

Privileged Communication

RCW 5.60.060

Who are disqualified -- Privileged communications

(6) (a) A peer support group counselor shall not, without consent of the law enforcement officer or fire fighter making the communication, be compelled to testify about any communication made to the counselor by the officer or fire fighter while receiving counseling. The counselor must be designated as such by the sheriff, police chief, fire chief, or chief of the Washington state patrol, prior to the incident that results in counseling. The privilege only applies when the communication was made to the counselor while acting in his or her capacity as a peer support group counselor. The privilege does not apply if the counselor was an initial responding officer or fire fighter, a witness, or a party to the incident which prompted the delivery of peer support group counseling services to the law enforcement officer or fire fighter.

(b) For the purposes of this section, "peer support group counselor" means a:

(i) Law enforcement officer, fire fighter, civilian employee of a law enforcement agency, or civilian employee of a fire department, who has received training to provide emotional and moral support and counseling to an officer or fire fighter who needs those services as a result of an incident in which the officer or fire fighter was involved while acting in his or her official capacity; or

(ii) Nonemployee counselor who has been designated by the sheriff, police chief, fire chief, or chief of the Washington state patrol to provide emotional and moral support and counseling to an officer or fire fighter who need those services as a result of an incident in which the officer or fire fighter was involved while acting in his or her official capacity.

c) A Peer Support Team Member who, as a consequence of obtaining any information from an employee, believes that the employee is an immediate danger to him/herself or others, shall consult with the Program's Clinical Director/Consultant, who will determine what steps should be taken. The Clinical Director/Consultant shall notify the employee's Supervisor if appropriate.

Confidentiality & Trust are paramount values in Peer Support

Peer Support Program Resource & Handout Printed By:
King County EMS - CISM Program
401 5th Ave. Suite 1200 Seattle, WA 98104-1818
206-296-4693 FAX 206-296-4966

<http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/ems/community/cism.aspx>

Common Peer Support Events

- Shootings
- Death or traumatic injury to a child
- Mass Casualties
- Helpless to aid a victim, e.g. failed rescue
- Physical encounters with assailants
- Death or near-death of a co-worker
- Being unable to directly assist someone when an incident is heard over the radio or telephone
- Death or injury to civilians in which department personnel or equipment were involved

Typical Emotions Following Critical Incidents

- Frustration
- Anger
- Irritability
- Numbness
- Guilt/Shame
- Helplessness
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Fear
- Sadness
- Alienation
- Vulnerability

Common Reactions from Critical Incidents

- Headaches
- Flashbacks
- Nightmares
- Mood change: Apathy/Frustration
- Relationship Difficulties
- Changes in Eating Habits
- Gastrointestinal Problems
- Alcohol, medication/drug over use
- Difficulty Sleeping
- Intrusive Thoughts
- Fatigue

* Depression or Suicide ideation (at severe risk)

Other Resources

Your Agency's Human Resources Department

Your Agency's Chaplain Program

Your Agency's Employee Assistance Program

Confidential Mental Health Counselor who specializes in Emergency Services Professionals via King County EMS - CISM 253-372-1400

*Seattle/King County Crisis Clinic
206-461-3222 ~ 1-800-244-5767*

*SafeCallNow.org Police/Fire/EMS
206-459-3020 ~ www.SafeCallNow.org*

Taking Care of Each Other



Peer Support

Peer Support Program

Peer Support is an objective and nonjudgmental resource from which employees may voluntarily request support and assistance in working through personal and occupational problems with specially trained co-workers.

Peer Support is designed to complement other behavioral health services; it does not replace professional care. Peer support provides a way for employees to "talk-out" problems with specially trained co-workers who "walk in their shoes" and want to help. Peer Support members are trained to use active listening skills, help clarify issues and explore options, support the person through their problem-solving process and/or refer them to professionals as appropriate.

A formal Peer Support team is paraprofessionals who, in addition to above, usually work with clinical oversight, can respond to critical situations to be a confidential advocate to those in crisis and, when necessary, refer to a mental health professional or other appropriate professional. Team members have a high degree of aptitude, selected for their experience and personal qualities. Formal Peer Support has the potential for legal confidentiality through RCW 5.60.060 ~ Privilege Communication law.

Emergency Services is a demanding profession. At times, the stress of the job increases to the point where it may be difficult to deal with it alone. The person who is impacted the hardest in a crisis is generally the person who is alone or one who has experienced several crises, a serious toll on the health and wellbeing of the individual.

SafeCallNow.org is a non-profit organization established by public safety employees for public safety employees and their family. It is confidential and not connected to their agency.

"I highly recommend peer support in law enforcement. Peer Support systems within departments can lead the way to reducing stress and psychological trauma among law enforcement officers. Officers in distress more easily confide in peer support officers than in outside sources, often to the extent of saving their careers and sometimes their lives."

John M. Violanti, PhD. Associate Professor and Retired police officer; author of Police Trauma

Managing Critical Stress

Your reaction is your reaction:

What is a crisis or critical stress event to one person may not be to another. Reactions should decrease with time and support.

Trust your operational training:

Stay focused upon safety to yourself; follow your operational objectives during the incident. Believe your training will carry you through the incident.

Avoid thinking crises as insurmountable:

You can't change the fact highly stressful events happen, but you can change how you interpret and respond to them. Maintain an optimistic view.

Accept change: Certain goals may no longer be attainable. Develop confidence in your ability to solve problems and trust your own instinct.

Move toward goals: Develop realistic goals and prioritize tasks. Take decisive actions. Delegate where necessary.

Self-discovery builds resilience: People who experienced tragedies and hardships report greater sense of personal strength, relationships, increased sense of self-worth, a more developed spirituality and heightened appreciation for life.

Take care of yourself: Engaging in activities that you enjoy. Exercising regularly keeps the mind and body primed to deal with situations. Eat nutritiously, and avoid excessive junk food, caffeine, alcohol, or tobacco. Get adequate sleep and rest. Recognize and heed early warning signs for stress reactions.

Apply stress reduction techniques:

Reduce physical tension by activities such as taking deep breaths, meditating, and walking mindfully. Use time off for exercise, reading, listening to music, talking to family, or getting a special meal.

Talk about your emotions and reactions:

Share your thoughts with someone you trust.

Don't make critical decisions when under stress:

Life changing decisions should not be made in a time of crisis or stress. A clear mind supports a clear direction. Seek unbiased assistance.

Signs of Stress in the Emergency Services Profession

- Inability to relax when off duty
- Loss of objectivity, easily frustrated
- Difficulty maintaining balance
- Unnecessary risk taking
- Increased use of drugs or alcohol
- Tunnel vision and muffled hearing
- Limited attention span, difficulty concentrating
- Inability to problem solve or make decisions
- Disorientation or confusion, difficulty communicating thoughts
- Refusal to follow orders or to leave the scene
- Vicarious traumatization or compassion fatigue may develop
- Tremors, headaches, and nausea

Psychological First Aid: Helping People in Crisis

1. **Listen** - Learn how to listen. Listen to what is being said. Don't give advice.
2. **Don't try to fix it** - Since emergency service personnel are action oriented they often feel they need to "do something" to fix it. "People never care how much you know until they know how much you care".
3. **Refer** - Be familiar with what services are available in your area or who knows what support services are available and how to access them.
4. **Know critical incident stress signs and symptoms** - Learn what the critical stress reactions are so you can help the person identify what is happening to them.
5. **Protect** - If the person is talking about doing harm to themselves or others you need to notify someone: supervisor, EMS, mental health professional or law enforcement. Handle the situation calmly, without false promises or physical restraining. Do not leave an individual alone until the situation is resolved.

Tips for a Chronically Stressful Lifestyle

American Psychological Association; J. F. Kelly, PhD, H.L. Coons, PhD, ABPP

Set limits. Identify those tasks you feel you absolutely must do and cut back on anything non-essential. For work projects, discuss a list of your responsibilities and prioritize them with your supervisor.

Seek additional support. Reach out to someone you enjoy a close relationship. Share with them your troubles and welcome their support and guidance. If you continue to feel overwhelmed, are feeling hopeless or are having trouble getting through your daily routine, seek consultation with a licensed mental health professional.

Strive for a positive outlook. Look at situations more positively, seeing problems as opportunities.

Make a health-related commitment. Bolster your health so that you can have the energy and strength to confront challenges. Physical activity increases a body's production of endorphins, a neurotransmitter that decreases the production of stress hormones.

Enhance your sleep quality. Experts recommend striving for 7-8 hours of sleep. Engage in calming activities such as listening to relaxing music, reading an enjoyable book or practicing relaxation techniques before you go to sleep. Write down your concerns, quieting your thoughts before lights-out.

Traits of Resilience

Resilience is having the skills or attributes to recover quickly from a mental, physical or emotional crisis. Stress adaption is better than stress avoidance. Some people possess traits of natural resilience; others learn these traits.

**Flexible ~Balanced ~ Adapts to the situation
Humble ~ Unpretentious ~ Content
Self-reliant ~ Autonomous ~ Self motivated**

**Values people ~ Empathic ~ Cooperative
Sense of Humor ~ Creative ~ Artistic sense
Values Healthy Relationships**

Request for Confidentiality

Date: _____

(Emergency Service Professional involved in Incident)

(Peer Counselor / Authorizing Supervisor)

Intent of this Peer Support Counseling Event

The parties herein agree that their discussions are meant to be confidential and within the intent of RCW 5.60.060 (Privileged Communications).

The Peer Counselor named above is a member/members of the agency's Peer Support Program and Peer Counselor(s) trained in matters relating to the critical incident intervention.

Any communications you have with a Peer Support Counselor(s) are considered privileged and confidential pursuant to Washington law.

I hereby recognize the need for confidential Peer Support. I have approved that all discussions between the affected person and Peer Counselor are privileged and within agency policy(s).

Signed _____
(Forward to Supervisor - if required)

CC: Assigned Peer Support Team Member
Authorizing Supervisor (where required)

- *This document does not supersede agency policy or automatically make for privileged communication outside the RCW.*

* Adapted from King County Sheriff Policy & Peer Assistance Team