



<b>Wintergreen Fire and Rescue Standard Administrative Policy</b>	
Subject:	Peer Support
Reference Number:	ADM 01-014
Effective Date:	5-Feb-22
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Signature of Approval	Curtis Sheets, Chief

**Purpose:**

The goal of the Peer Support program is to provide all Emergency Services personnel of Wintergreen, active or retired, and their families the opportunity to receive emotional and tangible support through times of personal or professional crisis and to help anticipate and address potential difficulties.

**Scope:**

This is a voluntary program offered to all Wintergreen Emergency Services personnel; active or retired, volunteers, dispatch, Law Enforcement and their families who express a need for assistance with professional or personal causes of stress.

**Mission:**

The mission of the Peer Support Team is to be a supportive means in which people can be heard in a safe, non-judgmental, and confidential environment. The Peer Support Team will also be a resource in referral to counseling through licensed professionals when appropriate. Peer Support Team Members may be utilized to support other departments or community members in situations of critical incidents (i.e. school shootings, disasters.)

This program is designed to:

1. Provide emotional support during and after times of crisis
2. Promote trust, allow appropriate anonymity, preserve confidentiality within guidelines
3. Check on the status of employees with long term illness, work-related illness, those who have suffered family tragedies, provide support where desired and warranted.

**Definitions:**

Peer Support Program Coordinator – shall be jointly designated by the Chief of Police and Chief of Fire & Rescue or their designee to coordinate the Peer Support Program. The Program Coordinator shall be responsible for administering the program to include assigning and supervising Peer Mentors in the performance of their duties associated with the program. The Program Coordinator shall be a qualified peer support mentor.

Peer Support Mentor – a colleague trained to provide both day-to-day emotional support for department personnel as well as participates with emotional support for responses to critical incidents. They are trained to recognize persons with personal conflict and refer cases that require professional intervention or are beyond their scope of training to a licensed mental health professional. These personnel are not counselors or therapists.

Monthly Peer Support Contact Summary – the summary of statistical data which is submitted by Peer Support Mentors to the Program Coordinator listing the amount of peer contacts made each month.

**Policy:**

1. Responsibilities
  - a. Peer Support Program Coordinator
    - i. General oversight of the program
    - ii. Ensures all personnel are aware of the program.
    - iii. Prepares and disseminates to all personnel a current referral list of Peer Support Mentors, with physical copies posted at each fire station, the police station and in dispatch.
    - iv. Develops resources to ensure the functionality of the program.
    - v. Identifies and coordinates training
    - vi. Maintains a monthly peer support contact summary, reporting statistical data regarding peer support contacts.
    - vii. Handles complaints regarding the program following departmental and WPOA policies and procedures.
    - viii. Completion of Peer Support course with at least five years of experience in emergency services
2. Peer Support Mentor
  - a. Advises peers seeking assistance that the Peer Support Mentor is not exempt from laws, or polices; but any exchange of information not in violation will be confidential.
  - b. Advises peers seeking assistance that any acts of self-injury or injury to others cannot go unreported.
  - c. Advises other parties seeking information about discussions shared between a peer and Peer Mentor is confidential.
  - d. Establishes contact and provides short term supportive assistance and or referral, for personnel involved in the Peer Support Program, within the scope of their ability, knowledge and training.
  - e. Makes additional referral for assistance when deemed appropriate
  - f. Responds to the scene of a critical incident if requested by the incident commander, Peer Support Coordinator or either the Police or Fire/Rescue Chief.
  - g. Maintains contact with the program coordinator regarding program activities and statistical data on program contacts for purposes of program evaluation, including submission of a peer support contact report which will detail the number of contacts made; identifying information will not be recorded
  - h. Shall abide by the program policies or be removed from program participation
  - i. Notify the Program Coordinator should a conflict arise
  - j. Notifies the Program Coordinator should the Peer Support Mentor voluntarily withdraw from participation.

### 3. Supervisors

- a. Keep apprised of personnel's wellbeing including the status of their mental wellness.
- b. If the supervisor, due to the signs being presented by an individual, feel the individual may be in mental health crisis which is causing adverse effects in judgment, decision making, focus, etc. and feel the individual creates a safety concern for themselves or others, that supervisor may remove the individual from actively responding to incidents or conducting any other type of department business.
  - i. If an individual is removed from duty for this reason, the supervisor must start the process of Peer Support if the individual is willing.
  - ii. In all cases they will ensure the individual is safe, provide a safe means of travel, and are in a state that they feel safe to leave the individual alone. All attempts must be made to have a family member or friend be with the individual.
  - iii. In the event of staffing changes, the Administrative Captain shall be notified.

### 4. Peer Support Mentor Selection Process

- a. Personnel interested in becoming a Peer Support Mentor must submit their request to the Peer Support Program Coordinator in writing.
- b. Selection Criteria
  - i. Must agree to maintain confidentiality within the guidelines of this general order. Shall sign a confidentiality agreement form.
  - ii. Must be empathetic and possess interpersonal communication skills.
  - iii. Must be motivated and willing to devote time to provide support at varying days and hours, to include some off-duty time, and may include use of personal communication devices and systems.
    1. In the event that a Peer Support Mentor contributes to the program while off-duty, the Peer Support Mentor shall be compensated fairly for their time.
  - iv. Must have Peer Support Mentor Training, and be willing to obtain continuing education as needed
    1. Training will be an approved Peer Support course of at least 16 hours, example- Virginia First Responder Support Services course. Non VFRSS course acceptance will be at the discretion of the Program Coordinator.
  - v. Personnel who may be involved in overseeing disciplinary actions shall avoid any conflict of interest by placing themselves in both the peer support role and an investigative role.

### 5. Referrals

- a. Peer Support Program
  - i. Supervisory staff have the responsibility to recommend a peer support session when appropriate. It should be understood that it is voluntary and an employee cannot be required to participate. The referral shall not, however, be used as a means of discipline.

- ii. An individual may personally contact any Peer Support Mentor or the Peer Support Program Coordinator for referral to either professional counseling or a Peer Support Mentor.
  - iii. Any individual aware of another individual who may need assistance can initiate a referral by contacting any Peer Support Mentor or the Program Coordinator. The referred individual will be contacted to assess their receptiveness to Peer Support intervention.
- b. A family member or associate of the individual may make a referral, in which case, also, the individual's participation is voluntary.

#### Peer Support Team Members

Tyler Savage	Wintergreen Fire-Rescue	540-414-1740	tsavage@wtgfireresq.org
Jeremy Wampler	Wintergreen Fire-Rescue	540-457-9110	jwampler@wtgfireresq.org
Steve Southworth	Wintergreen Police	434-325-8522	ssouthworth@wintergreenpolice.org
Tim Smith	Wintergreen Police	540-236-8942	tsmith@wintergreenpolice.org
Regina McHaffa	Wintergreen Fire-Rescue	540-570-1895	rmchaffa@wtgfireresq.org
MJ Fick	Wintergreen Fire-Rescue	540-642-6089	mfick@wtgfireresq.org
Renee Everhart	Wintergreen Fire-Rescue	434-610-0866	sr.everhart@yahoo.com

- c. Peer Support Mentor Sharing
- i. It is recognized and supported that personnel may want to reach out to Peer Support Mentors from outside of the agency or area.
  - ii. On the Peer Support Mentor list, there will be contact information for Program Managers/Mentors from the region.
  - iii. Likewise, Wintergreen Peer Support Mentor information will be made available to agencies in the region.
- d. Professional Counseling
- i. Under certain circumstances the Peer Support Mentor may refer the individual to professional counseling or a member of clergy, or both.
  - ii. In the event the employee elects to seek professional counseling, the employee will be provided those services available through the Employee Assistance Program or connected with a local network of resources.
    1. When referring to EAP counseling and under the circumstances that the primary concern is regarding Occupational Related Stress, the employee will be encouraged to identify the need for a counselor familiar with public safety personnel and/or Trauma Informed Care.
    2. If the employee does not wish to utilize services through EAP, they may obtain a list of services offered locally from the Program Coordinator.

- e. If the referral to a member of Clergy is preferred, a list of services may be obtained through the Program Coordinator.

## 6. Confidentiality

- a. Communication between a peer and Peer Support Mentor within the program shall remain confidential at all times.
- b. No records identifying individuals who utilize the program will be maintained.
- c. Peer Support Mentors shall not discuss information obtained while acting in the peer support capacity with anyone except:
  - i. The mental health professional the peer is referred to if permission is obtained from the peer to share information.
  - ii. When seeking guidance from a mental health professional or Program Coordinator however no information shall be used to identify the peer when seeking guidance.
- d. Communication between a peer and Peer Support Mentor within the program that does **NOT** fall within the confidentiality guidelines are:
  - i. Peer is a danger to self or others
    - 1. If the peer is an immediate threat to themselves or others do not leave them alone and contact law enforcement to assist with getting the peer to safety and help.
  - ii. Suspected child abuse or factual information supporting elderly abuse.
    - 1. As a representative of emergency services, the Peer Support Mentor has an obligation to report any child abuse or elderly abuse to the Department of Social Services.
  - iii. Domestic violence
    - 1. If there is factual information to think the peer is involved in a domestic violence situation, the Peer Support Mentor shall make notification to the law enforcement agency that has jurisdiction where the suspected violence has taken place.
    - 2. The Peer Support Mentor will make the peer aware that this type of information cannot be held in confidence and the appropriate authorities will be notified.
  - iv. Information required by law or policy to be divulged - such as drug/alcohol abuse
    - 1. Examples– the peer admits to drinking before reporting for their work shift or they admit to using illegal narcotics on their days off, even if at the time of conversation both the peer and Peer Support Mentor are not on duty. This violates Wintergreen policy and must be reported.
  - v. Peer has given consent to divulge

## 7. Training

Peer Support Mentors shall have received the requisite training prior to their appointment to the Peer Support Team.

- a. Training Topics
  - i. How the program works

- ii. Signs and symptoms of stress and other diagnoses
  - iii. Active listening strategies and non-verbal communications skills
  - iv. How stress affects the body, mind, home life, & job performance
  - v. Actions to take if co-worker is showing signs of stress
  - vi. As feasible, training for family of personnel will be offered.
8. Other Services
- a. There are many other services available such as CISM, scene/station debriefings, and After-Action Reviews. While it is recognized that these programs offer value, they are not to be considered the same as Peer Support nor used in place of Peer Support.