

**Phoenix Fire Department  
&  
Local 493**

**Peer Support Team**

**Policy and Procedures  
Revised 2017**

## **Overview**

The purpose of the Peer Support Program (PST) is to offer confidential assistance and support to all Department employees and their family members in times of personal need or due to traumatic incidents that have caused acute or cumulative stress.

The PST will augment the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and does not replace professional mental health treatment. The objectives of the PST are to minimize psychological trauma or stressors that the Department employees and their families may experience throughout their career and to render assistance and guidance.

Peer Support Members will be trained to provide peer support services. The PST team members are not licensed counselors or therapists but act as peer support providers offering information, guidance and direction on how to best resolve emotionally charged matters in a confidential setting.

This manual provides information regarding the administration, selection of team members, training required and the deployment process for the PST.

## **Purpose and Philosophy**

The Peer Support Team is designed to use the Department's resources to benefit employees in times of need.

Work related or externally caused stressors have the potential to jeopardize relationships, health, safety and work performance. The PST program is designed to help members and their families connect to resources to help reduce stress, cope with crisis, work through family difficulties, and obtain immediate and short-term help. The members of the PST will be educated and trained on how to pick up on red flags and how to refer those members to get assistance.

## **Peer Support Services**

The Peer Support Program (PST) provides a network of members to peers in need. PST are trained by mental health professionals and the IAFF master trainers and can assist with many types of problems. PST members will receive basic training in Peer Support and High Stress Incident Management. Additionally, the PST members will receive continuing education hours each quarter. One of the most significant skills PST members will possess is their ability to be good listeners and effectively communicate with others, as well as be familiar with resources available and how to refer members to utilize these resources.

## **Peer Support Team (PST) Goals**

- Educate peers and develop a referral system of appropriate professional assistance utilizing mental health benefits or other human service agencies and self-help support groups available to the membership and their families.
- To provide intervention, which will assist in defusing or mitigating problems before they become crisis situations.
- To assist at times of crisis, keeping member safe while supporting and facilitating use of appropriate resources.
- Provide Support during or after High Stress Incidents with phone calls, texts, and meetings.
- To provide ongoing resiliency training which will assist members in implementing healthy coping skills to promote quick recovery and return to normal functioning.

## **Administrative Structure**

### **Peer Advisory Board**

#### **Consists of:**

Member Services Deputy Chief  
V.P of Member Services – Local 493  
Licensed Mental Health Professional  
Peer Support Team Coordinator

#### **Duties include:**

Oversees the selection of the PST  
Develop and advise on policy and procedures  
Monitor the effectiveness of the program  
Provide administrative support to the program  
Evaluate the program's operations  
Maintain the adherence to the PST operations procedures

### **Member Services Deputy Chief**

- Member of the Peer Advisory Board
- Develops, implements and monitors the effectiveness of the PST program.
- Arranges or provides resources to Fire Department employees involving job, family, health, drug or alcohol use
- Consults with all levels of Fire Personnel on complex employee situations, responds to critical incidents with strategies and resources to address personal and workplace problems, and help ensure a safe workplace
- Assist with coordination of services after High Stress Incidents (HSI)
  - Contacts on duty Shift Commander or BC

### **PST Coordinator**

- Responsible for the day-to-day coordination of the program.
- Provide a running list of resources utilized by the program

- Ensure the adherence to confidentiality of the program
- Liaison between the PST leads, members and the Peer Advisory Board
- Assist with training and educational materials
- Coordinates PST assignments through PST Leads after High Stress Incidents
- Implements, coordinates, and evaluates employee assistance and wellness programs

### **PST Leads**

- These individuals are responsible for on duty operations of the PST.
- Recruiting PST members to make HSI contacts
- Evaluating Incident support needs
- Reporting and tracking HSI contacts to Coordinator
- Maintain a working provider list of resources
- Ensure that PST adhere to program policies

### **PST Members**

The primary responsibility of the Peer Support Team Members is to Listen, Refer, and Support. They are to **Listen** to the member to understand their situation and possible needs. If it is appropriate they are to then **Refer** the member to a mental health professional or other resources as needed. Afterwards the mentor is to continue to **Support** and reevaluate ongoing needs.

- Complete the 16 hours of IAFF Peer Support Team training
- Attend 9 hours of CE's per year.
- Maintain a good reputation
- Have good knowledge of available resources
- Ability to reach out and call members for support, especially after High Stress Incidents
- Perform station visits for outreach and education as assigned.
- Participate in department training as assigned.
- Be and advocate for the members and the PST program
- Keep bio info updated on Firestrong website
- Upon invitation of the Advisory Board, agree to these Guidelines and the Peer Support Program Guide.
- Adhere to the Terms and Conditions/Confidentiality Agreement provided prior to training.  
\*See Terms and Conditions/Confidentiality Agreement.

### **Department Chaplain**

Responds to the needs of the department members and contacts individuals in crisis.

### **Licensed Mental Health Professional**

Licensed professional counselor or social worker to provide clinical oversight and guidance to the PST.

# **Operation and Deployment**

## **Requests for Peer Support Team Services**

Individuals will self-refer to access PST services and may contact a team member by going to [Firestrong.org](http://Firestrong.org) under the Peer Team Resource tab for a list of names, phone numbers, and full biographies of each peer member.

It is critical that we look out for each other, and watch out for each other's wellness. In addition to self-referrals, any member of the Phoenix Fire Department can contact a PST member to discuss concerns for another member for evaluation. PST members will work with the member or supervisor concerned to provide resources and support via the person reporting the concern. The PST member will not act on behalf of a supervisor nor will they report back to the member or supervisor doing the referral on the status of a member being referred.

## **Peer Support Interaction**

PST members may be contacted at any time by a member. If the PST member is on duty, they will explain to the member that they are on duty and might be subject to calls. When peer contacts occur off-duty, overtime will not be approved.

If a PST member is contacted while on duty and it is an urgent situation that requires the PST member to alter their normal course of duty, they need to contact a member of the Peer Advisory Board for guidance and to call and authorize a change in duty status.

## **High Stress Incident Management**

The Department recognizes employees may be subjected to high levels of stress during the performance of their duties. The nature of some calls may require personnel to perform duties in harsh environments and in the face of great human tragedy, suffering and even loss. These stressors may have a direct impact or cumulative impact on the employee. A High Stress Incident (HSI) is any incident deemed serious enough by the magnitude of the circumstances based on the request or reactions of the on-duty personnel.

The Following issues are currently being flagged as High Stress Incidents:

- Pediatric Code
- Child code
- Hangings
- Drowning

Some calls that are NOT in the above service code designations can be very traumatic in nature. Any command or company officer with detailed knowledge of a potential HSI, can call the AHQ Supervisor and ask that a specific call be assigned the HSI designation. This will put into motion the support system. Member service or Alarm room personnel may also designate HSI.

Upon the occurrence of a High Stress Incident, the Deputy Chief of Member Services, the Peer Support Team Coordinator and Peer Support Team Lead will assist with assigning members of the peer support team to affected crew members for support. The Deputy Chief taking the lead on the incident will begin the needed research and contact the Shift Commander to assess those affected by the incident. Once needs are determined, support can be organized. If the Member Services Deputy Chief is not available, any member of the PST Advisory Board can take the lead on the incident.

PST Leads will be contacted by PST Coordinator or Advisory Board member to contact PST members with assignments supporting the crew member/s effected by High Stress Incidents. In the event a PST member played a significant role in the operations of the HSI, they will not be utilized to assist in the intervention, but will participate in a supportive role with their crew.

Follow-ups will be a crucial part of this process and PST members will remind individuals about normal symptoms and reactions to unusual events. The PST member will advocate for members needs and make recommendations to the PST Lead who will report to the PST Coordinator. Needs may include anything from additional time off shift, station visits, supplemental information regarding the incident etc. If time off is needed PST members will advise the team Lead, who in corroboration with the Coordinator or MS Deputy Chief, will make the arrangements and contact SDC.

A list of current team members will be available and maintained on the FIRESTRONG.ORG website. This list will be available for all members of the department to view if a PST member is sought to assist an individual.

## **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is essential to promoting trust and anonymity between peer support members and individuals requesting assistance. Confidentiality is vital to protect the identity of employees and the content of any information shared with a member of the PST. It must be clear that team members are not licensed counselors or therapists but act as peer support offering guidance to resolve emotionally charged matters in a confidential setting. Each peer support member must complete the Confidentiality Agreement form.

## **Confidentiality Guidelines**

The Peer Support Program is a confidential program. PST interactions are considered confidential by the Department in order to ensure trust, anonymity and the effectiveness of assistance requested. No records identifying employees who utilize the program will be maintained. Peer Support Team Members shall not discuss information obtained while acting in a peer support capacity (guidelines outlined in PST training). Peer Support Team Members shall not divulge shared information with other employees, family members, friends, supervisors, management, or coworkers. It is the Peer's responsibility to notify the members, prior to meeting of the exceptions to confidentiality.

## **Confidentiality Exceptions**

The rights and privacy of employees will be safeguarded to the maximum extent possible, while balancing the Department's compelling interest in maintaining a safe and productive workplace and work force. There are some situations where confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. While every effort will be made to protect anonymity, the gravity of some situations will demand attention by the Peer Advisory Board. Confidentiality will be maintained except in the following circumstances:

- When a crime has been committed.
- When child/elder abuse is alleged or apparent.
- If a member is a suicidal.

## **Breach of Confidentiality Consequences**

Compromising a confidence for any reason other than those outlined above, will be considered a violation of Department policy. A team member, who violates confidentiality, will be removed from the team.

## **Breach of Confidentiality: Non-Emergency Procedures**

Whenever a PST member believes a confidentiality exception is present, the PST member will, as soon as possible, contact the Peer Support Licensed Mental Health Professional and provide a briefing on the general circumstances of the situation.

If, in the judgment of the Licensed Mental Health Professional, immediate attention is required, the team member will disclose all information about the situation including the identity of the employee or individual(s) involved. The Mental Health Professional will initiate appropriate steps to resolve the matter.

If, in the judgment of the Licensed Mental Health Professional a confidentiality exception is not present, the issue will be considered confidential and the matter will go no further than the Mental Health Professional and the PST member.

## **Breach of Confidentiality: Emergency Procedures**

If a PST member becomes aware of an emergency involving a confidentiality exception, they will contact the PST Lead and disclose all pertinent information.

# **Peer Support Team Members**

## **Selection Process**

- As PST members are needed, it will be solicited through various department media.
- An anonymous survey will be sent out to collect recommendations for Peer Support Team Members
- Responses will be collected and used to fill the diverse needs of the department (i.e. rank, time on job, station assignments, shift, etc.)
- Those selected will be notified and must be able to attend the initial 16-hour IAFF Peer Support Team certification class.
- Dependent upon number of applicants an interview process may be conducted.

## **Training Requirements**

- Members are required to complete 16 hours of voluntary basic classroom training (provided by the PST) and IAFF on line training prior to becoming active. Thereafter, team members are to attend 9 hours of CE classes each year.
- Other pertinent and applicable training for PST members will be selected and provided as often as once a quarter through the Peer Team Coordinators. Any PST member failing to attend ongoing training may be removed from the program.

## **Removal of a Team Member**

PST members may be removed for cause from their positions. Conditions which will be considered for cause may include, but are not limited to:

- Any substantiated breach of confidentiality (including substantiate rumors of a breach in confidentiality).
- Failure to comply with training requirements.
- Removal for cause of a team member shall be evaluated by and at the discretion of the Peer Advisory Board.
- Voluntary removal or temporary removal can be requested by PST members.