




**WINCHESTER POLICE DEPARTMENT OPERATION ORDER**

**NOTE:** This policy is for internal use only, and does not enlarge an employee’s civil liability in any way. It should not be construed as the creation of a higher standard of safety or case in an evidentiary sense, with respect to third party claims. Violation of this policy, if proven, can only form the basis of a complaint by this Department, and then only in a non-judicial administrative setting.

Number <b>2-74</b>		Effective Date August 24, 2020	Review Date August 20, 2020	Reviewing Division Administration
Subject <b>Peer to Peer Support Team</b>	References  CEMS: 6.5 Employee Assistance Plan	<input type="checkbox"/> New Policy <input type="checkbox"/> Replaces: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Revised		This policy shall apply to personnel assigned to the following divisions: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> All Personnel <input type="checkbox"/> Patrol Division <input type="checkbox"/> Administration Division <input type="checkbox"/> Investigation Division
 Chief of Police or Designee		March 23, 2023 Date		

**I. PURPOSE**

The Winchester Police Department recognizes the harmful effects of stress caused by disasters, mass casualties, and other critical incidents. Winchester Police Department officers are involved in these types of incidents and are, therefore, subject to critical incident stress. To minimize the adverse effects of critical incident stress, the Winchester Police Department has established a Peer Support Team (PST).

**II. POLICY**

The Department should be proactive in activating the PST team during a critical incident in order to provide emotional support and professional referrals for those impacted by the magnitude of events. The objective of PST is to provide intervention after major incidents in order to minimize stress-related injuries to Winchester Police Department personnel.

PST is a formal process and requires trained personnel to assist persons during stressful incidents. Untrained or incorrect volunteer or professional intervention may have a negative impact and thus cause more harm than good. The PST team, or a Peer Support Worker, should perform any debriefing needed for WPD personnel. Other non-professionals should be excluded from providing this service for WPD personnel on emergency scenes unless specifically requested by the Incident Commander.

### III. DEFINITIONS

- A. Peer Support Team (PST): An organized approach to supporting police Department personnel who are involved in emergency operations under conditions of extreme stress in order to assist in mitigating long-term effects of stress.
- B. Critical Incident: Any situation faced by emergency service personnel which could cause them to experience unusually strong emotional reactions which have the potential to interfere with their ability to function either at the scene or later.
- C. PST Coordinator: WPD PST member appointed by the Chief of Police, or designee, to serve as team leader. The PST coordinator can also act as a Peer Support Worker.
- D. Debriefing: Critical incident debriefing is not a critique of police department operations at the incident. The debriefing process provides formats in which personnel can discuss their feelings and reactions, thus reducing the stress which results from exposure to critical incidents.
- E. One-on-One: A one-on-one is, as the name implies, an individual meeting with a PST member and an employee or first responder. This meeting may take place during the affected officer's tour of duty or at any other time or place. The meeting is usually initiated by the officer, however, it may come as a suggestion from a co-worker or supervisor, or the team member may initiate the session after learning about an incident.
- F. Demobilization: A demobilization is a primary stress prevention and intervention technique which is applied immediately after personnel are released from a large-scale incident before they return to their normal duties or home. A demobilization allows affected personnel to rest and take care of immediate physical needs.
- G. Deactivation: A deactivation is the removal of an affected employee from duty for the remainder of his or her shift. Should it be necessary to relieve an employee from a subsequent shift, it should be done in coordination with the affected employee's division commander.
- H. Stress Debriefings: The task of the PST is to provide an organized approach to the management of stress responses for police officers having been exposed to, or showing signs of, critical incident stress experiences in the line of duty. A critical incident can be any situation which causes an officer to experience strong emotional reactions which have the potential to interfere with their ability to function at the scene or later.

### IV. PROCEDURES

- A. Incidents that might result in a PST response:

1. Major disaster/mass casualties
2. Serious injury, death, or suicide of an officer.
3. Serious injury or death of a civilian resulting from law enforcement operation.
4. Death of a child, or other incident involving profound emotional responses.
5. Any incident which usually attracts heavy attention from the news media.
6. Loss of life following an unusual, or extremely prolonged, expenditure of emotional and physical energy by police personnel.
7. Any unusual incident which produces a high level of immediate or delayed emotional response.
8. Accumulating stress reactions over long periods of time, after involvement in many previous critical incidents.
9. A serious incident involving an officer's family or close friend.
10. Any situation deemed by a supervisor to be a critical incident.

B. Stress Debriefing Process

1. The first phase of the PST process consists of initial ventilation of feelings by the employee and an assessment of the intensity of the stress response by the facilitator or the WPD PST member.
2. The second phase of the process consists of a more detailed discussion of the signs and symptoms of stress response and provides for education, support and reassurance.
3. The final, or closure phase of PST, is providing information about further action or referral to the professional counseling services as conducted by the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

C. Peer Support Team Plan:

1. On Scene Management

Minimizing personnel exposure to stressful incidents results in fewer stress-related problems. Incident Commanders should reduce this exposure by rotating personnel and by removing initial responders from the scene of critical incidents that have the potential of causing an emotional stress response. A system of rotating personnel should be set up as soon as possible after the need for such rotation and on-site evaluation is determined.

2. On-site evaluation

Counseling by a PST member should be considered for some critical incidents when time and circumstances permit. In such situations, debriefing teams can watch for acute reactions and provide support, encouragement, consultation, and be available to help resting personnel deal with stress reactions. PST members should be considered as a resource available to the Incident Commander.

### 3. Follow up debriefing

A follow up debriefing will be performed within 48 hours after the incident. The main purpose of this debriefing is to resolve any issues or problems that were not initially resolved or new issues or problems that have risen since the original stress debriefing. The follow-up debriefing will be performed with the entire group or a portion of the group. Consideration should be given to include involved dispatchers in this debriefing. This debriefing will be conducted by a mental health professional (EAP) with the assistance of the PST.

### D. Peer Support Team

#### 1. Position Assignment Descriptions:

- a. PST coordinator
  - 1) Will mobilize other team members at the beginning of an incident.
  - 2) Will act as a liaison with the Department for other agencies handling all administrative matters.
  - 3) Will establish debriefing locations.
- b. Peer Support Worker
  - 1) Will perform the introductory phase of the debriefing by establishing confidentiality and rules for debriefing.
  - 2) Will assist the coordinator.
  - 3) Any officer involved in a particular incident may be required to attend a debriefing session.
  - 4) Team members involved in a defusing process shall participate, if possible, in formal debriefing sessions.
  - 5) Team members shall be sensitive people who will keep confidential the material shared in the debriefing sessions. They must be well adjusted, empathetic, respected by peers, credible and non-judgmental.
  - 6) Team members will be recommended by PST members to the staff. The Chief of Police, or designee, will have final approval on all members. Team members will be selected by an interview committee. The process will consist of a letter of interest from the person, recommendation letter from the supervisor, interview process and no disciplinary action for previous two years.
  - 7) Team members must also be in good standing with the Winchester Police Department.

### E. Education and Training

PST Education and Training: All team members will be required to attend both initial and continuing education. Peer Support Workers will be recommended for

training by the PST and PST coordinator, with the approval of the Chief of Police or his/her designee.

**While the training of police personnel as PST members will be an on-going process, it should be emphasized that they are not thought of as “psychologists”. However, each PST member will be trained to recognize certain signs and symptoms associated with stress and where to refer WPD personnel for the appropriate assistance when required. Educational activities within the WPD will emphasize counseling as an appropriate choice of action for those experiencing distress.**

1. Initial Education

- a. Peer Support worker shall receive:
  - 1) Basic and Peer Support Worker Training.
  - 2) Ongoing Critical Incident Stress Management Debriefing Training during scheduled PST meetings.

2. Continuing Education

- a. Training class provided by mental health professionals.
- b. Educational opportunities presented by outside agencies.
- c. Seminars covering topics of mental health.

3. Education and Training about PST

- a. Roll call visitations
  - 1) Each PST member will be required to visit roll call at least annually. Roll call visits will be coordinated by the PST Coordinator to avoid duplication or omission.
- b. Recruit/FTO training
  - 1) Each FTO trainee will receive training on how the PST team functions and what peer support assistance is available.
  - 2) Additionally, each PST member will be required to introduce themselves to each FTO trainee.
- c. In-service training
  - 1) Supervisor training
  - 2) Personal contacts
  - 3) Seminars for Police personnel

4. Periodic meetings will be held to establish training, education and team direction.

- a. These meetings, held a minimum of twice a year, will be mandatory for all team members.

5. All PST members will attend a mandatory counseling session with the Public Safety Mental Health Specialist or an EAP member once a year. If the

member does not attend a session they will not be able to continue their participation in the program.

#### F. Activation/Notification

Any officer may contact a PST member for one-on-one consultation for themselves or for another officer. An exception to this resource use is if PST is sought because of an internal investigation, the employee is permitted to only contact the Public Safety Mental Health Specialist and no other member of PST.

1. The PST member can be contacted by direct call or through the PST coordinator.
2. It is not necessary to contact a supervisor or go through the chain of command.
3. The involved officer should be given the option of choosing the PST member contacted.

#### G. Identifying/Recognizing Incidents

1. Division, Unit or Sector Commanders are responsible for identifying/recognizing significant incidents that may qualify for debriefing.
  - a. When an incident is identified, a request for debriefing consideration should be made through the PST coordinator as soon as possible.
2. Any officer may initiate the debriefing process by contacting a supervisor at the incident scene.
3. Any member who believes there is a need for individual, confidential debriefing may initiate the process by contacting the Employee Assistance Program or other established program.

#### H. Call List of PST members

Each supervisor will maintain an up-to-date call list of PST members. Contact list will also be posted in the Police Department to maintain privacy.

#### I. Confidentiality

1. All statements, facts, opinions and discussions that are expressed during the debriefing process shall be considered confidential. (Reference; Virginia Code§19.2-271.4: Privileged communications by certain public safety personnel.)
2. No member of the Winchester Police Department or any other Department conducting an administrative or criminal investigation into the incident shall be allowed in the debriefings if the investigation involves a Department employee as part of the investigation.

3. No PST member will discuss the contents of any debriefing with anyone other than the individual or individuals involved in the debriefing.
4. The purpose of this process is to provide confidence and gain control of the situation for the PST member and the officer in need of assistance.
5. PST members will discuss the contents of the debriefing outside of the parameters only when compelled by some legal requirement and approved by the Chief of Police or designee.

J. Debriefing Attendance

1. Attendance at a debriefing shall be mandatory for all personnel directly exposed to the traumatic aspects of the incident, except as excused by authority of OIC.
  - a. All participants will be encouraged to share their feelings; however, active participation is optional.
  - b. No one should be criticized during the debriefing for how they feel. Instead they should be allowed free expression of their feelings with acceptance, support and understanding from each other.
  - c. No written, taped, or other recordings will be maintained regarding the individual participation or topics of discussion.
  - d. Personnel shall not leave a debriefing once in progress, except for necessary personal needs.
  - e. Critical Incident debriefing is not a critique of Police Department operations at the incident. Performance issues, possible procedure violations, or policy statements shall not be discussed during the debriefing.
  - f. The debriefing process provides a format in which personnel discuss their feelings and reactions, thus reducing the stress which results from exposure to critical incidents.

K. Media Coverage

1. **No media coverage will be allowed.** Media shall be handled by the Public Information Officer guided by the OIC or designee.

L. Organizational Structure

When the Peer Support Team is activated, the incident will be evaluated for the amount of debriefing required. The specific debriefing services utilized will depend greatly on the nature of the incident.

1. PST member who fail to respond to an incident or who fail to respond to calls from the PST Coordinator three (3) or more times during a year, will be removed from the PST team.

#### M. Ethical Statement

Ethical standards for all peer support workers serving public safety personnel (client) are necessary to ensure high standards of professional conduct. Ethical behavior among the PST Members is expected at all times. The professional and personal behavior of each PST Member reflects on the Team as a whole and on the Teams work. Membership, therefore, bears with it the burden of the highest level of conduct both in and out of the workplace. Team members will be held accountable for their adherence to all PST guidelines as well as WPD policies and procedures.

#### N. PST professional guidelines

Each PST Members primary obligation is to respect the integrity and promote the welfare of the client, whether the client is assisted individually or in a group.

1. In a group setting, the PST member is responsible for taking reasonable precautions to protect individuals from physical and/or psychological trauma resulting from interaction within the group.
2. Each PST Member must avoid bringing personal issues into the peer support relationship, especially if the potential for harm is present. Through awareness of the negative impact of both racial and sexual stereotyping and discrimination, the PST Member guards the individual rights and personal dignity of the employee in the peer support relationship.
3. In a group session, the PST Member must inform participants of the rules of confidentiality regarding all group participants' disclosures.
4. When the employee's condition indicates that there is a clear an imminent danger to the employee or other, the PST member must take full reasonable personal action to inform the mental health professionals. In the absence of a mental health professional, a supervisor must be notified. The employee must be involved in the resumption of responsibility as quickly as possible.
5. Each PST member may consult with another PST member, Mental Health clinician supervising team, or EAP about an employee (client) to obtain supervision.
6. Dual relationships with clients that might impair the PST Members objectivity and professional judgement must be avoided. Clients should be referred to another PST member.
7. PST members will not have inappropriate physical or sexual relationships with clients. **Intimate relationships with clients are prohibited.**

PST Members are prohibited from interfering, or in any way becoming involved in an investigation of a PST member. **You cannot be part of the scene and part of the team.**

#### O. Team Administration

There may be instances when the PST Team member's job assignments prohibit them from responding to specific incidents or may limit their ability to respond at all during the duration of that assignment.



1. Instances of violation of PST guidelines may result in removal from the PST after review by the Coordinator, staff or EAP designee. The Chief of Police has final authority for removal.
2. Members of the PST will be evaluated annually by the Coordinator for continued suitability on the team. The final decision on retention or removal will rest with the Chief of Police or designee after consultation with the Coordinator.