
	MESQUITE POLICE DEPARTMENT
	319.00 PEER SUPPORT PROGRAM
	Effective Date: June, 2020
	Approved: _____  Chief of Police

I. Purpose and Philosophy

The purpose and goal of The Mesquite Police Department Peer Support Program is to provide all employees in the department the opportunity to receive emotional and tangible support through times of personal or professional crisis and to help anticipate and address potential difficulties. This department is committed to safeguarding the mental health and emotional well-being of all employees, sworn and civilian. Confidentiality is paramount. Without it, no employee would utilize the program which benefits, first, the employee, second, his/her family, third, the police department and finally, the community as a whole. Every community benefits from the mental health and well-being of its police officers.

II. Definitions

- A. Peer Support Team-A group of trained, voluntary Mesquite Police Department personnel who lend support to others experiencing personal or professional crisis in their lives.
- B. Peer Support Member (PSM) - A specifically trained colleague, but not a counselor or therapist. A PSM is trained to provide both day-to-day emotional support for department employees as well as to participate in the department's comprehensive response to critical incidents. Peer Support Members are trained to recognize and refer cases that require professional intervention or are beyond their scope of training to a licensed mental health professional. PSM's may be either sworn or civilian police department employees.
- C. PSM Director - The Peer Support Director is responsible for the day-to-day operations of peer support services of the department, direct supervision of all Peer Support Members and administrative duties associated with the Peer Support Program.
- D. Mental Health Professional - A licensed mental health worker, counselor, psychotherapist, psychologist or psychiatrist.
- E. Critical Incident Stress - The acute or cumulative psychological stress or trauma that an emergency service provider may experience in providing emergency services in response to a critical incident, including a crisis, disaster, or emergency. The stress or trauma is an unusually strong emotional, cognitive, or physical reaction that has the potential to interfere with normal functioning, including:
 - 1. Physical and emotional illness
 - 2. Failure of usual coping mechanisms
 - 3. Loss of interest in the job
 - 4. Personality changes
 - 5. Loss of ability to function
- F. Privacy- The expectation of an individual that disclosure of personal information is confined to or intended only for the PSM, unless disclosure is mandated under Section G.
- G. Confidentiality- a professional or ethical duty for the PSM to refrain from disclosing information from or about a recipient of peer support services, barring any exceptions recommended to be disclosed at the outset (Please refer to Texas Health and Safety Code 784.003)
 - 1. Contacts by Peer Support Members will remain confidential to the extent allowed by law. Confidentiality will be maintained in all instances except under the following circumstances:

- a. The PSM reasonably needs to make an appropriate referral of the emergency service provider to or consult about the provider with another member of the team or an appropriate professional associated with the team;
 - b. The communication conveys information that the emergency service provider is or appears to be an imminent threat to the provider or anyone else;
 - c. The communication conveys information relating to a past, present, or future criminal act that does not directly relate to the critical incident or crisis;
 - d. The emergency service provider or the legal representative of the provider expressly agrees that the communication or record is not confidential;
 - e. The employee is deceased
 - H. Privilege- The legal protection from being compelled to disclose communications in certain protected relationships, such as between attorney and client, doctor and patient, priest and confessor, or in some states, peer support members and sworn or civilian personnel. In Texas, Peer Support Members are governed and protected by Texas Health and Safety Code Chapter 784, which include limitations and liability.
- III. Procedures and Responsibilities
- A. Peer Support Members are qualified and specially trained personnel. The Peer Support Program is designed to augment outreach programs such as the City of Mesquite EAP (Employee Assistance Program) and psychological services, not replace them. Peer Support Members are not governed or licensed by the Texas Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors.
 - B. Peer Support Members will be available 7 days per week, 24hrs per day for call out. Designated Peer Support Members are available on a 24hr basis through assignment by the PSM Director. A PSM contact list will be created and maintained by the PSM Director.
 - C. An individual in need of peer support may contact dispatch or the on-duty Watch Commander directly to obtain assistance. Dispatch or the Watch Commander will, as soon as possible, contact the PSM Director for support contact requests. The PSM Director will maintain and distribute a current support roster.
 - D. Departmental employees may voluntarily seek the assistance of a qualified PSM. The PSM, if contacted outside of their assigned working hours, will be compensated for the initial off-duty contact according to the current Overtime General Order, however subsequent contacts should be scheduled during the PSM's regular duty hours or offset, with the permission of their supervisor and the PSM Director, so as to not require overtime compensation. Overtime may also be approved for any PSM related function that has been pre-authorized by the PSM Director or a command level officer. The employee seeking the assistance of a PSM will not be eligible for any type of overtime compensation because of time spent meeting or communicating with the PSM.
 - E. Peer Support Members will maintain contact with the PSM Director regarding program activities and statistical data on program contacts for purpose of program evaluation, including the submission of a Mesquite Police Department Peer Support Team Contact form. A log will be created that contains information regarding the number of support contacts made with employees, the number of contacts accepted and/or rejected, as well as, the general content area of those contacts. Names of persons seeking assistance and specifics about the sessions shall not be submitted.
 - F. The PSM will make a reasonable attempt to remain available to the individual and offer additional support if necessary.

- G. Peer Support Members will assist peers by referring them to appropriate referral services when necessary, i.e. the City of Mesquite EAP Program, Alcoholics Anonymous, local mental health facilities, etc.
- IV. Traumatic Events
 - A. As prescribed by the Chief of Police, departmental personnel who are involved in critical incidents may be requested to attend a debriefing session with a PSM.
 - B. The below listed events should trigger an automatic debriefing for any departmental personnel directly involved. Any employee not directly involved is not precluded from being a part of a debriefing if they so choose.
 - 1. Major disasters
 - 2. Multiple casualty incidents
 - 3. Line of duty death or suicide of a department member
 - 4. Death of a child resulting from violence, neglect or any other condition which may have a lasting effect on personnel
 - 5. Any incident or situation that the Chief of Police or his designee feels may require a PSM debriefing
- V. Training
 - A. Peer support members must successfully complete an initial Individual/Group Crisis Intervention training. After the introductory training, Peer Support Members will continue to receive training relevant to their duties as a PSM.
 - B. Bi-annual meetings will be held for all Peer Support Members. The PSM Director will schedule these meetings and may add additional meetings as needed.
 - C. Records Management and Special Reporting
 - D. All contacts by Peer Support Members will be documented on a Peer Support Contact form. Names or identifying characteristics will not be included in the synopsis as per confidentiality guidelines.
 - E. The PSM Director will prepare an annual report, which will include information on the number of utilizations and contacts.
- VI. Confidentiality:
 - A. Peer Support Members will keep all communications with those they come in contact with strictly confidential. Except as provided in Section II, paragraph G., under no circumstances will a PSM divulge information to any other person, including supervisors.. No employee or supervisor will ask a PSM to discuss or reveal information gained about an employee through a peer support sanctioned meeting or communication, unless such disclosure is required under Section II, paragraph G.
- VII. Selection / Removal Criteria
 - A. To be considered for a PSM position, all candidates must:
 - 1. Be a sworn or non-sworn member of the Mesquite Police Department
 - 2. Have at least two years of service, post-probation, with the Mesquite Police Department or any other recognized law enforcement agency. The Chief of Police must formally authorize exceptions to this requirement. Examples include those that have a formal background in Mental Health Services, i.e. psychology, sociology, grief counseling, etc.
 - 3. Complete a Peer Support Member application, which includes a statement of interest, critical incidents experience, and training experience applicable to peer support. PSM applicants may be asked to participate in an oral interview.
 - 4. Completed Lateral Transfer Applications from Supervisors/Peers
 - 5. Have no sustained complaints in the 12-month period preceding the application date.
- VIII. Rejection and Removal Criteria

- A. In the event that an application for a PSM fails to fulfill the selection criteria, the application shall be rejected. If selected for the program and any of the selection criteria change, a PSM may be removed, at the discretion of the Chief of Police, if they fail to meet the new criteria.
 - B. The PSM Director will review the progress of Peer Support Members every two years for continued suitability in the program. A PSM may be dismissed at any time from the program by the Chief of Police at his/her sole discretion.
 - C. A PSM shall notify the PSM Director in a timely manner should the PSM decide to voluntarily withdraw from participation in the Peer Support Program.
- IX. Duty to Maintain a Professional Relationship
- A. Peer Support Members will refrain from engaging in any type of improper relationships, arrangements or behaviors with peer support recipients that may reasonably impair objectivity, competence, or effectiveness in performing his/her role as a PSM or otherwise risk exploitation or harm to the person with whom the relationship exists.

EFFECTIVE: June, 2020.