

Peer Support Training Information



Virginia First Responder Support Services Peer Support Training Information

Background

First responders face a variety of growing stressors including both personal and professional issues. This chronic acute stress is not new to any first responder department, but recently more departments are beginning to acknowledge that they need to do more for their staff's mental wellness needs. While utilizing community mental health service providers in crisis is beneficial, many departments are beginning to focus on the benefits of increased proactive mental health training. This training allows first responders to learn, build relationships, and help one another before a crisis hits. Our educational opportunities and peer support training focus on increasing awareness and knowledge of what action steps you can take as a department and as a peer to help your fellow first responders, their families, and your retirees.

Program Description

Our peer support training is a two-day training for approximately eight hours each day. Our training is heavily discussion based which means that classes with fewer in attendance may not last the full eight hours each day. Training focuses on an overview of symptoms of stress, PTSD, depression, anxiety, and substance abuse, and an introduction to and development of active listening strategies, non-verbal communication skills, and crisis intervention strategies. Attendees will learn how to build rapport with fellow first responders on and off the job and how to identify local mental health resources. Finally, registrants will learn how to conceptualize, build, and maintain their department's own peer support program or how to function as an individual peer support mentor.

Once the training is complete attendees will be offered the opportunity to join the VFRSS state-wide peer support team. After the training, our Executive Director and Clinical Director remain available to assist with department specific questions regarding developing and maintaining a peer support team.

VFRSS is constantly learning, reading, and researching the most up-to-date and effective teaching methods and treatment methods for first responders. Due to this ever-changing knowledge base this training is constantly evolving to better support all first responders and to provide the most evidence-based training approach possible.

Eligibility for Attendance

All law enforcement, fire, dispatch, and emergency medical service workers are eligible to attend our peer support trainings. We encourage participation from all positions and ranks within departments to attend our trainings. Individuals with no experience with mental health or peer support are encouraged to attend, as are others who may have a lot of experience. Mental health service providers are welcome to attend the peer support training on a case-by-case basis and will first be vetted by our Clinical Director.

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Hosting a Training

Any police department, fire department, emergency communication center, emergency medical service, or volunteer agency can host a peer support training program. Our program is designed to be taught to all first responders so we can all learn to be of support to one another. We have great flexibility in the dates we are available to train to accommodate shift schedules and weekends.

Our class is heavily discussion based and as such we need to cap our classes at 30 people. We offer 5 FREE spots to the hosting department as a thank you for taking the mental health needs of your department into consideration and taking the action step to improve the education in your department. For each additional spot, the cost is \$150 per person.

We offer three types of trainings; closed, open, and service specific. For our closed trainings only members of the hosting department are allowed to attend. Open trainings are made available to all other first responders in the area, which is a great opportunity for locations surrounding the hosting department to attend. Finally, service specific trainings are open to other first responders in the same service as the hosting department. For example, if a police department is hosting a training only other law enforcement professionals would be able to attend.

For closed trainings we ask that a representative from that department oversee the recruiting and registration process. For open and service specific trainings a VFRSS representative will assist in posting the training online and will solicit additional registrants.

For additional questions please call us at (540)755-0208 or email VFRSSDirector@gmail.com