

Kent PD	WASPC	Title
#8.90	N/A	Peer Support Policy

There is a need for employees to have support for both personal and professional crisis situations and general work stressors. Employees may be under personal stressors, which influence their daily lives and work habits. Additionally, the situations and demands specific to law enforcement can cause effects from both acute and accumulated work place stress.

The Kent Police Department recognizes that these stressors can affect the abilities of its employees to provide proper and professional services to the community. The department also recognizes the value of the individuals it employs and wishes to provide various avenues of help depending on the needs of the employee. To this end this policy outlines two programs available to staff under varying circumstances:

- Critical Incident Stress Management Response
- Peer Support Team Program

The goals of the programs are:

1. To provide an avenue that will aid employees in the resolution of crisis situations in their personal and professional environments.
2. To provide information about the various physiological and psychological effects of stress on the individual through educational materials and presentations.
3. To act as a liaison between the staff and employee and provide resources for support.

Through the use of the stress management programs offered, the department projects the following benefits:

1. Higher retention of employees with decreasing costs of recruiting and training new employees.
2. Provide an avenue for employees to know what support resources are available to them.
3. Improved utilization of current resources.

Critical Incident Stress Management Response.

During the course of performing regular duties, officers and employees may suddenly find themselves exposed to a situation which results in an unusually strong emotional reaction which interferes with their ability to function either at the scene or later.

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These types of situations are called "critical incidents" and may include one of the following:

1. Officer involved shooting, or other life-threatening encounter.
2. Serious injury or death of a co-worker.
3. Response to a catastrophic event such as a major disaster with multiple victims.

On-Scene Critical Incident Procedures

The following procedures should be followed when an employee of the department is involved in a critical incident:

- Demonstrate an attitude of personal concern for the employee(s) involved. This is an important element of physical and mental first aid. Supervisors and employees who respond to the scene and find it appropriate should express their concern for the well-being of the employee involved.
- Employees involved should be removed from the scene as soon as is practical. The employee will be accompanied from the scene to the station or other appropriate location by a supervisor, a peer support team member, or a personal friend. The person who accompanies the employee will remain with them until properly relieved.
- If the employee deems it necessary they may contact an attorney to provide them with legal assistance and advice.
- The employee may contact their family or significant others. The employee can request that this contact be made for them by someone they designate.
- The employee will be given the date and time of the critical incident debriefing (See next section).
- To provide optimum privacy for the employee and their immediate family, the department will issue them a cellular telephone.

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- If desired, a peer support team member will arrange transportation home for the employee. The Peer Support Team will also provide the employee and their family with information about possible responses to stressful incidents.

Activating the Critical Incident Stress Management Team

Any member of the department may request the on-scene supervisor notify the peer support team coordinator. After assessing the situation, the peer support team coordinator will recommend to the affected division commander what response is most appropriate. If it is determined by the division commander that a critical incident debriefing is needed, the peer team coordinator will make contact with Code 4 Northwest at 425-243-5092. Code 4 Northwest will have a Critical Incident Management Team leader contact the peer support team coordinator.

The peer support team coordinator will explain the circumstances to the CISM Team Leader. A time and date for a debriefing will be agreed upon, and all members of the department directly involved in the incident will be made aware of the meeting. If at all possible the debriefing should be scheduled within 72 hours of the incident. Attendance at the debriefing is mandatory for all Kent Police Department employees involved in the incident, except when an employee is injured or is receiving individual psychological evaluation. Expenses of psychological counseling resulting from a critical incident will be paid by the department.

Only those employees involved in the incident will attend the debriefing. If other employees not directly involved in the incident are having strong emotional reactions to the situation, a separate needs assessment can be made by the peer team coordinator or employee's supervisor for additional services to be provided to the employee.

The critical incident debriefing will be held away from the work site when possible. The purpose of the debriefing is to provide a safe, non-judgmental, environment for all involved to discuss the event and what effect the event may have had on them. All discussion taking place during the debriefing is to be held in confidence by the participants.

Peer Support Team

The field of law enforcement has its own unique stressors. Employees are frequently

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hesitant to talk about their problems with someone not familiar with the law enforcement culture and may not understand their perspective. Attempting to deal with the stress alone can lead to more pressure and additional problems. The peer support team is available to provide an opportunity for trained employees to help their fellow employees deal with a variety of personal and professional problems.

Confidentiality

Peer support team members are trained to provide counseling to any employee of the Kent Police Department. In accordance with RCW 5.60.060 communications between a sworn police officer and a peer counselor, who has been trained and is designated by the Chief of Police, is considered privileged communication. The law does not provide such a privilege for communications between peer counselors and other civilian or corrections staff persons. However, it will be the policy of the department to honor these individual confidences as well.

The exception to the above issue of confidentiality is in the following cases:

1. The employee admits to current and continuing physical abuse of a child or domestic partner.
2. The employee threatens physical harm to themselves or another person.
3. The employee admits to having committed a crime as defined by law.

If, as a result of a peer counseling session, a team member becomes aware of any of the above situations, they will immediately notify the peer team coordinator. The team coordinator will notify the employee's division commander for further action.

Selection of Members

The process for selection of members to the peer support team will be as follows:

1. Nominations from each division (corrections, support staff, sworn officers) will be made by those working in that unit.
2. Employees nominated will be contacted by the team coordinator to determine their desire to serve in the capacity of a peer counselor.
3. The names of those nominated and who agree to serve if selected will be put to a vote by those within the unit.

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4. The name(s) receiving the highest number of votes will be assigned to fill open positions on the team.
5. The team coordinator will be selected by majority vote of the team members.

Team Membership Duration

Team members will serve as peer counselors for as long as they wish, unless it adversely impacts the member's regular duty assignments and corrective action and counseling has not resolved the issue. Team members can ask to be placed on "secondary responder" status, which means all other team members would be utilized prior to their being called to a scene. Also, their name would be removed from the contact list as being available for non-incident counseling. Team members will automatically be reassigned to the team every year by the Chief unless they express a desire to be removed. A letter listing the names of current team members will be signed by the Chief and kept by the team coordinator.

Training of Team Members

All members assigned to the peer support team will receive an initial two-day training course providing the basics of peer counseling techniques. During the course of the year, the team coordinator will provide additional training through meetings or e-mail communication. Written articles or videos may be used to provide this training.

Team Member Responsibilities

Team members are expected at all times to conduct themselves in a manner that reflects the confidence the members of the police department have placed in them. The main responsibility of the peer support team member is to be available to their fellow employees whenever they are needed. Contact with peer support is done proactively by the peer support team member after a critical incident takes place. The team member who is aware of the incident will make contact with the employee involved to check on their wellbeing. The involved employee can make contact after a critical incident on their own at any time. Contact is made in person or over the phone.

All peer support contacts will be reported to the peer team coordinator every two weeks. Subject matter and who the contact is will not be included in this report. The peer team coordinator will keep track of these contacts in order to show the

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validity of the program and as a way to monitor the emotional wellbeing of the peer support team members.

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