interaction with peer support team members.