

**Fort Lauderdale
Professional Firefighters, Inc.
I.A.F.F. Local 765**



“Bearing One Another’s Burdens”

Peer Support Team

Guidelines

Mission Statement:

To “Bear one another’s burdens” by providing first responders with a confidential and comfortable atmosphere where they can open up and talk about issues that may be weighing them down. Peer Support is here to change the culture or state of mind that we can handle tough times on our own.

Vision Statement:

At some point in life we all experience hard times. This may come by sickness, loss of a loved one, emotional issues, financial strain, and marital difficulties and or the mental/physical strain of being a first responder. Our ultimate goal is to save marriages, restore broken relationships; break addictions, save jobs and ultimately, save lives by making sure no brother/sister feels they have to do it alone.

Value Statement:

Brotherhood/Sisterhood is the understanding that above all differences of opinion, feuds, hurt feelings, and just plain old not getting along you understand that you have a duty to all firefighters equally. We are all “Our brothers keepers” meaning we are all deserving of genuine support by our peers in a time of need, no matter what the need may be.

Explanation of Fort Lauderdale Firefighters Peer Support:

Peer Support is defined as a service provided by an individual or group of trained Firefighters who respond to Firefighters in need –whether that need be a personal or professional concern. Peer Support Teams will serve as a *helping resource* for Fire Service members and their families.

Contact Information:

The Local 765 Peer Support Team can be reached in a couple ways. You can access team members by logging into Firestrong.org and reviewing Fort Lauderdale’s page. You can also call the team coordinators (Ryan Zauner 954-478-7482 or Eric Stern 954-240-6524) and ask for a one on one meeting or group firehouse setting.

Selection of Peer Support Team Members:

The goal of the team is to be diversified as much as possible so recruitment will be an on-going process. If interested in joining the team in any capacity all one has to do is call or email a coordinator to have a brief interview over the phone. The interview is NOT a selection process but more of an explanation of what we do and what one might encounter by being part of the team.

Training for Peer Support Team:

Training opportunities are year round and vary in nature and location. The goal for the team is to have each member complete at least (1) one training seminar, conference, webinar or online base class at least once yearly. In addition to the training each member should attend (3) three monthly team meetings annually and take part in or teach the team's awareness training PowerPoint annually as well. The team will have yearly team building exercises that may incorporate reading a book, watching a movie or meeting for an outing.

Background:

Empirical studies have repeatedly shown that careers within public safety and emergency services are high stress on the human beings that work them. Members may or may not be more susceptible to stress/distress encountered on a daily basis due to their unique cultural background and personality, the culture of their department, station and crew as well as the location and nature and call volume of their department. This type of stress/distress can occur because of the physical conditions that the job entails, (i.e., wearing full gear, fighting fire, moving patients, training, etc.) but also the emotional and physiologically taxing situations (i.e., interacting with families, calming down upset patients, Signal 7's, conflict with co-workers, etc.) and the nature of the job requires continual contact with customers and coworkers who are not having a normal day, and have varying levels of distress. For these reasons, each member of the Fire Department has access to and can initiate the Peer Support team for themselves or for a fellow peer that may be showing signs of compassion fatigue, PTSD or just stress of the job. Please see next section for signs and symptoms and how the team will be accessed and function within FLFD.

Confidentiality:

The Local 765 Peer Support team will ensure every measure is taken to keep 100% confidentiality for everyone that accesses the team. Whatever is discussed in a group setting will stay with those in that particular group. Whatever is discussed in a one on one setting will stay with those individuals. Any team member violating the privacy/confidentiality guideline will be removed from the team.

When to Consider Peer Support Assistance (On-duty calls):

1. Line of Duty Death
2. Suicide of family member, colleague
3. Serious work-related injury
4. Disaster or multi-casualty incident
5. Terrorist attacks or Extreme threat to crews
6. Death or Injury involving children
7. Prolonged extrications, especially with loss of life
8. Drowning or near-drowning of fire service members or civilians
9. Fires with fatalities

Peer Support response will collaborate with any CISM efforts for above situations

When to Consider Peer Support Assistance (Personal Reasons):

1. Serious illness or bad diagnosis
2. Personal tragedy
3. Emotional issues: Depression, anxiety, panic attacks, fearful
4. Feeling overwhelmed, just need to talk
5. Big life changes, i.e. Divorce, Bankruptcy, loss of income
6. Financial strain
7. Substance Abuse resources
8. EAP assistance
9. Directory of vetted resources (counselors, therapy, etc)

Signs and Symptoms to be aware of:

Physical Symptoms:

Nausea/sour stomach, fine motor tremors, sweats/chills, difficulty regulating temperature, bowel changes, dry mouth, increased hunger/thirst, chest tightness, tingling in extremities, increased heart rate, increased respirations, exhaustion, dizziness, inability to relax, body pains, grinding teeth, and twitching.

Cognitive Symptoms:

Slower or delayed thought processes, difficulty in making decisions, confusion, disorientation, speech pattern changes, difficulty concentrating, memory problems, difficulty naming familiar item, hyper-vigilant, increased startle response, and changes in libido.

Emotional Symptoms:

Anxiety, exhaustion, depression, irritability, anger, rage, sadness, negative feelings about self worth, lack of confidence, fear, guilt, grief, suspiciousness, withdrawal, feeling lost and/or abandoned, isolating, ruminating, distressing dreams, denial, defensive, and numbness.

Follow Up Procedures:

Once a member or members have met with Peer Support it will be our intention to follow up on a weekly basis until the member or members gives the team clear direction and confidence that their issues have been resolved. The team will do a 6-month and 1 year follow up as well just to make sure each member is watched over.

Files for members accessing the FLFD Peer Support Team

There shall be **NO files** kept on any member or any issue that was brought to the Local 765 Peer Support Team. The only files that will be kept and logged will be the Awareness Training that each member will receive periodically throughout the year. This will be logged under training with a code OSHA 1500 Peer Support Response in Fire Service.

Team Boundaries for One on One Sessions

Male Peer Support team members should not be alone with female members seeking support and the same goes for Female Support team members being alone with male members seeking support from the team. If the need arises make every effort to have another male or female in the room or reschedule the meeting until Peer Support can appropriately accommodate.

Reimbursement and Costs

Peer Support team members will be afforded mileage and costs for attending approved classes, seminars and conferences.

Guidelines when helping a member

- Take all suicidal comments and behaviors seriously.
- Initiate a conversation. Express your concern. Inform the person that you are there to help. Express caring. Establish rapport. Be yourself. Your support is demonstrated through a genuine caring relationship. You have (2) two ears so please use them.
- Be prepared: the person may become extremely emotional when communicating with you.
- Bring the issue of suicide into the open if that seems to be where the conversation is leading. Ask about the member's current circumstances, emotions and feelings and acknowledge the person's difficulties.
- Ask about recent or past history of self-harm thoughts or behavior.
- Ask about the availability or ownership of any lethal means for suicide. Examples: Pills, firearms or chemicals.
- Determine if there is a suicide plan. The more detailed and complete the plan, the greater the risk.
- It is ok to talk to the person about their suicidal thoughts. Let him or her know that such thoughts are often the result of depression and that depression can be effectively treated. Assure the person that with appropriate treatment suicidal thoughts and the feeling of wanting to die will diminish. Help to provide realistic hope.
- If you feel that the person is imminently suicidal do not leave him or her alone. Arrange for appropriate intervention, which may include a chaplain, family, PD for possible Baker Act or someone the person trusts to intercede for them.
- If the person is not imminently suicidal, spend some time with him or her, "provide an ear" and other emotional support.
- Avoid providing problem solutions. Instead, (1) focus on listening and supporting the person. Let the person know that he or she is important to you. (2) Work to have the person contact or become involved with professional counseling services. Provide information about our available support services.

- If you are unsure about whether the person is or is not imminently suicidal or you do not feel competent to assess his or her level of self-danger, do not leave the person alone. Contact another Peer Support member. Do this even if the person objects. This is the best way to keep the person safe.
- Do not keep a “suicidal secret”. Gently explain that you must contact others. Have them give you names.
- Arrange for the person to be with others 24/7 for continued support and to add an additional level of safety if needed.
- Follow up as appropriate. Always remember to follow up!

Self Care for Peer Support Team Members

It is highly recommended that any member of the Peer Support team that engages in “peer to peer” or “peer to group” debriefings shall themselves get debriefed by another member of the team that was not present on scene or at the peer meeting. This will be a face-to-face or phone call designed to release any emotions that the team member maybe carrying after they’ve been giving support and listening to others peers.

Outreach By Peer Support Team

1. Each shift will have a Peer Support Team representative that will be responsible for following up with members that have called out sick 2 or more shifts in a row. This phone call is to check and let the member know we are thinking about them and wanted to see if they needed anything.
2. When our department has a member out for an extended period of time due to illness, injury or other circumstance a hand written letter from the Peer Support Team will be mailed to the member’s home with a simple appreciation/check in letter. Again, like the phone call this is just another way to show the member he/she is being thought of.
3. Home visitations are recommended but never impromptu. The Peer Support Team member wanting to visit someone at their home should give the member a day or two notice so they can plan accordingly.
4. Station visitations will be on going as long as the team is in place. Peer Support will collaborate with shift Division Chiefs to get units out of service for 1-2 hours of awareness training. Topics will vary but will most likely keep the theme of Body, Mind and Emotional support training.

Peer Support Coordinator Responsibilities

- Schedule and conduct monthly meetings, which occur the 1st Monday of each month.
- Follow up each monthly meeting with a minutes report.
- Advise team of any upcoming training.
- Attend Local 765 Union Meeting each month to give updates for committees report.
- Collaborate with the department Chaplain to assist in CISM when available.
- Schedule “Awareness Training” with shift Division Chiefs.

- Scout and vet local and out of state resources such as counselors, therapists, detoxification facilities and etc.
- Follow up with each active team member quarterly as routine check up.
- Coordinate the assembly of FLFD Peer Support team when a regional response is needed.
- Meet with Wellness coordinator yearly to discuss overall health of our members and how we can get better.
- Assist our members with finding and scheduling appointments with our resources or helping them with the city's EAP.
- Order and supply team members with polo shirts.
- Attend the Florida Firefighters Safety and Health Collaborative meetings on a quarterly basis.
- Continually update the awareness training to reflect current times and or issues.
- Coordinate with the FBA to assist sick and injured members.
- Track training of Peer Support Team.

Peer Support Team Member Responsibilities

- Be the ears, eyes and voice for the Peer Support team.
- When on duty and at the fire stations talk about our program and what it offers.
- Never pass the buck in regards to hearing about a member in need. Take the time to reach out and make sure a mentioned member is ok.
- Be prepared to respond to call outs on duty and off duty.
- Keep all training certificates in your personal file.
- Shift representatives should be calling sick members or members that are out for an extended period of time to check in on them.

The Four Legs of Support and Four Pillars of good health model

- As a Fire Department we are using four support legs to help with the overall health of our firefighters. The 4 legs of support are: CISM, Chaplaincy, Employee Assistance Program and Peer Support.
- The four pillars for overall good health that firefighters need to be aware of are: Good diet, exercise routine, sleep and some form of stress release.

These are guidelines and should be used as such. Peer Support team members are not counselors but instead are there to lend an ear, offer guidance and assist with resources.