3-02/040.55 - Peer Support Program

The Sheriff's Department's Peer Support Program (PSP) is a voluntary support program which operates out of the Psychological Services Bureau (PSB). PSP offers confidential help and guidance by trained volunteer peer support personnel to all Department members experiencing a personal or professional issue.

The Department has long recognized the relative importance of physical and emotional well-being upon personnel performance. Supervisors are entrusted with the responsibility of identifying problems being experienced by employees and helping these individuals affect a positive change when possible. The PSP provides a valuable resource for unit supervisors wanting to assist members of the Department who have particular problems. Supervisors are reminded that an individual's decision to receive support from a member of PSP must remain voluntary. A referral to participate shall not be made under duress or promise of reward.

Department members are encouraged to seek assistance, be it from licensed professional psychologists working within or outside the Department or active PSP members, before a situation escalates into a severe personal or professional problem.

Nothing in this subsection or the PSP is intended to alter a supervisor's responsibility.

Selection and Training of Peer Support Members

Volunteer peer support members are chosen from all ranks within the Department. They may be sworn, civilian, or reserve members, active or retired. Interested applicants should consult the PSP coordinator at PSB. All PSP applicants shall undergo a screening process conducted by the PSP Coordinator and/or PSB Psychologist designee assigned to the program to determine if the applicant meets the requirements to be a peer support member.

Pre-screened PSP applicants shall complete an initial three-day training program provided or approved by Psychological Services Bureau's PSP coordinators prior to conducting any peer support activities. To remain as an active member of the PSP, members must continue to attend one eight hour face-to-face training session and one off-site training (e.g., webinar) per calendar year to remain an active member of the PSP. All peer support members will operate within the PSP guidelines and policies or may be subject to dismissal from the program. The peer support member's unit commander shall allow the PSP member to attend the initial three-day training and annual face-to-face training, absent exigent circumstances.

Primary Function of Peer Support Program Members

The primary function of peer support members include providing support, helping employees to problem-solve, offer coping tools, and provide referral services to fellow employees in time of need. Those experiencing problems which require long-term or professional guidance shall be given the opportunity to choose a professional either from within PSB or an external referral.

Confidentiality

Communication between a PSP member and a Department employee is confidential except in one of the following circumstances:

- There is a safety concern for self or others (including child, elder abuse, dependent/adult abuse, or gravely disabled);
- The PSP member needs to make an appropriate referral and consult with PSB psychological staff on the concerning circumstances of the employee receiving peer support. In those instances, PSB psychological staff will maintain confidentiality upon receiving information from PSP members;
- Disclosing the communication shared by the employee receiving peer support may reasonably prevent certain death, substantial physical harm, or commission of a crime;
- The employee receiving peer support gives written authorization to disclose the confidential content from contacts with the PSP member. Oral permission is acceptable when referring to a mental health professional; or
- When disclosure is required by law.

PSP members remain responsible for adhering to all reporting procedures requisite of their rank. At no time will information received by a PSP member be used for disciplinary purposes.

PSP members shall neither be interviewed in an administrative hearing nor shall they discuss details of PSP contacts with Department personnel conducting an investigation without the written authorization of the member receiving peer support or a court order.

Peer support members shall advise and seek guidance from the PSP coordinator, designated PSB psychologist, or PSB manager promptly when concerned about the distress level, function, or safety of the employee receiving peer support in order to address the problem. A peer support member shall seek and receive timely consultation from a PSB psychologist to determine if the threat of serious harm meets the mandatory reporting threshold. This consultation does not relieve the peer support member from making any mandatory notifications required of a sworn or other member who is legally defined as a mandatory reporter. PSB shall also make any additional mandatory notifications as necessary to protect the safety of the individual and/or others. Depending on the steps required to reduce imminent safety concerns, notifications could be made to the local authorities, a local hospital, unit of assignment, Department of Child and Family Services, Adult Protective Services, and/or potential (identifiable) victims.

This subsection in no way inhibits the Sheriff from ordering a member to cooperate with an outside agency involved in a criminal investigation.

Peer Support Program Contact Meetings

Peer support contacts may occur both on-duty and off-duty; however, they shall not interfere with a member's or the peer support member's performance of assigned duties, absent exigent circumstances. Should an emergency require that a peer support member be called upon while on-duty, his/her response shall be at the

discretion of the concerned unit commander.

General peer support members shall not claim reimbursement for mileage or the use of private telephones for peer support business; however, the use of county vehicles and telephones according to Department policy is authorized.

Referral to the Program

Peer support members' names and business telephone numbers may be obtained from a published list available at all units, the PSP coordinator, the PSB intranet webpage, or PSB.