3-10/460.00 - Department Psychologist Response to Critical Incidents

Personnel involved in critical incidents such as shootings and other life-threatening or non-life-threatening events often experience significant trauma. Unit commanders shall encourage and/or at times require those personnel involved in any event that has the potential to overwhelm their normal coping skills to attend a debriefing with a Department psychologist. Incidents that can result in trauma include the use of firearms and deadly force incidents such as wounding or fatally shooting, firing, attempting to fire, and being fired upon. Other types of critical incidents covered by this policy, whether or not life-threatening to our personnel, include events such as traumatic traffic collisions, death of an infant or child during a rescue operation, serious or career-threatening injuries, death of a partner, colleague, or innocent bystander, and physical confrontations with an armed suspect or inmate which involve substantial danger to the employee.

These circumstances have the potential to affect the performance and health of the employees involved. The exact impact varies with each individual and is difficult to predict. In some cases, there is no change in the individual. In others, the change may occur immediately, several hours or even days, weeks, or months later. A debriefing conducted by a Department psychologist can assist in reducing potential problems.

In all use of firearms and deadly force incidents, it is the responsibility of the concerned unit commander to arrange a debriefing between a Department psychologist and all involved personnel no later than five days following the incident. This is to provide each employee with the opportunity to discuss the incident in a confidential environment. Employees shall be required to attend the debriefing. For all other critical incidents covered by this policy, the concerned unit commander shall at minimum strongly encourage or require the involved employees to attend a debriefing with a Department psychologist within five days. Unit commanders should consult with a Department psychologist when uncertain if an event represents a critical incident or if involved personnel should be required to attend a debriefing.

The Department psychologist will confirm for the unit commander that this first debriefing appointment was kept but will not provide any information on the content of the session unless the employee requests such disclosure.

Psychological Services Bureau shall conduct a follow-up contact with each employee via eâ€‘mail or phone at two weeks and four months. Should a subsequent face-to-face debriefing be indicated or requested by the employee, that debriefing shall be compensated under the provisions of the employee's Memorandum of Understanding. At any time following the initiation of the debriefing process, the employee may also request confidential counseling sessions related to the critical incident or any other issue, and attend on their own time.

In all shootings involving death or serious injury, the employee who fired the weapon or was fired upon should be given the option of a three-day leave. Upon returning to duty, the employee shall be provided an assignment where risk exposure is minimal. For these types of incidents, every effort shall be made to schedule the initial debriefing with the Department psychologist within five days of the shooting incident. Psychological Services Bureau shall then conduct a telephonic follow-up at two weeks and schedule a second face-to-face debriefing with a Department psychologist four months following the initial incident. Such options allow employees an opportunity to marshal their natural coping skills to deal with the emotional impact of the incident prior to returning to regular field duty.

There are times when entire units may be adversely impacted by one or a series of shootings. A Department psychologist is available to conduct group debriefings, upon request. When warranted, the psychologist may respond to the scene for an emergency debriefing/assessment.