





POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

	PEER SUPPORT TEAM	
	POLICY NUMBER: 22-2	ISSUING AUTHORITY 
	EFFECTIVE DATE: January 1, 2025	Christine A. Elow Police Commissioner

I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS AND GUIDELINES

The leadership of the Cambridge Police Department recognizes that its most valuable resource is its employees. They also appreciate the value of providing a means for employees and their families to manage stress while seeking creative solutions to personal and professional problems before they become insurmountable. To further this end, leadership has authorized the development and activation of a Peer Support Program.

The Peer Support Program allows employees to talk out personal and/or professional problems confidentially with someone who understands and cares. By doing so, employees can meet challenges in a healthy way, thus avoiding the risks and pitfalls of self-destructive behavior.

Stress from a critical incident or from cumulative exposures to critical incidents can trigger responses that may interfere with or overwhelm an employee's ability to function, either during the emergency event itself or later. Early intervention to mitigate the negative effects of stress may prove to be a life or career-saving effort and of great value to the employee, family and friends, the department, and the Cambridge community at large.

Police officers by the very nature of their work are exposed to human tragedies and behaviors that create stressors they must deal with. Shift work, forced overtime, and other police functions can add to the stress. The Peer Support Team can help alleviate some of the personal problems that may result from this stress.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Cambridge Police Department to:

- A. establish and maintain a Peer Support Team whose members serve as an in-house resource for employees in need of emotional or psychological assistance during times of distress or difficulty;
- B. provide training for team members;
- C. adhere to strict guidelines for privacy and confidentiality; and

- D. develop a network of mental health professionals who may work with the team when advisable.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. *Critical Incident*: An event, within the course of duty as a police officer, that is considered extraordinary to the point where it may produce significant reactions, physical, cognitive or emotional, for the intervening personnel. At times, these reactions may rise to the level of interfering with one's ability to manage personal and/or professional duties and responsibilities. Providing rapid psychological first aid is often a valuable tool in mitigating these possible reactions.
- B. *Critical Incident Contact*: A private discussion between the Peer Support Team members and the individual exposed to or experiencing a traumatic incident. Meetings are not open to anyone other than those selected by the team members.
- C. *Critical Incident Stress Debriefing*: A closed, confidential discussion of a critical incident relating to the feelings and perceptions of those directly involved prior to, during, and after a stressful event; intended to provide support, education, and an outlet for views and feelings associated with the event. Debriefings are not counseling, nor are they an operational critique of the incident.
- D. *Critical Incident Stress Defusing*: A *defusing* is defined as a brief post-incident intervention conducted by specially trained members of the Peer Support Team immediately following a stressful incident. It is designed to lessen the impact of the event and to accelerate recovery.
- E. *Mental Health Professional*: A licensed mental health professional approved by the Police Commissioner will be available to train and consult with the team. As described by IACP guidelines, this clinical consultant will be available to the team on a 24-hour basis.
- F. *Peer Support Team*: A team of police officers who have been selected and trained in providing support to members of the department who may be having difficulty in managing a personal or professional situation. This team of officers is available to members of the department who may be seeking advice and guidance with any variety of issues that may be affecting their ability to perform their regular duties.
- G. *Peer Support Team Coordinator*: The team, along with the clinical consultant, will designate one or more members of the team to function as a Peer Support Team Coordinator. It is the Coordinator's responsibility to act as the principal point of contact whenever a member of the Peer Support Team is needed, or when a team member is unavailable.
- H. *Peer Support Team Member*: A member of the police department trained in Critical Incident Stress Management to recognize and understand stress reactions during and after critical incidents.

IV. PROCEDURES

A. Administration

1. Executive Support

- a. In the interest of promoting and maintaining the good physical and mental health of all members of the police department, the Police Commissioner has committed full authorization and support for the Peer Support Program. This commitment includes:
 - (1) honoring and preserving the principles of confidentiality set forth in this policy so that employees may access the resources of the team without fear of compromised privacy;
 - (2) providing for the assistance of a mental health professional;
 - (3) providing resources to support training; and
 - (4) ensuring that the program will not be used as an alternative to discipline; team members will not be expected to intervene in any disciplinary process, even at an employee's request.

B. Team Coordinator(s) Roles and Responsibilities

- 1. A Team Coordinator will act as liaison between the team and all other associated entities including the Command Staff, other members of the department, outside agencies, and other police departments.
- 2. A Team Coordinator will serve as the primary support for team members and may confer with them on cases.
- 3. A Team Coordinator may also be the point of contact for a member needing assistance when other team members are unavailable.

C. Selection and De-selection of Team Members

1. Posting

- a. The department will post openings for membership on the team, as needed.
- b. The posting will follow a similar format to other Cambridge Police Department postings for positions, including the prerequisite skills and personality attributes required for the position.

2. Selection Criteria

- a. Demonstrated ability to resolve difficult situations.
- b. Demonstrated willingness to be available to other members of the department who may need personal support and advice.

- c. Recognized personality attributes leading to success as a team member, such as compassion, professional credibility, maturity, good judgment, good communication skills, and a positive attitude.
- d. All members of the department are eligible to apply for an opening regardless of title, function, or rank.
- e. Any member of the team may be removed from the team by the Police Commissioner or designee for failure to adhere to the standards set by the department for member performance.

3. Selection Process

- a. Applications will include a letter of intent and a resume.
- b. Candidates are required to participate in an interview panel typically conducted by the Team Coordinator(s), one or more team members, and a clinical mental health advisor. The panel or designee will consult with the Commissioner regarding the final choice.
- c. Membership on the team is voluntary and will extend for an indefinite period.
- d. Membership on the team may be rescinded by the Commissioner for any of the following reasons.
 - (1) Failure to abide by the confidentiality requirements set forth within this directive.
 - (2) Failure to participate in the periodic trainings that members of the Peer Support Team are expected to attend.
 - (3) Whenever it appears that a team member goes beyond the bounds set in terms of the role and responsibilities established for Peer Support Team Officers.
 - (4) Whenever it appears that a team member is being adversely affected as a result of additional stressors this position could potentially pose.
 - (5) If, in the opinion of the mental health professional and/or the Peer Support Coordinator(s), it might be in the best interests of the officer to withdraw from the program.

D. Training for Team Members

1. Initial Training Requirements

- a. All team members shall be Peer Support and Crisis Intervention Team (CIT)-trained within one year of appointment.
- b. The Team Coordinator(s) will train all new members regarding standards of conduct and performance including a thorough understanding of the definitions and meanings of *privacy*, *privilege*, and *confidentiality*.
- c. New team members should refresh their understanding of the City's Employee Assistance Program and other available social service resources.

2. Applicable Continued Training

- a. Domestic violence.
- b. Alcohol and drug use and dependence.
- c. Medical conditions effecting mental health and well-being.
- d. Psychiatric disorders.
- e. Suicide risk assessment and recognition.
- f. Depression, anxiety, and burn-out.
- g. Communication skills and listening techniques.
- h. Limits and liability.

3. Team meetings may include training sessions conducted by guest speakers, discussions to address administrative issues, and round table discussions on any matters of interest or concern to the members.

- E. Responsibilities of Team Members

1. Team members shall adhere to the standards of performance established by the IACP and the Cambridge Police Department. The Team Coordinator will provide to all team members clear expectations for their conduct and performance consistent with the values and mission of the department.
2. Team members shall attend, at a minimum, three out of four team meetings per calendar year.
3. Participation as a team member is voluntary; however, members may be compensated for callouts and training.
4. From time to time, team members may be asked to prepare and deliver brief trainings for all members of the department during in-service sessions.
5. Team members are expected to adhere to the confidentiality requirements established for the Peer Support Team.

- F. Role of Team Members

1. Team members will be available to all members of the department to:
 - a. talk with, provide guidance, offer suggestions and make referrals with the goal of minimizing potential psychological and/or physical damage that may result from a delay to act;
 - b. provide support during periods of grief and adjustment after the death or serious injury/health issue of someone close to a member of the Cambridge Police Department;
 - c. accompany a department member to a medical/psychological appointment or evaluation;

- d. serve as a resource to employees who have been affected by an event that is stressful or difficult to deal with;
 - e. make hospital visits;
 - f. provide on scene support immediately following a critical incident; and
 - g. make notifications to next of kin.
2. A team member may provide support for an employee under investigation or during a disciplinary procedure but may not discuss the incident under investigation. In such cases, employees should be cautioned that any information shared with a team member regarding the incident might not be confidential.
- (1) The Peer Support Team is not an investigative unit of the police department; therefore, team members shall not interfere with nor question other members, or any other participant involved in a Peer Support Team debriefing or defusing of a critical incident concerning the content of such discussions.
3. Team members are not expected to keep written records of their contacts. Aggregate data will be kept by the clinical consultant.

G. Making Contact

- 1. Any employee of the Cambridge Police Department may at any time contact a team member or the Team Coordinator to arrange for a private and confidential initial conversation through any appropriate available means.
- 2. Whenever a supervisor or other employee of the Cambridge Police Department recognizes in another employee a troubling condition or situation, and the employee may benefit from talking with a Peer Support Team member, that supervisor or employee should contact the Team Coordinator(s) to discuss options. A Team Coordinator may assign a team member to discreetly approach the employee.

H. Confidentiality

- 1. Team members shall maintain strict confidentiality. Any breach of confidentiality can greatly impact any further success of the team.
- 2. Exceptions include cases when there is reason to believe that a department employee:
 - a. presents a danger to self or others, such as threats or actions toward suicide, homicide, or intentions to cause harm;
 - b. has committed a felony;
 - c. is suspected of child abuse;
 - d. has factually committed elder abuse;
 - e. requests discrete divulgence; or

- f. may have committed an act requiring action by a mandated reporter in accordance with any pertinent Massachusetts General Laws.
- I. Records
 - 1. A Team Coordinator shall be responsible for keeping accurate records of training sessions, meetings, and attendance, new postings, and results of candidate interviews.
 - 2. No written records will be maintained regarding the content of conversations with employees.
- J. Conflicts
 - 1. If at any time, a team member believes that their conversation with an employee may present a conflict of interest, the team member shall refer the employee to a Team Coordinator or another team member.
- K. Role of Mental Health Professionals
 - 1. The mental health professional will be on call to provide consultation to team members and may facilitate referrals requiring intervention beyond the scope of peer support.
 - 2. The consultant will coordinate and plan on-going training and support.
 - 3. The consultant will submit to the Police Commissioner or designee an annual report and analysis of team activities including a description of services provided, the number and content of training sessions, number of team interactions with employees, a general assessment of the program, and any recommendations for improvement of team operations.