

# COLCHESTER POLICE DEPARTMENT

SUBJECT: Peer Support Program	
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**POLICY:** The Colchester Police Department (CPD) recognizes the sacrifice and commitment of its employees, who in the course of their duties expose themselves to danger, violence, and the worst in human behavior. CPD's most valuable resource is its employees. It is the policy of CPD to assist officer and civilian employees in dealing with stress and trauma. CPD has created a Peer Support Program (PSP) to augment the support provided by the Department Clinician(s) and the Employee Assistance Program.

- CONTENTS:**
- I. DEFINITION
  - II. DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
  - III. PSP SELECTION PROCESS
  - IV. CONFIDENTIALITY
  - V. CASES INVOLVING INTERNAL INVESTIGATIONS
  - VI. PSP NOTIFICATION OR REFERRAL
  - VII. AUTHORITY OF THE CHIEF TO COMPEL MEMBERS TO PARTICIPATE IN PSP OR OTHER COUNSELING

- I. **DEFINITION:** The PSP is a program that offers assistance and appropriate support resources to employees when personal or professional problems negatively affect their work performance, family, or self. This assistance is confidential, providing it does not violate any law or department policies.

The PSP offers the support of trained peer counselors to assist employees with the day-to-day stress and trauma and provides timely intervention and prevention strategies for those in need. The PSP is composed of a group of employees who have volunteered and been approved by the Chief of Police to make themselves available to any member of the department to talk out personal and/or professional problems confidentially with someone who understands their job and cares about their wellbeing.

## II. DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. Services of the PSP include (but are not limited to):
- i. Being available to assess employee's needs;
  - ii. Peer support intervention;

- iii. Assist with critical incident debriefings;
  - iv. Referral to an appropriate resource for service;
  - v. Stress managements techniques;
  - vi. Provide information on community resources and partners who have expertise in dealing with the stress inherent in law enforcement and with other health related issues.
- B. A PSP member is authorized to use department facilities to meet with employee(s).
  - C. A PSP member is permitted to consult with employee(s) on duty. No names, written reports, or identifying information is given to any department representative during these contacts or specific details as to the nature of the contact.
  - D. Communications made to a member of the PSP are to be handled professionally and in a discreet manner, but they are not legally considered to be privileged or confidential communications.
  - E. Members of the PSP shall coordinate with employee(s) seeking assistance to provide a meeting location that is free from interference and will maximize the goal of anonymity.
  - F. PSP members shall maintain contact with the Department Clinician(s) regarding program activities.

### **III. PSP SELECTION PROCESS**

- A. The PSP shall consist of at least 3 sworn and/or civilian employees. One member shall be designated by the Chief of Police, or designee, as the Program Supervisor and shall be accountable to the Chief for the operation of the PSP.
- B. Other employees shall be assigned to the PSP by the Chief of Police with the advice of the Program Supervisor.
- C. Any assignment to the PSP shall be voluntary and will be in addition to an employee's regularly assigned duties. PSP members may voluntarily withdraw from participation at any time but they are required to notify the Program Supervisor.
- D. A PSP member will be removed from participation in the program for conduct inconsistent with program policy and objectives. See the PSP Guidelines for further details on objectives.
- E. Negative job performance caused by PSP duties must be reported to the Program Supervisor so that issues can be addressed and resolved.

- F. Participation in the program is voluntary and no overtime or compensatory time will be authorized for time expended performing PSP duties unless authorized by the Chief of Police or designee.

#### **IV. CONFIDENTIALITY**

- A. The acceptance and success of the Colchester Police Department's PSP will be determined, in part, by observance of the protected confidential information shared with peer members. It is imperative that each PSP member maintain strict confidentiality of all information learned about an individual within the guidelines of this program. Communication between PSP members and employees are considered confidential except for matters which involve the following:
  - i. Danger to self;
  - ii. Danger to others;
  - iii. Duty to warn;
  - iv. Suspected abuse of a child or vulnerable person, or any mandated reporter information;
  - v. Narcotic offenses (including use, possession, sale or transportation);
  - vi. Domestic violence;
  - vii. Criminal activity;
  - viii. Acts of misconduct as outlined by Colchester Police Department Rules and Regulations;
  - ix. Disclosure is requested by the employee being served.
- B. PSP members should inform the employee, prior to discussion, what the limitations and exceptions are regarding the information revealed. In those cases where a concern or a question regarding confidentiality arises, the PSP member should immediately contact the Department Clinician who will take appropriate action, as needed.
- C. A PSP member is not exempt from federal, state or local laws or the Rules and Regulations of the Colchester Police Department.

#### **V. CASES INVOLVING INTERNAL INVESTIGATIONS**

- A. It may occur that a PSP member is assisting an employee who is, or becomes, the subject of a disciplinary investigation. The PSP member should be guided by confidentiality as noted above in section IV.
- B. PSP members should offer appropriate support and assist individuals through the stress they may face during the disciplinary process. If PSP members have any questions or concerns regarding these situations they should refer the employee to the Department Clinician or EAP for additional resources.

## VI. PSP NOTIFICATION OR REFERRAL

- A. All CPD supervisors are authorized to contact the PSP for assistance in dealing with traumatic stress or traumatic incidents.
- B. Requests for assistance may be made at any time by contacting a member of the PSP or the Department Clinician(s).
- C. All employees may be referred to the PSP, Department Clinician(s), EAP or a professional counselor as determined by the Chief of Police.
- D. Notification of the PSP Supervisor (or designee) shall be made **as soon as possible** following these types of events:
  - i. Line of duty death;
  - ii. Serious line of duty injury;
  - iii. Employee suicide;
  - iv. Officer involved shooting;
  - v. Disaster or incidents with mass casualties;
  - vi. Tragic events/deaths to children;
  - vii. Death of a civilian due to department operations;
  - viii. Death of a victim after prolonged rescue measures;
  - ix. Significant events where the victims are relatives or friends of employees;
  - x. Events that seriously threaten the lives or wellbeing of employees;
  - xi. Any high risk event where life/lives of employee(s) was threatened;
  - xii. Any event that has significant emotional power to overwhelm the employee.

## VII. AUTHORITY OF THE CHIEF TO COMPEL MEMBERS TO PARTICIPATE IN PSP OR OTHER COUNSELING

- A. Mandatory referrals to the PSP or other mental health provider(s) can only be made by the Chief or his/her designee after receiving all pertinent information regarding a member's situation. Referrals must be based on significant job performance difficulty, or documented ongoing disciplinary problems.
- B. The Chief has the authority to compel members to attend debriefings for high trauma events (listed above) and to participate in counseling relative to such events until the provider has indicated that the employee is fit to return to duty.
- C. This does not prevent a supervisor from relieving a member from duty in accordance with Colchester Police Department Rules and Regulations. In this event the Chief shall be notified immediately via the chain of command.
- D. In unusual or extreme cases, the Department has the right to receive a fitness for duty evaluation from a licensed psychologist before the member returns to duty. The Department retains the right to choose the appropriate

professional for the member to see. This fitness for duty evaluation is above and beyond the PSP or any ongoing employee wellness efforts.

- E. Expenses for any mandated referrals will be borne by the Department.

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