



**OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF POLICE  
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SYSTEM  
POLICY AND PROCEDURE MANUAL**



Subject		Policy Number	
<b>Peer Support Program</b>		<b>450</b>	
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Reference Standards		Rescinds or Amends Policy Number	
TPCA: CALEA: 22.1.7, 35.1.9 IACLEA:			

**I. Purpose**

The University of Texas System Police recognizes the harmful effects stress can cause in employees’ lives, job performance, and daily interactions with others. The purpose of the Peer Support Program is to provide emotional support and appropriate resources to employees when personal or professional stress occurs. The assistance is voluntary and confidential. All employees, including cadets, are entitled and encouraged to reach out to their campus Peer Support teams for assistance. The Peer Support Program is not an element of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), nor is it a substitute for counseling and therapy through licensed professionals.

**II. Goal**

The goal of the Peer Support Program is to assist in the reduction of and/or mitigate long-term effects of stress, reduce the stigma of asking for help, provide resources for employees, retain employees, prevent employment separations and employee self-induced harm.

**III. Definitions**

UT System Peer Support Coordinator: UT System Office of Director of Police Inspector appointed by the Director who is responsible for overseeing the UT System Peer Support Program.

Peer Support Team Lead: Peer Support team member at each institution designated to oversee the program for that campus.

Peer Support Member: A selected employee who has completed all required training and received certification through the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, Inc. (ICISF) for Individual and Group interventions.

Peer Support Team: A group of Peer Support Members who use an organized approach to support police department personnel dealing with personal and professional stressful circumstances.

Critical Incident: Any event or experience that could transcend or overwhelm a person’s normal effective coping skills.

Traumatic Event: Any event or experience with the potential to cause severe physical, emotional, or mental injury.

Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM): Adaptive, short-term psychological assistance process that focuses solely on an immediate and identifiable problem.

Critical Incident On-scene Support: Peer Support Team members who respond to the location of a critical incident or any other location to support incident-involved personnel.

Defusing: A brief, confidential discussion among incident-involved personnel and a trained peer support team member immediately following a critical incident. A defusing should occur one to four hours after the incident or as soon as practical and should last 30 to 60 minutes.

Debriefing: A confidential meeting among incident-involved personnel, a mental health professional and two trained peer support members occurring 24-72 hours after a critical incident. Attendance may be optional and last two to four hours. A department chaplain and additional peer support team members may also attend.

#### **IV. Responsibilities**

- A. The UT System Peer Support Coordinator shall:
  - 1. Liaison with each UT System institutional Peer Support team lead when coordinating activities;
  - 2. Maintain monthly contact with each police department team lead through the monthly contact forms;
  - 3. Present an annual report to the Institution Police Chiefs or upon request; and
  - 4. Work with grant researchers to compile data and facilitate the success of the Peer Support Program for UT System.
  
- B. Peer Support Team Lead shall:
  - 1. Facilitate the recruitment and selection process of new members;
  - 2. Collect monthly data and submit that data to the UT System Peer Support Coordinator;
  - 3. Serve as the point of contact for the UT System Peer Support Coordinator and/or outside UT System PD agencies requesting peer support assistance. The team lead may also act as a team member; and
  - 4. Be familiar with team members' schedules and assignments to ensure enough members are available for a response at any time.
  
- C. Peer Support team members volunteer to support their fellow colleagues in times of stress and trauma. As team members, they shall:
  - 1. Be willing to respond at any time, when available, which includes when off-duty and on weekends as needed.
  - 2. Notify the team lead when they will not be available for peer support response;
  - 3. Successfully complete the ICISF Group and Individual Crisis Interventions training prior to providing support;
  - 4. Provide assistance to fellow employees at their own institution police departments, including individual interventions and critical incident defusings and debriefings;
  - 5. Be asked to respond to individual interventions, and critical incident defusings and debriefings at other UT campuses or neighboring outside agencies.
  - 6. Assist at scenes by providing water, and snacks to affected employees while also acting as a resource at critical incidents;
  - 7. Be familiar with available local resources regarding referrals for requesting employees; and

8. Recognize when an employee's needs extend beyond the member's abilities in the peer support role. The member shall refer the employee to EAP or an appropriate licensed professional for further assistance and support. Peer support is not a substitute for professional counseling.

## **V. Policy**

- A. Peer Support may be provided to any employee for any of the following circumstances:
  1. After a critical incident or traumatic event;
  2. Serious injury, illness, or death of an employee or an employee's family member;
  3. Family, marital, or relationship issues;
  4. Financial difficulties;
  5. Work performance;
  6. Employee involved in a use of force event;
  7. Employee who worked a violently graphic call (ex: death, crash);
  8. Substance abuse;
  9. Line of duty death;
  10. Overwhelming situations impacting work, home, or training;
  11. Employee experiencing intense emotional stress;
  12. Any other personal or professional event an employee feels is beyond normal coping skills.
- B. A supervisor may suggest the Peer Support Program to any employee if the supervisor notices a sudden change in behavior at work such as a pattern of tardiness, absence, excessive use of sick time, increase in complaints, or a change in demeanor.
- C. Peer Support contacts are encouraged to be held in-person or via telephone. Text message should be avoided unless mitigating circumstances exist.
- D. Peer Support shall not be a substitute for discipline.
- E. An employee under administrative or criminal investigation is allowed to ask for Peer Support assistance during the investigation(s). Peer Support services shall remain separate and confidential from the ongoing investigation(s). If the employee is held under a Garrity warning, the Garrity warning can be amended to enable the employee to confide in a peer support member.
- F. Peer Support may be offered in conjunction with the Peace Officer Mental Health Leave (University of Texas System Policy 195).
- G. Peer Support individual and group interventions shall remain confidential unless the content of the interventions fall under the exceptions identified in Section IX of this policy. Supervisors are encouraged to allow peer support members to conduct interventions while on duty when applicable.
- H. To compensate for off-duty responses, members may earn state compensatory time, overtime, or be required to "flex" their hours, depending on their institution police department requirements.

## **VI. Requesting Peer Support Assistance**

- A. Requests for individual peer support assistance can be made for oneself or for another employee.
- B. Requesting Individual Assistance at Employee's Institutional Department;
  1. Employees may contact a Peer Support member from their respective institutions directly; supervisor notification is not required.

2. Employees are provided with the names of the Peer Support team members; an employee may select and contact a specific team member if desired.
- C. Requesting Individual Assistance at another UT Campus;
1. If an employee wishes to speak to a peer support member located at another UT Campus, but does not know a specific team member, the employee should contact the UT System Peer Support Coordinator at ODOP.
  2. After obtaining necessary information, the Coordinator shall contact the team lead at the other campus and coordinate contact between the requesting employee and the selected team member.
  3. The Coordinator shall follow up to ensure contact was made.
- D. Requesting Group Assistance at Employees' Institutional Department – Requests for group or critical incident support assistance should be made by a supervisor in a position to make the request in a timely manner. For critical incidents, it is important that requests for peer support response be made as soon as practical after the event.
- E. Requesting Group Assistance at another UT Campus
1. Requests for outside peer support assistance for a group intervention generally occur when a critical incident involves a large number of employees, and the requesting institution does not have enough peer support members to provide an adequate level of support.
  2. The team lead from the requesting institution shall contact the UT System Coordinator to coordinate a response from other UT campuses.

## **VII. Selection and Training**

- A. Selection Process – Employees must:
1. Have at least one year of employment with UTPD or another law enforcement agency;
  2. Not be the subject of an internal investigation at the time a letter of interest is submitted;
  3. Want to voluntarily participate and respond on duty, off duty, and on weekends as needed;
  4. Submit a letter of interest through the chain of command; and
  5. Complete all required training.
- B. Peer support teams should be diverse and represent the workforce they serve. However, candidates who are successful as peer support team members tend to:
1. Be mature
  2. Have a strong ethical foundation
  3. Be empathetic
  4. Show good judgment
  5. Have a desire to help others
  6. Have strong communication skills
  7. Have previous education and training in crisis management or related topics
  8. Have successfully resolved a traumatic experience.
- C. Training
1. Team members must successfully complete the following International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, Inc. courses:
    - a. Assisting Individuals in Crisis
    - b. Group Crisis Intervention
  2. Team members are encouraged to attend other peer support-related trainings when available. Authorized topics include, but are not limited to:
    - a. Active listening
    - b. Stress management

- c. Post-traumatic stress
  - d. Problem-solving skills
  - e. Relationship mediation
  - f. Suicide prevention
  - g. General assessment
  - h. Wellness and Self-care
  - i. Burnout
  - j. Local referral services
3. If unsure a course meets the required topics list, contact the UT System Peer Support Coordinator for guidance.

### **VIII. Monthly Contact Reports**

- A. Peer support team members shall enter specific, non-identifying, information on the Monthly Peer Support Contact form after each peer-to-peer session (form attached to this policy).
- B. Team members shall submit completed monthly contact forms to their respective team leads by the fifth (5<sup>th</sup>) of each month.
- C. Team leads shall submit their members' contact forms to the UT System Peer Support Coordinator by the tenth (10<sup>th</sup>) of each month.

### **IX. Confidentiality and Reporting Requirements**

- A. Confidentiality in a Peer Support Program is crucial for a program like this to succeed. A single breach of confidentiality can damage:
  1. A member's reputation
  2. A team's reputation
  3. Years of trust built between peer support members and fellow employees
  4. An entire peer support program.
- B. All statements, facts, opinions, and discussions expressed during an official peer support intervention shall be considered confidential and privileged. Supervisors are prohibited from asking peer support members about contacts with their subordinates.
- C. Peer Support Team Members shall be required to sign a confidentiality agreement, which includes the consequences of violating the agreement. If a member needs assistance in supporting a co-worker, the member may only discuss privileged conversations with the member's team lead and the UT System Peer Support Team Coordinator.
- D. Peer support members who violate an employee's confidentiality as outlined by the [Health and Safety Code, Section 784.003](#), must report that violation to the member's immediate supervisor and the UT System Peer Support Coordinator.
- E. A peer support member is required to inform the employee of confidentiality exceptions prior to beginning a confidential intervention.
- F. Confidentiality must be maintained *except* in the following circumstances:
  1. An employee has conveyed a desire to harm him/herself or others;
  2. The Peer Support team member suspects an employee has recently had direct involvement in an offense identified under [Texas Education Code Section 51.251-.259](#);
  3. An employee admits direct involvement in an offense identified under [Texas Education Code](#)

[Section 51.251-.259](#); or

4. An employee provides a written and signed release of confidentiality.
  
- G. If an exception is met, the peer support member will make efforts to connect the employee with appropriate resources. The peer support member shall report the behavior to the team lead immediately and then provide a written report describing what was said or done during the intervention. The team lead shall notify a member of the employee's command staff and the UT System Peer Support Coordinator.



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Michael J. Heidingsfield  
Director of Police



# Peer Support Contact Form

Peer Member Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Month: \_\_\_\_\_ Year: \_\_\_\_\_

	Contact Number:														
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Initiated by: Individual (I) Peer (P) or Dept (D)															
Male (M) Female (F)															
Officer (O) Cadet (C) Telecommunicator (T) Staff (S) PSO/Guard (G)															
Identified Issues:															
Accident (physical injury)															
Addictive Behaviors															
Anger															
Anxiety															
Career/Work Related															
Children/Elder Care															
Critical Incident															
Depression															
Disability															
Disciplinary															
Domestic Violence															
Family															
Financial															
Grief/Bereavement															
Individual Growth															
Legal															
Marital/Relationship															
Medical															
Military															
Separation/Divorce															
Spiritual/Religious															
Stress															
Suicide Ideation															
Minutes spent with each Contact:															
Minutes															
<b>Total Time spent with contacts:</b>															