

PEER SUPPORT PROGRAM

1862

(No.29 October 2014)

The Peer Support Program (PSP) provides all CAL FIRE employees the opportunity to receive emotional first aid and tangible support through times of personal or professional crisis from fellow employees, who are specifically trained in peer support skills. The PSP offers a special kind of crisis intervention and support service facilitated by fellow employees, which is not always possible for mental health clinicians to provide.

The PSP should be viewed only as one point in a continuum of emotional first aid offered to CAL FIRE employees and is structured to augment, and not replace the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or other professional consultation. PSP representatives shall always refer employees in crisis to EAP, in order to access the services of a mental health professional for more acute emotional care.

The intent of the PSP is to provide Unit-wide, as well as a Departmental network of peer representatives, reflective of the CAL FIRE workforce both in job positions and personal experiences, who are available to come to the aid of their fellow employees on a broad range of emotional or professional issues. The intent of the PSP is to be able to provide employee support for issues such as, but not limited to:

- Alcoholism and drug addiction
- Critical incident stress
- Family issues
- Grief support
- Law enforcement officer issues
- Legal issues
- Line of duty deaths
- Military and veteran issues
- Serious injury or illness
- Suicide
- Violence and victims of crime
- Work place issues

POLICY

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- PSP representatives are volunteers and will be trained to provide day-to-day emotional support for CAL FIRE employees. PSP representatives are also expected to participate in the Department's comprehensive response to critical incidents (Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)), and they will be in paid status for actual hours worked when officially requested by an Emergency Command Center to respond.
- The PSP is structured by CAL FIRE policy to be a confidential program. Confidentiality is defined as the professional and ethical duty for the PSP representative to refrain from disclosing information from or about a recipient of peer support services.
- A PSP representative must not keep written, formal, or private records of supportive contacts other than non-identifying statistical records that help document productivity of the program (such as number of contacts).
- Individuals acting in the role of PSP representative shall be trained to recognize and refer cases that require professional intervention, or are beyond their scope of training, to a licensed mental health professional.
- All PSP representatives will have training on how to obtain clinical professional consultation from a licensed mental health professional through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). This resource is available should a specific question or concern arise on how to best support a fellow employee in crisis.
- PSP personnel should not hesitate to utilize the EAP 24-hour phone access for a licensed, mental health professional when an employee is in crisis, and a hospital is not immediately accessible.
- The PSP will always access the 911 system to request emergency services if the employee is a danger to him/herself or others.
- PSP representatives need to be aware of their personal limitations and should seek advice and counsel in determining when to disqualify themselves from working with problems for which they have not been trained, or problems about which they may have strong personal beliefs.
- Each Administrative Unit shall have a clearly identified and accessible PSP representative/Critical Incident Management Team Coordinator to address program logistics and development. This individual will coordinate PSP activations and referrals, collect utilization data for Employee Support Services (ESS), and coordinate training and meetings.

- Employees may accept or reject the assistance from a PSP representative without fear of any adverse consequences for their decision.
- PSP representatives should not intervene in investigatory or progressive disciplinary processes. The PSP can support employee(s) under investigation or during a disciplinary process, but should refrain from discussing the specific details surrounding any alleged employee misconduct.
- CAL FIRE reserves the authority to accept or decline an employee's ability to function as representative within the PSP.

ROLE CONFLICT PROTOCOLS

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- PSP representatives should refrain from serving in a peer support role if such a relationship could reasonably be expected to impair objectivity, competence, or effectiveness in performing his or her role, or otherwise risk exploitation or harm to the person with whom this connection exists. For example, a PSP representative should avoid religious, sexual, or financial entanglements with the receiver of peer support.
- Because of potential role conflicts involved in providing the peer support, including those that could affect future decisions or recommendations concerning assignment, transfer, or promotion, PSP representatives should not develop peer support relationships between supervisors and subordinates.
- PSP representatives shall be trained to know when and how to refer employees, supervisors, or subordinates to another PSP representative, Fire Chaplain volunteer, or other professionals to avoid potential conflict of interest.
- PSP representatives should not offer emotional support to another employee if they were involved as a participant or witness to the same traumatic incident as the requesting employee. The affected employee will always be referred to another PSP representative under these circumstances.
- Supervisors have additional requirements regarding the reporting of issues such as employee misconduct, sexual harassment, racial discrimination, or workplace injury that can place the supervisor in jeopardy if Departmental procedures are not followed. PSP representatives cannot relinquish their job responsibilities as supervisors. Supervisors serving in a PSP role must be cognizant of potential conflicts that may exist, and the limitations they can create in carrying out support activities within the PSP.

CONFIDENTIALITY

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The most important aspect of the PSP is the promotion of anonymity and confidentiality. PSP representatives should not be asked to give, nor shall they release identifying or confidential information about employees they support with the following exceptions:

- The individual utilizing PSP services authorizes such a release of information in writing to the PSP representative.
- A PSP representative is subpoenaed to testify in court or at a deposition.
- Where there is a reasonable suspicion that an employee utilizing PSP services is likely to harm him or herself or others unless protective measures are taken. PSP representatives shall take reasonable efforts to warn intended victim(s) if they witness threats of personal harm against others.
- PSP representatives shall be required to disclose information obtained from individuals utilizing peer support who admit that they have participated in employee misconduct if interviewed in any subsequent Departmental administrative investigations.

PSP representatives must respect the employee-confidentiality policy, must be knowledgeable with the limits of confidentiality, and must communicate those limits to the employees being served. It is essential that PSP representatives advise employees of the level of confidentiality that they can offer.

SELECTION CRITERIA FOR PSP VOLUNTEERS

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- Nominees can express their intent to be a PSP Volunteer/Critical Incident Stress Debriefing by completing the Peer Support Volunteer/Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Application (see Exhibit One). All applicants must have the approval of their supervisor and their Unit Chief to enter the PSP.
- PSP volunteers need to be reasonably available during off-duty hours to answer phone calls from employees who may be seeking program assistance.
- PSP volunteers must be active employees who are in good standing with CAL FIRE.

- Considerations for selection of PSP volunteers include, but are not limited to, previous education and training, resolved traumatic experience, and desirable qualities such as maturity, judgment, personal and professional ethics, and credibility.
- The suggested expectation of any volunteer entering the PSP is to serve a three-year commitment. However, PSP representatives may discontinue participation with the Program due to unforeseen personal issues or obligations.

REQUIRED TRAINING AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

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All PSP representatives are expected to respond to critical incidents when available and when requested by an Emergency Command Center. There are two classifications of duties that a qualified PSP representative can perform. These qualification levels include both Critical Incident Stress Debriefer (CISD) and Critical Incident Stress Leader (CISL). For more information on the duties of these two positions, please refer to CISM Program Requirements (Section 1865.7).

Training requirements include the following:

1. CISD: Completion of all the following International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF) courses:
 - Individual Crisis Intervention and Peer Support
 - Group Crisis Intervention
 - Suicide Prevention, Intervention, and Postvention
2. CISL: The following training and experience requirements must be met:
 - Be a fully qualified CISD
 - Completion of either ICISF course: Advanced Group Crisis Intervention or Strategic Response to Crisis

To complete qualification requirements, both CISD and CISL positions require at least one trainee assignment be satisfactorily completed under the supervision of the Unit Peer Support/Critical Incident Management Team Coordinator. Trainee assignments can be completed in either a simulated training setting or during a critical incident deployment.

PSP continuing education is also strongly encouraged for all PSP representatives. The objective of this supplemental training is to enhance the

overall network capabilities of the PSP to provide unique assistance for, but not limited to law enforcement officers, returning veterans, matters of grief and loss, family issues, substance abuse, and victims of violent crime.

OBTAINING SERVICES

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Every CAL FIRE facility shall have a PSP poster displayed, identifying the Unit's PSP/Critical Incident Management Team Coordinator with an accompanying contact phone number. After employee contact, the Unit Coordinator has the ability to make a referral to the PSP representative that may best be suited to assist the requesting employee, based on the peer representative's career and relevant life experiences.

ESS maintains a 24 hour, 7 day a week phone line that employees or their family member(s) can use to find a PSP representative. The phone number for the ESS Help Line is 916-445-4337. Individuals in crisis can expect a prompt response and assistance from a PSP representative.

Each Emergency Command Center has an emergency resource directory of all individuals who are listed as either CISD or CISL that are potentially available for deployment should a critical incident occur.

TIME REPORTING/STATE VEHICLE USAGE

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Off duty participation by a PSP representative shall be conducted on a voluntary basis, with the exception of requests ordered by an Emergency Command Center when critical incident support is required. Activation as either a CISD or CISL shall be treated as an emergency assignment, and pay status shall be limited to actual hours worked.

PSP representatives can be allowed time while on duty to serve in peer support roles if work conditions permit, and if approved in advance by their supervisor.

Use of a state vehicle while on duty can be authorized, provided a vehicle is available and approved by the PSP representative's immediate supervisor or Unit Chief.

Exhibit One

Peer Support Program Volunteer/Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Application

Applicant Information

Name: _____ Unit: _____

Rank/Present Assignment: _____ Email: _____

Work Address: _____ Business Phone: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Home Address: _____ Home Phone: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Cell Phone: _____ Personal Email: _____

Experience – Please briefly describe any significant personal life experiences or Critical Incident Stress Management assignments that you are willing to share, that may be useful in assisting other employees while acting in the role as a Peer Support Program Volunteer/Critical Incident Stress Debriefing.

Training - Check All Completed International Critical Incident Stress Foundation Courses

Individual Peer ___ Group Peer ___ Suicide Prevention ___

Advanced Peer ___ Stress Management ___ Strategic Response___

Please describe any other relevant Peer Support Program/Critical Incident Stress Management training completed:

Peer Support Program Volunteer Declaration:

I agree to participate in the CAL FIRE Peer Support Program both in a volunteer capacity and as a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing in pay status for actual hours worked when officially requested by a local Emergency Command Center to respond. I understand that Peer Support Program Volunteers need to be reasonably available during off duty hours to come to the aid of their fellow employees when requested. I agree to act only within my scope of training as a Peer Support Program Volunteer, and I will always offer my assistance in finding a mental health/substance abuse or other professional, if I should encounter employees who are experiencing either a personal or professional crisis. Further, I agree to always recognize and respect the anonymity and confidentiality of any employee who will utilize the Peer Support Program for assistance, except as specifically prescribed by law or Department policy. Finally, I understand that any violation of trust of the Peer/Employee relationship, or the Departmental Peer Support Program protocols and policies could discontinue my participation in the Peer Support Program.

Printed Name

Signature of Peer Support Program Volunteer

Date

Administrative Approval:

Check one: Approved Not Approved (Attach reason for denial)

Supervisor Signature

Date

Approval Signature (Unit Chief) Date

Submit this completed form to:

Employee Support Services
Postal Box 944246
Sacramento, CA 94244-2460

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[\(see Forms and Form Samples\)](#)