0

0

  **Barre City Police Department**

***Barre, Vermont***

**Braedon S. Vail**

***Chief***

**PERSONNEL PROCEDURES**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Subject:**  **Peer Support Program** | **Number:**  **314** | **Effective Date:**  **XX/XX/24** |

**Note:** These Rules & Regulations, Operational Policies and/or Procedures are for internal use only and does not enlarge a member’s civil or criminal liability in any way. It should not be construed as a creation of a higher standard of safety or care in an evidentiary sense, with respect to third party claims. Violations of this directive, if proven, can only form the basis of a complaint by this department, and then only in a non-judicial administrative setting.

**Policy:** It is the policy of the Barre City Police Department to provide assistance and referrals to peer support personnel in times of personal and/or professional stress and/or crisis in the best interest of the employee, the agency and the public.

**Purpose:** To establish and manage peer support services for agency personnel who may be in need of peer counseling or mental health services.

**Contents:**

I. Definitions

II. Peer Support Team

III. Notification and Activation

IV. Peer Support Team Guidelines

V. Defusing

VI. Debriefing

VII. General Duties

VIII. Cancellation

**I. Definitions**

**A.** **Critical Incident** ‑ any situation which has such a profound emotional impact that it has the potential to interfere with an employee’s ability to function due to trauma.

**B.** **Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)** - a peer-driven, comprehensive, systematic, and multi-component approach to the management of traumatic stress that endeavors to decrease the effects of critical incident stress early on before reactions become rooted.

**C.** **Debriefing** ‑ a confidential meeting between employees involved in a critical incident and a designated Critical Incident team, usually following a defusing. This meeting can be on an individual or group basis. It is used to inform and educate involved employees on stress management techniques. It is not an operational critique; rather the focus is on assisting the employee or group with coping behaviors and techniques.

**D.** **Defusing -** a brief discussion, parallel to a debriefing, between involved employees and peer counselors immediately following a critical incident, at the location of the involved personnel. The defusing meeting serves as an assessment of the personnel to determine if a full debriefing is necessary.

**E**. **Mental Health Professional** - a licensed professional, departmentally authorized social or mental health caseworker, counselor, psychotherapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist.

**F.** **Peer Counselor(s)** - employees specifically trained in CISM techniques that provide personal support. Peer counselors shall be authorized by this agency to provide voluntary counseling services to agency employees only after having successfully completed the 16-hour course as mandated by the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation. Peer counselors must be active members of the Barre City Police Department.

**G. Trauma** - a state of emotional shock induced by severe stress and precipitated by an intense, unusual, and/or emergency event, e.g., an unexpected death of a coworker or suspect in custody, hostage incident, sexual assault, etc.

**II. Peer Support Team**

**A.** The Peer Support Team shall be comprised of members from the department. Ideally, composition of the team should represent a cross section of department personnel such as patrol, emergency communications and criminal investigations.

**B.** The Peer Support Team will be managed by a Team Coordinator. The coordinator will be a member of the team and selected by the Chief of Police or their designee. The Team Coordinator will be responsible for:

● supervising the program on a daily basis;

● arranging agency critical incident debriefings and defusings;

● coordinating training of the Team;

● coordinating follow-up response when referrals are made by Peer Supporters for outside services; and

● offering guidance to Peer Supporters as necessary

**C.** The police mental health clinician will be considered as part of the Peer Support Team.

**D.** All members must complete a department-approved training program, unless otherwise trained as a professional by virtue of their position (i.e., police mental health clinician), prior to serving as a Peer Supporter.

**E.** Selection and participation:

● Interested employees requesting appointment as a Peer Supporter must submit their request through their chain of command to the program coordinator.

● The program coordinator will convene a board to review, interview, and select Peer Supporters.

● In consultation with the Chief, successful candidates will be appointed.

● A Peer Supporter will be removed from participation in the program for conduct inconsistent with program policies or objectives.

**III. Notification and Activation**

**A.** A list of Peer Support Members will be maintained. The Team Coordinator is responsible for providing the Communications Center with updated rosters of Team members.

● The Peer Support Team is available for activation 24 hours a day for critical incidents.

**B.** The supervisor shall promptly notify the Peer Support Team Coordinator of the following types of incidents.

● Suicide of a department member

● Any police-related shooting

● Any mass casualty incident or natural disaster with traumatic results (i.e., plane crash, hurricane, etc.)

● Death or severe injury to a child

● Any other incident in which the circumstances were so unusual or the sights and sounds so distressing as to produce a high level of immediate or delayed emotional reaction. These may include but are not limited to fatal crashes, suicides, or other traumatic events

**C.** In the event of a traumatic incident, the shift supervisor shall immediately assign an on-duty member of the Peer Support Team as Peer Supporter to stay with the affected employee for personal support during post incident activities.

● If no on-duty Peer Support Team members are available then a co-worker may be assigned until the Peer Support Team can be activated.

● At no time should the affected employ be left alone.

**D.** When a member of the Peer Support Team is requested by the proper authority to respond to a Peer Support Team call-out during non-scheduled working hours, that member will be compensated on an overtime basis.

**E.** Under some circumstances, it may be necessary for a Peer Support Team member to conduct one-on-one Peer Support at the scene. These interventions shall be brief and supportive in nature.

● On-scene formal group debriefings are prohibited.

**IV. Peer Support Team Guidelines**

**A.** Team members shall meet quarterly to discuss mutual issues and concerns, review team activities, and update training as needed. The Peer Support Team Coordinator or their designee shall facilitate this meeting.

**B.** It shall be the duty of the Peer Support Team members to maintain strict confidentiality in matters involving emotional, financial, or personal concerns of Peer Support participants.

**C.** Members of the Peer Support Team who are also employees of the Barre City Police Department have certain legal obligations. Team members may become aware of information during the CISM process that may not remain confidential. Exceptions to the confidentiality rule of CISM are:

● There is as reason to believe a participant presents a danger to themself or others.

● There is a reason to believe a participant has committed or anticipates committing a criminal offense.

**D.** Officers who have been involved in a violation of law or their oath of office shall not rely upon nor expect peer counseling to serve as a means of relieving or diminishing their real or perceived responsibility. Exceptions to the confidentiality rule will be clearly stated to the participants prior to the beginning of a debriefing process.

**E.** Peer Support Team members having knowledge of one of the exceptions will not discuss the matter but will immediately contact the Peer Support Team Coordinator or their designee for direction.

**F.** It will be the practice of the Department not to question Peer Support Team members for facts surrounding a critical incident defusing or debriefing or the individual involved.

**G.** Agency employees may voluntarily seek the assistance of a peer counselor at any time.

**H.** Peer counselors may be used to assist officers and their families in cases of job-related crises through informal counseling and support and through referral to professional mental health service providers where necessary.

**I.** Employees should use peer counselors as a referral source where appropriate and may, with or without anonymity, provide the name of a fellow officer or employee for discreet and confidential intervention.

**J.** Strict confidentiality shall be maintained between the peer counselor and the employee. Other than the noted exceptions, nothing discussed between counseling participants shall be divulged to any third party without the express written consent of the employee.

**K.** As an alternative to peer counseling, employees are encouraged to contact the Employee Assistance Program, a police chaplain, their personal clergy, physicians or mental health professionals when deemed necessary for resolving emotional crisis.

**V. Defusing**

The primary purpose for the off-scene defusing is to educate personnel of possible stress reactions and the need for proper care of themselves (i.e., food, rest, things to avoid, etc.)

**A.** Off-scene defusing can be an individual or group process. The defusing should be conducted within eight hours of the incident, if possible, and in a comfortable, quiet location away from at the scene.

**B.** Personnel are encouraged to unwind during this session and ventilate feelings and emotions. Peer Support Team Members shall make themselves available for individuals who would like to talk one-on-one after defusing. Team Members should ensure that this session does not turn into a critique of the incident.

**VI. Debriefing**

**A.** It shall be the responsibility of the Peer Support Team Coordinator, in conjunction with the on-scene supervisor, to determine if a debriefing and/or defusing is needed and when they will take place.

**B.** Any member or employee of the department can request or recommend a debriefing by contacting the Peer Support Team Coordinator.

**C.** Only those members involved in the Critical Incident will be permitted to attend the debriefing and/or defusing.

**VII. General Duties**

**A.** Peer Support Team Coordinator:

● Shall be responsible for administering and supervising the program and assuring that services are available on a reasonable basis to all agency employees.

● Determine if the Peer Support Team shall respond to a scene or incident.

● If needed, ensure a debriefing is held as soon as possible, preferably within 72 hours following the incident.

● Notify the Deputy Chief of an affected employee's physical and emotional status if the coordinator feels that additional time off, work assignment modification or other follow-up assistance is needed.

● Monitor Peer Support Team members for signs of emotional burn-out.

**B.** Peer Supporter:

● Obtain first aid for the affected employees if necessary and, if requested by the employee, accompany them to the hospital.

● Inform the affected employee of the limits of confidentiality prior to discussing the traumatic incident.

● Notify the Peer Support Team Coordinator of an affected employee's physical and emotional status if the Peer Supporter feels that additional time off, work assignment modification or other follow-up assistance is needed.

● Continually monitor fellow Peer Supporters for signs of emotional burn-out.

**VIII. Cancellation**

This written directive cancels, replaces and supersedes any directives in conflict therewith.

AUTHORITY:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Braedon S. Vail, Chief of Police

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

, 2024

Index As:

CISM

Critical Incident

Debriefing

Defusing

Peer Support

Trauma