

# UW Whitewater Police



## Peer Support Program

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Special Instructions:

Approved By:  
Chief Kiederlen

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### I. Purpose

The purpose of the Peer Support Program is to offer assistance and support to employees that have experience traumatic and stressful/critical incidents, while on duty and off duty. Through the formation of the peer program, officers will have an outlet to more effectively cope with life stresses that they may be experiencing.

### II. Definitions

**Work Related Stress:** Stress originating from a call or scene that elicits an undesired response.

**Work Related Trauma:** Trauma originating from an experience which happened while on duty.

**Non-work Stress/Trauma:** Incidents in the officers' personal lives that cause undesired responses.

**Critical Incident:** Any powerful or sudden event that falls outside the usual realm of human experience and may be markedly distressing to the individual or group.

**Peer Support Program Coordinator (PSPC):** Manages the program and acts as the primary liaison between the peer supporters and supervisor.

**Peer Supporter (PS):** Provide support and assistance to the peer during times of stress/trauma and crisis.

**Confidentiality:** The act of keeping information private between the Peer Supporter and the peer.

### III. Policy

It is the policy of the UW-Whitewater Police Department (UWWPD) that the Peer Support Program will be a confidential resource for UWWPD personnel, providing it does not violate laws or University regulations. It is imperative that each peer supporter maintain strict confidentiality of all information learned about an individual within the guidelines. All contacts between personnel and a peer supporter will remain strictly confidential, except as required

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during an official investigation or pursuant to court order, subpoena, or similar process. Other information shared between the peer supporter and the peer that is not confidential include:

- Danger to self;
- Danger to others;
- Suspected child abuse;
- Narcotic offenses (sales or transportation);
- Domestic violence;
- Factual elder abuse;
- In cases where law requires disclosure;
- Where disclosure is requested by the peer.

## IV. Procedure

### A. Confidentiality

1. Officers who have experienced stress or trauma through work or off duty are entitled to a support group and professional guidance from a licensed therapist. All employees of the department will be trained on how to access and utilize the Peer Support Program in an effort to improve and maintain career resiliency.
2. The most important services provided by the Peer Support Program to members of UWWPD is to give members an opportunity to confide in a peer supporter about issues they feel they could not speak to others about. Any betrayal of this trust would result in irreparable damage to the Peer Support Program. The entire concept of peer support is based on confidentiality and trust of the membership using the program.
3. A general principal for a peer supporters to follow is to inform the peer, prior to discussion, what the limitations and exceptions are regarding the information revealed. In cases where a concern or question regarding confidentiality arises, the peer supporter must contact the Peer Support Program Coordinator (PSPC) who will take appropriate action.
4. If there is reason to believe a peer supporter has breached confidentiality, the PSPC will review the incident and allegations, as well as the peer supporter's fitness to continue as a peer supporter. The PSPC retains the right to remove any member from the program if there is cause to believe confidentiality has been breached. This could be subject to appeal to the PSPC and the Chief of Police.

### B. Role of the Peer Support Program Coordinator (PSPC)

1. Providing peer to peer support services.
2. Ensure that follow-up occurs when referrals are made to outside resources.
3. Responsible for continuous evaluation and maintenance of the Peer Support Program.
4. Maintaining an accounting of resources used by Peer Support Program applicants.
5. Coordinate the training of peer supporters, new peers and biannual training for the Peer Support Program.

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6. Ensure that peer supporters adhere to confidentiality policies.
7. Receive feedback including support and critique of any part of the program, process and delivery of peer support.
8. Coordinate and direct regular meetings of peer supporters.
9. Participate in the recruitment of new peer supporters when necessary.
10. Review applications and conduct interviews of peer support candidates with current peer supporters. They will then make the appropriate recommendation to the Chief of Police (or designee).
11. In the event that the PSPC will be unavailable for an extended period of time (excess of 14 days), he/she shall notify the Chief in writing informing him/her. In addition, the coordinator shall make a recommendation to the Chief of Police or a member of the Peer Support Program to act as the acting coordinator during this absence.

## C. Role of Peer Supporter

1. Provide assistance and support on a voluntary basis.
2. Respond to peer support requests at any hour (if possible).
3. Effectively listen, communicate, and understand when meeting with peers by remaining empathetic.
4. When possible, share their personal experiences, skills, strengths, and support resources that they utilized in similar situations.
5. Convey trust, anonymity and assurance of confidentiality within guidelines to the peer who is seeking assistance from the Peer Support Program.
6. Utilize personal experiences to assist peers in creating wellness plans.
7. Provide knowledge and referral information as needed by referring the peer to the appropriate outside resource when necessary.
8. Be available to the individual for additional follow-up support.
9. Document all contacts and forward them to the PSPC.
10. Attend peer support training seminars and any additional training which may be required.
11. Be responsible for following all policies, procedures and applicable laws.

## D. Referrals to the Peer Support Program

1. Referral to the Peer Support Program can be made from by anyone involved in the incident or a supervisor who becomes aware of the officer's involvement in the incident. Possible areas of support include, but are not limited to:
  - a. Grief and loss;
  - b. Depression;
  - c. Critical Incidents;
  - d. Post-Trauma Incidents;
  - e. Emotional Distress;
  - f. Career Stress;
  - g. Family Issues;
  - h. Parenting Issues;
  - i. Suicide;

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- j. Financial Issues;
  - k. Medical Concerns;
  - l. Substance Abuse;
  - m. Burnout;
  - n. Anxiety;
  - o. An Injury;
  - p. Separation/Divorce.
2. Personnel may be referred to the Peer Support Program in the following ways:
- a. An employee may personally contact a peer supporter.
  - b. Referred by an employee aware of another employee who may be in need of assistance.
  - c. A peer supporter may contact an employee they see dealing with any of the above-mentioned areas of support.
  - d. Referred by a family member or associate of the employee.
  - e. Supervisory personnel can refer an employee after any critical incident or traumatic event. Examples of critical incidents or traumatic events may include, but are not limited to:
    - i. Employee involved in a deadly force incident.
    - ii. Aggravated assault on an employee.
    - iii. Hostage situations.
    - iv. Injury, illness or death of an employee or a family member of an employee.
    - v. Assisting family members with an employee's death, injury, or serious illness.
    - vi. Catastrophic incidents such as a flood, fatal accidents, mass casualty event, etc.
    - vii. Investigations involving death (i.e. unexpected deaths, child, infant, homicide).
- E. Peer Support of Department Member(s) Involved in an Incident: The following is a brief outline of what is important when talking with UWWPD members directly involved in a critical incident.
- 1. Introduce yourself, explain who you are, and why you are there.
    - a. Meet the personal concerns and needs of the member.
    - b. Advise the member you are not a union representative.
    - c. Advise the member you are not involved in the investigation.
    - d. Advise the member you will not record your conversation or file any reports related to your conversation.
    - e. Advise the member of the confidentiality expectations of the Peer Support Program.
  - 2. Find out the member's reaction to the incident.
    - a. How is the member feeling?

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- b. Listen to whatever the member says. Try to validate and normalize what they are feeling and thinking.
  - c. Let the member talk about what is important to them.
  - d. If the member has questions, answer them. If you can't, attempt to find out the answers.
3. Stress Reactions to Traumatic Events.
    - a. A traumatic event has both physical and emotional impact.
    - b. Most people will experience intrusive thoughts of the event.
    - c. Explain to the member he/she may experience sensory distortion and that these are common reactions.
    - d. Explain the emotional responses that are possible (mood swings, anger, guilt, etc.).
    - e. Try to discourage the second-guessing of their decisions.
  4. Self-help tips for individuals involved in Critical Incidents.
    - a. Find someone trusted to talk to about the event and reactions to it.
    - b. Limit alcohol and caffeine intake.
    - c. Exercise.
  5. Explain what the member should expect from the department.
    - a. Debriefing.
    - b. Possible administrative leave.
    - c. Officers may be assigned to desk duty.
    - d. District Attorney review may be pending.

## F. Training

### 1. Overview

- a. The Peer Support Program realizes that training is the most important component to creating a successful team. Work of this nature is difficult even when properly trained.
- b. The PSPC shall be in charge of the preparation (arrange for speaker[s], study materials, and equipment) and conduct the training needed.
- c. Topics to be covered in both the training of new peers and the biannual training sessions of the Peer Support Program are as follows:
  - i. Issues of confidentiality;
  - ii. Communication skills;
  - iii. Problem-solving skills;
  - iv. Suicide;
  - v. Substance abuse;
  - vi. How to use and make referrals;
  - vii. Stress and stress management;
  - viii. Mental disorders;
  - ix. Critical incident issues and procedures;
  - x. Depression;
  - xi. Peer support techniques.

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- d. The Peer Support Program will use resources within the Department and attempt to bring in experts in the above topics to assist in the training of its members. Training will include lectures, videos, demonstrations, and role-playing.
  - e. Training will also teach peer supporters that they are not providing actual therapy but are peer supporters. It is important to know your limitations with regard to what you can do to help your fellow Department members. Over extending yourself can do more harm than good.
2. New Member Training
- a. New members selected to be in the Peer Support Program shall receive no less than 40 hours of training before they are considered active members. This minimum is in place so that new members are knowledgeable in peer support techniques and comfortable in their new position.
  - b. The goal of new member training is to enable the Peer Support Program member to handle many different situations with confidence. The new member must take advantage of this training to clarify any topic they may have questions about.

Attachment(s):

Appendix A. Peer Support Program Team Letter of Commitment

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## Appendix A.

### Peer Support Program Team

#### Letter of Commitment

##### Mission Statement:

The mission of the Peer Support Program is to provide members of the UW Whitewater Police Department who may be suffering from emotional, personal, and physical or stress related difficulties with access to quality support services so as to have an opportunity to work at resolving any difficulties before job performance may be impaired. The function of Peer Support Program is to provide a voluntary and ***confidential*** outlet for officers, employees and their families who have a need to talk about conflicts or feelings they have concerning their job, home situations, or the relationship between the two.

##### Objectives:

I, as an active member of the Peer Support Program, agree to the following objectives of the Peer Support Program and am willing to make at least a two-year commitment.

1. To provide a readily accessible network of members trained and willing to be of service to their fellow employees who have expressed a need for assistance.
2. To develop an awareness among employees that they are not alone, that people are willing to listen to them, and that others care about them and their issues.
3. To develop among peers, an awareness of the self-help alternatives that are available to them.
4. To provide 24-hour crisis assistance to all members and their families.
5. To provide non-crisis, but still critical and essential, assistance to all members and their families.
6. To help fellow employees through temporary crisis situations that is a common part of the law enforcement career.

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7. To provide referrals to professional services when appropriate.
8. To provide a program of intervention which can assist in defusing problems before they reach a point of crisis and result in the loss of family, work time or job.
9. To treat as ***confidential*** all information about employees and their families within established Peer Support Program guidelines.
10. To make every effort to attend Peer Support Program training sessions or, if unable to attend, notify the Peer Support Program coordinator.
11. To file timely monthly reports.
12. To remember that this is a volunteer organization and as such, all off-duty time is on a volunteer. donated basis.

I have read the Mission Statement and Objectives of the Peer Support Program and agree to make at least a two-year commitment to the organization.

Signature:

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Printed name:

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Date: