

PEER SUPPORT TEAM

Date Issued: March 29, 2019

Rescinds: December 17, 2004

Section: Personnel

File Code: P-PST

PURPOSE

To provide all Toronto Fire Services personnel with a guideline regarding the Toronto Fire Services Peer Support Team (PST).

RESPONSIBILITY

All personnel are responsible for knowing the resources available to them and other employees through the PST.

GUIDELINES

1. General

- 1.1. Personal problems are a normal part of life. Support from a Mental Health Professional and Peer can help an individual look at situations differently while providing information to help make decisions, respond to issues and resolve difficulties. Toronto Fire Services PST direct clients to the proper professionals.
- 1.2. Most problems can be resolved with early intervention. Problems that are ignored may become more serious. Employees are encouraged to seek early assistance to help reduce the potential for negative effects on personal and family life, as well as job performance.
- 1.3. The purpose and intent of the Team is to minimize staff exposure to stressful incidents resulting in fewer stress-related problems. Chain of Command can help reduce this exposure by considering rotating staff on scene and by removing initial (first on scene) staff from the scene as soon as possible.
- 1.4. On-site support, evaluation and defusing by a PST member should be considered for some critical incidents.
- 1.5. During and following critical incidents, peer members on scene are better able to:
 - a) watch for acute reactions
 - b) provide support
 - c) provide encouragement
 - d) consult
 - e) be available to help resting staff deal with stress reactions
- 1.6. PST members should be considered a resource available to Chain of Command for assignment as needed.
- 1.7. Upon any critical incident or potential traumatic event, any individual may request the PST to attend for appropriate intervention.

1.8. Several types of intervention may be conducted depending on the circumstances of a particular incident. They may be conducted on a one-on-one basis or with the entire crew.

2. Toronto Fire Services Peer Support Team

2.1. The Toronto Services PST offers employees assistance with a wide range of issues including, but not limited to the following:

- a) Family matters.
- b) Communication difficulties.
- c) Misuse of alcohol and drugs.
- d) Parent/child issues.
- e) Couple and marital relationships.
- f) Abuse/assault.
- g) Eldercare/childcare resources and information.
- h) Financial /legal concerns.
- i) Anxiety/depression.
- j) Stress/health /lifestyle.
- k) Loss and bereavement.
- l) Trauma/critical incidents.
- m) Other personal/professional challenges.

2.2. Toronto Fire Services PST is in place to provide

- a) support
- b) psychological first aid
- c) awareness
- d) education
- e) information
- f) referrals
- g) Chaplaincy Services
- h) Critical incident interventions, such as individual and/or group meetings/station visits, such as:
 - i. defusings
 - ii. debriefings
 - iii. psychological first aid
 - iv. education
 - v. phone calls
 - vi. follow up

2.3. These services are provided to normalize common reactions when faced with a critical incident or traumatic workplace event (see above and/or *Attachment 2 – 'Critical Incidents and Traumatic Events'*), and/or to mitigate issues related to mental health at home and/or in the workplace.

2.4. The PST will encourage resiliency, develop a MH plan, provide education, support and reinforce coping strategies for either an individual or an entire group.

3. Peer Team Members Roles and Responsibilities

- 3.1. Peers are staff from a variety of ranks and divisions drawn from TFS and operate under the auspices of TFS Health & Wellness. Peers serve as models of healthy behaviour and coping skills for members involved in a critical event or who may be coping with mental health issues or concerns.
- 3.2. Members are responsible to follow and adhere to the TFS Peer Support Team Code of Conduct and fulfill duties as outlined in the PST Job Description. Confidentiality is a core element of the Peer model and both these documents.

4. Making the Call

- 4.1. The Toronto Services PST can be contacted at (416) 338-9327 for more information or if an employee would like to discuss a problem/issue that is/is not identified in this list. Individual Peer Members can also be contacted; individuals cell numbers can be found on the PST Contact List,
- 4.2. All calls made to the Toronto Services PST are confidential. Information about who has used the Toronto Firefighters' Peer Support Team is not disclosed. No one knows that a person has used the program unless it is divulged by or consent is provided by the individual making the call.
- 4.3. A Toronto Fire Services PST member asks a few questions to help refer the caller to a proper health professional. An "on-call" PST member speaks with anybody needing immediate assistance with a crisis/emergency situation. The PST member can also provide referrals, information about resources available on-line and in the community.
- 4.4. Defusings and debriefings are normally conducted at fire halls, or fire/city facilities, however they may be conducted anywhere that provides
 - a) ample space
 - b) privacy
 - c) freedom from distractions.

*Selection of the site may be determined by the PST members in consultation with the individuals they are meeting with (ie. For psychological first aid meetings).

- 4.5. Personal information is released only with the individual's informed, voluntary, written consent. However, there are some exceptions when PST members may be required to provide information obtained, even if consent is not given. The criteria for these exceptions are clearly defined and specific to ensure confidentiality. For example, PST members have a professional duty to report suspected child abuse and to protect individuals when they pose a serious threat to themselves or others. PST members may also be compelled to provide information under the law (e.g. court order or subpoena).
- 4.6. Statistical information about the program is collected and reported in a summary format that protects the identities of our clients. Statistical reports contain information relating to the number of calls, the number of meetings with clients and the number of on and off duty hours worked by the PST members. No

information on individuals, crews, or any meetings details or notes are kept or recorded.

- 4.7. Use of the Toronto Services PST is voluntary. Employees are encouraged to call the TFS PST directly when they feel they can benefit from the services or require information or a referral. Sometimes supervisors, union representatives, healthcare professionals and others suggest that employees use the program. The final decision to participate is up to each individual.
- 4.8. There is no cost to the individual or their family for short-term services. If long-term or specialized counselling is required, TFS PST members assist in obtaining and providing a referral to an appropriate community resource. This sometimes involves a fee that may not be covered by provincial health insurance or by the City's extended health benefits plans. When additional resources are necessary, a TFS PST member tries to identify providers that are affordable and offer the best possible services.

5. Eligible Members

- 5.1. TFS employees and their immediate family members (i.e. spouse/partner and dependent children) can access Toronto Fire Services PST services.
- 5.2. Retired TFS employees can access TFS PST services.
- 5.3. Eligible family members can use the TFS PST services at no cost. If a family member needs help coping with an issue but is reluctant to get assistance, a TFS PST member may be able to assist in dealing effectively with the situation. This is often the first step in helping a family member.

6. Contacting the PST

- 6.1. For more information, personnel should call the TFS PST directly to discuss the services available or to schedule an appointment.

Toronto Fire Services Team Lead Number: (416) 338-9327

7. The Chaplaincy Service of Toronto Fire Services

- 7.1. TFS personnel have the additional resource of Chaplains available for consultation.
- 7.2. The Chaplaincy Service of TFS does the following:
 - a) Acts as a presence among fire department personnel as a reminder of the deeper realities and truths of life, non-denominational.
 - b) Gives encouragement and support in times of trial and testing, providing strength in times of weakness, consolation and support in times of sadness and loss, and assists and gives formal leadership in honouring the great moments of life such as birth, marriage and death.
 - c) Provides counselling that is encouraging and non-judgmental.
 - d) Supports and when requested encourages the religious faith of TFS personnel while honouring all faith traditions represented.
 - e) Is a concerned and involved presence that encourages, understands and accepts all persons and willingly shares the various burdens that people

often carry.

7.3. The Chaplaincy Service of TFS has the following goals:

- a) Chaplains are well known by those they serve.
- b) Chaplains are prepared to respond to and be present at major events and multiple alarms.
- c) All TFS personnel feel known and cared for pastorally by the Chaplains and feel great freedom in sharing with the Chaplains celebratory events as well as personal and family problems for counsel.
- d) Encouraging personal faith through example rather than through preaching, helping make spirituality seem an attainable goal for all, and assisting those who aspire to a greater sense of a Higher Power (however one understands that reality).

7.4. The Chaplaincy Service of TFS has the following objectives:

- a) Getting to know and be known by TFS personnel as soon as possible by carrying out a regular program of fire station and division visits.
- b) Being present at social events and formal TFS/Association events.
- c) Attending meetings of the PST and official TFS events.

7.5. The Chaplaincy Service of TFS may be contacted through the TFS PST Lead Phone at 416-338-9327, or individual Chaplains may be contacted directly – see *Attachment 1 – ‘PST Contact List’*.

ATTACHMENT(S)

Attachment 1– Peer Support Team Contact List

Attachment 2 – Critical Incident and/or Traumatic Events

RELATED SOGS

G-CRIS — *Activation and Deployment of the Peer Support Team (PST)*