

Peer Support Program

1011.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Almost everyone has experienced or will experience a stressful situation in his/her lifetime. It is during these times that family and friends come to the rescue. They are able to provide needed support and understanding that help overcome life's problems. The Peer Support Program is designed to meet those same needs in the work environment and is available to every Fontana Police Department employee.

This policy has three specific objectives:

- (a) It provides a background for understanding the department's Peer Support Program;
- (b) It provides practical guidelines for management of the program;
- (c) It provides the peer supporters with guidelines for assisting their peers.

This policy is divided into two sections. Section one contains a description of the program, including the roles of the organizational components. In addition, it contains an outline of the information and a listing of procedures for practical administration of the program.

Section two describes the skills and techniques that may be used by a peer supporter to assist persons who are faced with stressful situations. Each peer supporter must comply with the policies and procedures outlined in this manual.

As the Peer Support Program matures, policy and procedure changes are inevitable. The program coordinator and the peer supporters shall be required to keep open lines of communication to facilitate this evolving process. Effective, honest communication in a caring environment, balanced by the program protocol, will greatly enhance the opportunity for a successful program.

1011.2 DEFINITION

The Peer Support Program is a program that offers assistance and appropriate support resources to employees when personal or professional problems negatively affect their work performance, family unit or self. This communication is confidential, providing it does not violate any law or department regulation.

This program is designed to:

- (a) Provide emotional support to employees who need assistance during and after times of personal or professional crisis.
- (b) Promote trust, allow anonymity, and preserve confidentiality for persons using peer support within the guidelines of the program.
- (c) Develop peer supporters who can identify personal conflicts and provide guidance or referral to professional/alternate resources as required.

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- (d) Maintain an effective peer support training and response program.
- (e) Check on status of illnesses and IOD's and provide support where desired and needed.

1011.3 MISSION STATEMENT

The Fontana Police Department has recognized the value of providing a way for their employees and their family members to deal with personal and/or professional problems. The Peer Support Program is provided as a non-professional support program which compliments the professional counseling service provided through The Counseling Team International. The Peer Support Program is comprised of peers, who on a voluntary basis make themselves available to any member of the department. Employees are afforded the opportunity to talk out personal/professional problems with a peer who understands and cares.

The Fontana Police Department's most valuable resource is its employees. The Peer Support Program's goal is to assist peers with the stresses caused by personal and/or professional problems and help them continue to be a productive member of the Fontana Police Department.

1011.4 ACCESSING PEER SUPPORT

The Peer Support Team is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to all employees. There are Peer Support brochures and flyers at several locations in the station including briefing, report writing and the break room with Peer Support personnel contact information included. If no Peer Support personnel are available or working at the time of the employee's need, the employee should call the Program Coordinator who will locate a suitable and available Peer Supporter.

1011.5 ROLES IN THE PEER SUPPORT PROGRAM

Several integral roles exist within the Peer Support Program.

The roles are as follows for each defined position:

1011.5.1 ROLE OF PEER SUPERVISOR

The peer supporter provides assistance to employees in time of stress and crisis. The responsibilities of supporters are as follows:

- (a) Provide trust, anonymity and assure confidentiality within guidelines to employees who seek assistance from the Peer Support Program.
- (b) Listen to another employee's feelings after a critical incident or crisis situation.
 - 1. These events may include, but are not limited to- OIS, employee death or serious injury, infant/child death, witness to a traumatic event
- (c) Facilitate or assist supervisors in diffusing critical incidents and in debriefing sessions.

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- (d) Attend peer support training sessions.
- (e) Provide assistance and support on a voluntary basis to employees and family, referring him/her to the appropriate outside resource when necessary.
- (f) Be available to the individual for additional follow-up support.
- (g) Provide information on other resources available.
- (h) Provide peer support orientation to new employees.
- (i) Maintain contact with the program coordinator regarding program activities.
- (j) Agree to be contacted, and if practical, respond at any hour.

Peer supporters are not exempt from federal, state, local laws, or the rules and regulations of the department. When necessary, contact the Peer Support Program coordinator for assistance and guidance.

1011.5.2 ROLE OF COORDINATOR

The Peer Support Program coordinator acts as the primary liaison between the peer supporters, resource persons, and the department. The program coordinator serves as the link to ensure that the Peer Support Program is being managed in accordance with the goals and objectives established for the program.

- (a) Major duties of the coordinator include:
- (b) Supervising of the program on a daily basis.
- (c) Recruiting and coordinating the screening of applicants.
- (d) Coordinating training of peer supporters.
- (e) Developing resources to assist individuals when problem areas are identified.
- (f) Maintaining and accounting of resources used by the program.
- (g) Offering guidance to peer supporters when problems occur.
- (h) Ensure follow-up response of peer supporters when referrals are made for outside services.

1011.5.3 ROLE OF ADVISORY PANEL

The advisory panel shall:

- (a) Assist the coordinator with the selection of peer support personnel.
- (b) Assist the coordinator with record keeping, which is to include statistics, training expenses and resource contacts.
- (c) Provide input to coordinator and to peer supporters through the coordinator.

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1011.5.4 ROLE OF COUNSELING TEAM INTERNATIONAL

The Counseling Team shall:

- (a) Design a training curriculum and provide peer supporters with the basic and continuing (updated) training.
- (b) Serve as a primary referral source.

1011.6 PEER SUPPORT SELECTION PROCESS

All interested employees who choose to volunteer as a peer supporter must submit a memorandum of interest through the chain of command to the coordinator.

- (a) Prospective peer supporters must meet the following criteria:
 - 1. Agree to maintain confidentiality within the guidelines provided in this policy.
 - 2. Be in good standing with the department.
 - 3. Provided requested information in memorandum of interest.
- (b) Desirable qualities include:
 - 1. Be empathetic and possess outstanding interpersonal and communication skills.
 - 2. Effective listening and problem solving skills.
 - 3. Be motivated and willing to manage time effectively. This will allow minimal impact on their duties.
 - 4. Be known for being able to keep confidential matters to themselves and have the trust of their peers.

When there is a need for peer supporters, the coordinator and advisory panel will select peer supporters from among qualified applicants who have expressed a desire to be part of the program and understand all that it entails. Memorandums of interest are to be submitted by applicants and the advisory panel would then discuss the attributes, (based on set criteria as listed in attached applicant review sheet,) of each applicant and make recommendations to the peer coordinator. The peer coordinator would add his comments on each applicant and forward their recommendations to staff. Peer supporters would then be selected by staff and would receive an introduction from the coordinator and advisory panel.

The coordinator will make available to staff a current list of peer supporters.

1011.7 TRAINING PROGRAM

The training program will consist of POST approved courses offered by The Counseling Team International and other outside sources, as well as in-house training. All training will be overseen by the program coordinator. The Basic Peer Support training course will be required of all personnel

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involved in the program. The mandatory eight hours of updated peer support training is offered three times per year and all involved personnel will be required to attend one session every two years. The major emphasis of peer support training will focus on skills development of which includes:

- # Effective listening
- # General assessment skills
- # Problem-solving skills
- # Relationship termination (death, divorce, etc.)
- # Referral follow-up.

Follow-up/in-house trainings will focus on the following but are not limited to:

- # Department policy
- # Confidentiality
- # Coordination with Mentoring Program

1011.8 SERVICE ASSIGNMENT

- (a) Peer support personnel may withdraw from the program at any time with proper notification.
- (b) Peer support personnel may be removed from participation from the program for conduct inconsistent with program policy and objectives.
- (c) Negative job performance caused by peer support duties must be reported by the peer supporter's supervisor to the program coordinator for discussion and resolution.
- (d) Peer supporters may be removed from participation in the program for failure to attend scheduled training.
- (e) Peer support personnel may be removed from the program at the discretion of the Chief of Police.

1011.9 ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES

The following guidelines provide peer support personnel formal authority to obtain certain organizational resources and support he/she needs to assist peer employees.

- (a) All training will be approved by the program coordinator. POST training and all off-site training will be processed through the training coordinator, who will arrange the appropriate lodging, meals, etc.
- (b) Peer support personnel are authorized to use department facilities to meet with employees.
- (c) Peer supporters are permitted to consult with employees on duty, as long as said meetings do not interfere with either employees' immediate required duties. If the

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consultation is lengthy or the employee is in distress, the peer supporter will advise the employee's immediate supervisor, if applicable.

- (d) Participation in the program is voluntary and no overtime or compensatory time will be authorized for the time expended performing peer support duties, unless under special circumstances and authorized by the program coordinator of higher rank.

1011.10 CONFIDENTIALITY

It is imperative that peer support personnel maintain strict confidentiality of all information learned about an individual within the guidelines of this program.

Communications between peer supporters and employees are not privileged communications under the Evidence Code. The department will respect the confidentiality of conversations between peer support personnel and employees with the following exceptions:

- (a) Danger to self.
- (b) Danger to others
- (c) Suspected child abuse.
- (d) Narcotic offenses (sales or transportation).
- (e) Domestic violence.
- (f) Factual elder abuse.
- (g) Where divulgence is requested by peer.

Disclosures under these exceptions will be made directly to the Chief of Police or his designee. Peer support assistance is not exempt from laws, rules, regulations, or special orders; but any exchange of information not in violation of this statement will be confidential.

A general principle for peer support personnel to follow is to inform the person, prior to discussion, what the limitations and exceptions are regarding the information revealed. In those cases where a concern or a question regarding confidentiality arises, the peer supporter must immediately contact the coordinator or Counseling Team who will take the appropriate action.

1011.11 INTERNAL INVESTIGATIONS

It may occur that a peer supporter is assisting an individual who is or becomes the subject of a disciplinary investigation. The peer supporter's role in disciplinary situations should be one of support and assisting individuals through the stress they may face during the disciplinary process. The peer supporter should be guided by the confidentiality policy of the Peer Support Program. He/she should not volunteer any information received in confidence, however, the peer supporter may not hamper or impede the actual investigation, nor may they attempt to shelter the individual from the department's investigation. Department supervisors shall respect the confidentiality of the prior peer support conversations. If a peer supporter is ordered by a supervisor to divulge

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information obtained during a peer support session that divulgence shall be ordered by the Chief of Police or designee.

If peer supporters have any questions or concerns regarding these situations, they should consult with the coordinator for guidelines and assistance.

1011.12 PEER SUPPORT PROGRAM SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES

The purpose of this section is to provide the peer supporter with a summary of the guidelines to be followed when dealing with situations under field conditions. These guidelines are the basic tools for providing assistance. Used properly, they will help boost peer supporter confidence and will reduce the risks of mismanaging emotional problems. For more detailed guidelines, the peer supporter should refer to the training material from the Basic Peer Support training course.

1011.12.1 LISTENING

Listening techniques are fundamental to the use of all other interviewing skills. The purpose of effective listening includes:

- (a) Encouraging self-expression.
- (b) Allowing individual opportunity to direct the interview.
- (c) Giving individuals the sense of responsibility for what happens.
- (d) Helping individuals relax and be comfortable in the interview.
- (e) Fostering trust of the peer supporter and a sense of security.
- (f) Enabling the peer supporter to draw more accurate inferences about the individual.

1011.12.2 ASSESSMENT

The process of making a judgment about the information gathered during the interview. Two primary factors must be considered:

- (a) Assess whether the problem is one with which you can assist the person or one that should be referred to professional resources.
- (b) Assess whether the problem needs urgent attention.

1011.12.3 REFFERAL

The process of directing the peer to the appropriate professional service(s) available.

1011.12.4 FOLLOW UP

Once assessment and referrals have been made, the peer supporter should monitor the individual's progress, and provide follow-up assistance as needed.