



Kern County Sheriff's Office
Policies and Procedures

TITLE: PEER SUPPORT PROGRAM		NO: J-0410	
APPROVED: Donny Youngblood, Sheriff-Coroner			
REFERENCE: Government Code Sections 8669.1 – 8669.7			
EFFECTIVE: December 21, 2021	REVIEWED: 11/26/2024	REVISED: 11/26/2024	UPDATED: 11/26/2024

PURPOSE

The purpose of this program is to provide all employees (including volunteers) and their families with the opportunity for peer support through times of personal or professional crisis or stress.

The Peer Support Team (PST) is designed to help employees and their family members by providing a group of trained individuals who can help support others. The Sheriff's Office recognizes a strong support system can benefit those in need as well as their families.

The Sheriff's Office also recognizes employees face many stressful and conflicting situations that may seriously affect their lives both personally and professionally. The Peer Support Program is provided as a resource to facilitate the understanding and expression of feelings and assist in problem solving.

The Sheriff's Office will place the highest priority on the well-being of all employees, regardless of classification. For this reason, the Sheriff's Office will ensure the PST is properly staffed and trained.

DEFINITIONS

Peers: PST members including employees, volunteers, and their family members. Collectively referred to as "peers."

Support: Support can be provided in a variety of ways including, but not limited to, the following: staying in contact with the peer in need; providing emotionally encouraging feedback and/or healthy advice; directing the peer in need to appropriate resources if/when needed; and, being available to assist a peer in need at all hours, day or night.

Confidential Communication: Any information, including, but not limited to, written or oral communication transmitted between law enforcement personnel, a PST member, or a crisis hotline or crisis referral service staff member made in connection with the PST program. Confidential communications are communications made while a PST member provides peer support services or while a crisis hotline or crisis referral service staff member provides crisis services and must be kept in confidence. Information discussed in these confidential communications are not to be disclosed to third persons other than those who are present to further the interests of the law

enforcement personnel in the delivery of peer support services or those to whom disclosures are reasonably necessary for the transmission of the information or an accomplishment of the purposes for which the PST member is providing services. “Confidential communication” does not include a communication in which law enforcement personnel are required by law to disclose the commission of a crime or a communication in which the law enforcement personnel’s intent to defraud or deceive an investigation into a critical incident is revealed. (See Paragraph G(4).)

Peer Support Services: Authorized peer support services provided by a PST member to an employee, volunteers, and their immediate families affected by a critical incident or the cumulative effect of witnessing multiple critical incidents. Peer support services assist those affected by a critical incident in coping with critical incident stress and mitigating reactions to critical incident stress.

A. PEER SUPPORT ROLES

1. **PST** is comprised of Sheriff’s Office employees who are trained in peer support and interested in preventing and mitigating the negative impact of acute stress on themselves, their peers and their families.
2. **PST Members** are employees from all classifications within all divisions of the Sheriff’s Office, who are specially trained to provide support for employees, volunteers, or their family members.
3. **PST Coordinator** is responsible for managing the team, ensuring team members are properly trained, maintaining necessary records, selecting new team members, removing team members when necessary, and acting as a liaison with the Sheriff’s Office Administration as needed.
4. **PST Leader** is responsible for the direct supervision of PST members.

B. TEAM SELECTION CRITERIA

Employees interested in participating in the PST Program shall submit a special assignment application and a memorandum expressing their desire to do so. The application and memorandum shall be forwarded, through the chain of command, to the Personnel Division Commander. For selection to the program, employees shall meet the following criteria:

1. Have the endorsement of their Division Commander.
2. Not have any work restrictions due to psychological stress.
3. Is not the subject of a serious or major investigation or suffering from serious or extreme personal problem(s).
4. Be subject to inquiries with their coworkers and supervisors to determine their suitability as a PST member.
5. Be subject to a review of their personnel file.
6. Be subject to a peer review completed by the PST.

J-0410-2

EFFECTIVE: December 21, 2021	REVIEWED: 11/26/2024	REVISED: 11/26/2024	UPDATED: 11/26/2024
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7. Have the following characteristics:
 - a. Strong work ethic.
 - b. Naturally compassionate and empathetic.
 - c. Good communicator.
 - d. Dedicated to helping others.

Preference will be given to those employees who have formal education in a field pertaining to peer support.

The Peer Support Coordinator and Team Leaders will consult during the selection process of new PST members and will consult prior to the removal of any PST members.

C. ANNUAL PEER SUPPORT TEAM MEMBER REVIEW

1. PST members will be subject to an annual job performance review, which will minimally consist of a criminal and administrative review for all PST members.

D. TRAINING

1. PST members shall complete a POST certified Basic Peer Support course, which meets the requirements outlined in Government Code section 8669.6.
2. PST members shall participate in quarterly training and/or meetings.
3. The Peer Support Program Coordinator or his/her designee shall schedule and develop quarterly meetings, training, and continuing education.

E. TEAM MEMBER DUTIES

PST members shall perform the following functions:

1. Attend at least one PST continuing education course or refresher session per year.
2. Abide by the principles of confidentiality and keep all PST interventions and conversations confidential, unless otherwise required by policy and/or law.
3. Be sensitive to the psychological and emotional needs of their peers.
4. Be willing to devote their time to others when either requested or approached directly by a peer in need.
5. Be willing to track necessary statistical information.
6. Have the necessary sensitivity to deal with all people, regardless of race, religion, gender, gender preference, sexual orientation, culture, and to do so with full confidentiality and without judgement.
7. Maintain all their duties and responsibilities in their primary working assignment.
8. PST members who are supervisors shall not provide continuous peer support to subordinates. After making an initial assessment, the supervising PST member will

J-0410-3

EFFECTIVE: December 21, 2021	REVIEWED: 11/26/2024	REVISED: 11/26/2024	UPDATED: 11/26/2024
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pass along the peer support duties to another PST member. The intent of this section is to prevent a conflict between supervisory duties and peer support assistance.

F. PST MEMBER REMOVAL

1. PST members may be subject to discipline and/or removal from the team by the Peer Support Program Coordinator only after obtaining final approval from the Support Services Bureau Chief Deputy. Removal will be based on:
 - a. Violation of any confidentiality rules.
 - b. Repeated failure to attend quarterly meetings and/or training.
 - c. Continuous unavailability in responding to peers in need.
 - d. Failure to maintain required statistical information.
 - e. Work performance deficiencies in primary assignment.
 - f. Any failure found during the annual performance review (section C).

G. PEER SUPPORT REQUEST PROCESS

1. Any Sheriff's Office employee, volunteer or their family members may contact any member of the PST at any time without prior approval, either for themselves, their family or on behalf of another employee.
2. Supervisors and managers are encouraged to contact the PST whenever they feel the team can benefit an employee or volunteer.
3. Supervisors will make every effort to allow PST members to leave their primary working assignment to respond to a peer in need. If other factors prevent this, either the PST member or supervisor may contact the Peer Support Program Coordinator to request another PST member respond.
4. PST members may respond to a variety of incidents, including any of the following:
 - a. Officer involved shootings.
 - b. Line of duty death or serious injury.
 - c. Disturbing or emotionally trying calls for service or work events.

H. CONFIDENTIALITY

1. To be effective, the PST Program must maintain confidentiality. Government Code sections 8669.4 and 8669.7 provide mandates regarding confidential communication between a PST member and any employee seeking peer support services.
 - a. PST members may be subject to discipline for the negligent release of confidential

J-0410-4

EFFECTIVE: December 21, 2021	REVIEWED: 11/26/2024	REVISED: 11/26/2024	UPDATED: 11/26/2024
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communications.

2. Communications between a PST member and the employee seeking peer support is considered a confidential communication.
3. Per Government Code section 8669.4, law enforcement personnel, whether or not a party to an action, has a right to refuse to disclose, and to prevent another from disclosing, a confidential communication between the law enforcement personnel and a PST member made while the PST member was providing peer support services, or a confidential communication made to a crisis hotline or crisis referral service.
4. Per Government Code section 8669.4, a confidential communication may be disclosed under the following circumstances:
 - a. To refer law enforcement personnel to crisis referral services by a PST member.
 - b. During a consultation between two PST members.
 - c. If the PST member reasonably believes disclosure is necessary to prevent death, substantial bodily harm, or commission of a crime.
 - d. If the law enforcement personnel expressly agree in writing that the confidential communication may be disclosed.
 - e. In a criminal proceeding.
 - f. If otherwise required by law.
5. As mandated reporters, PST members will also be required to disclose incidents of:
 - a. Suspected child abuse.
 - b. Person(s) who are determined to be a danger to themselves or others.
 - c. Illegal narcotics or drug offenses.
 - d. Domestic violence.
 - e. Suspected elder abuse.
6. The Sheriff's Office understands that a PST Program will not be effective without trust or with fear of reprisal or discipline.
 - a. No investigator conducting an Internal Affairs investigation will attempt to interview or compel a PST member to give a statement regarding the actions or behavior of an employee who is receiving assistance from a PST member, unless disclosure is required by policy or law.
 - b. No PST member shall be compelled to give a statement regarding the conversation between the PST member and the employee seeking support.
 - c. No PST member shall be compelled to testify in any Civil Service hearing.
 - d. The investigator will also not ask the employee about their interactions with the PST member, including what services were offered or arranged by the PST member and what was discussed during any confidential conversations.
 - e. A PST member may not be subjected to discipline by the Sheriff's Office for refusing to divulge communications deemed privileged by these sections of the Sheriff's Office procedure manual.
 - f. These protections shall not apply to an investigation in which PST members are alleged to have violated any provisions outlined in Government Code section 8669.5(c) or who have been alleged to have violated provisions of this policy.
7. Supervisors will refrain from discussing matters about their subordinates with the PST

J-0410-5

EFFECTIVE: December 21, 2021	REVIEWED: 11/26/2024	REVISED: 11/26/2024	UPDATED: 11/26/2024
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member, unless it is to the employees' benefit for their well-being, or part of the referral process. No notations shall be made in any D-500 supervisor files regarding Peer Support.

8. PST members will only discuss their interactions with other employees when required to do so with the Peer Support Program Coordinator or if other situations dictate. Examples of such situations include if a PST member needs additional assistance from other PST members, is unable to establish rapport and/or trust with a peer, or needs to pass off care to another PST member for whatever reason.
9. PST members will not openly discuss their peer interactions with other employees.
 - a. If the Peer Support Program Coordinator has any indication that a PST member has violated the confidentiality required by this policy, they will be removed from the PST program immediately and subject to discipline.

I. PEER SUPPORT LIMITATIONS

1. Per Government Code section 8669.5, a PST member shall not provide peer support services in any of the following circumstances:
 - a. If, when serving in a peer support role, the PST member's relationship with the law enforcement personnel receiving peer support services could be reasonably expected to impair objectivity, competence, or effectiveness in providing peer support, or would otherwise risk exploitation or harm to the law enforcement personnel.
 - b. If the PST member and the law enforcement personnel receiving peer support services were involved as participants or witnesses to the same traumatic incident.
 - c. If the PST member and the law enforcement personnel receiving peer support services are both involved in a shared active or ongoing investigation.

J. COMPENSATION

1. PST members are not required to carry a communication device to ensure their availability and will not be required to respond to emergency peer support situations during off-duty hours.
 - a. PST members are not considered to be subject to mandatory call-out or eligible for availability pay.
 - b. PST members who provide support to a peer while off-duty will be compensated with a PST supervisor's approval.
 - (1) Such PST members will have the option to be paid overtime or to earn compensatory time off earned (CTOE).
 - (2) Each PST member will bill the Cost Center of their primary work assignment, using Overtime Type 510.

J-0410-6

EFFECTIVE: December 21, 2021	REVIEWED: 11/26/2024	REVISED: 11/26/2024	UPDATED: 11/26/2024
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K. OFF-DUTY RESPONSE

1. If a PST member responds in person to an after-hours support request or off-duty peer in need, a notification to a PST Leader is required. If a PST Leader responds in person to an after-hours support request or off-duty employee in need, notification to the Peer Support Program Coordinator is required.
2. In the event PST members have access to a department vehicle, either through the PPV or HRV program, they will be authorized to utilize their assigned vehicle. Those team members who are not assigned a PPV or HRV can either use their privately-owned vehicle or make arrangements with the Fleet Management Unit to obtain a department vehicle to use while conducting PST activities.

J-0410-7

EFFECTIVE: December 21, 2021	REVIEWED: 11/26/2024	REVISED: 11/26/2024	UPDATED: 11/26/2024
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