

BERKELEY POLICE DEPARTMENT

DATE ISSUED: January 19, 1996

GENERAL ORDER P-50

SUBJECT: POST-TRAUMA RESPONSE AND DEBRIEFING

PURPOSE

To establish guidelines for post-trauma debriefing and peer support for employees experiencing a traumatic incident.

POLICY

It shall be the policy of the Berkeley Police Department to place highest priority on the general well-being of department employees affected by traumatic incidents.

DEFINITIONS

Traumatic Incident: Any situation that one may find emotionally overwhelming and that attacks one's ability to cope with the situation. These incidents may include, but are not limited to, an officer- involved shooting, death or serious injury of an employee, traumatic death or injury to a child, or a major disaster.

Post-Trauma Stress: A normal human response to abnormal events such as disasters, plane crashes, etc. When not treated, this condition may attack one's ability to cope with the situation or future events. Symptoms may include physical reactions such as restlessness, headaches, tremors, nausea, insomnia, digestive and sexual problems. It may also include psychological reactions such as becoming insulated from the external world, memory impairment and/or trouble concentrating, moodiness and general feelings of anxiety.

On-Scene Support: On duty personnel trained in Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) shall provide on-scene support as soon as it is feasible.

Defusing: As used in this order, defusing is when a peer or supervisor takes an involved employee aside soon after a traumatic event. The peer explains to the employee Departmental procedures for handling the type of event involved, and determines the need for further defusing . In addition, the peer explains the possible reactions a person who has been through this type of event may experience. The peer is to avoid any discussion about the facts of the case and is not to be involved in any way with the investigation. The peer defuser will provide updated phone and related information regarding the City's employee assistance programs. Defusing takes place soon after an incident and is not intended to act as a debriefing. A list of trained defusers will be maintained by the Captain of the Administrative Division.

Debriefing: As used in this order, a confidential meeting with the involved employees, a therapist (CISM - trained) from Berkeley Mental Health, and a trained CISM peer debriefer. Meetings will be held within 24 to 72 hours after the event, and after all other investigative procedures have been completed (usually a few days after an incident). The debriefing is confidential. All personnel attending will be acting under the health

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care professionals code of ethics (umbrella of confidentiality).

Debriefings will be conducted by the peer employee, assisted by a Berkeley Mental Health (CISM-trained) employee and will include discussions of feelings and reactions of each involved member. The debriefing session will not be a re-examination of the facts.

Peer Debriefers: As used in this order, an employee of the Berkeley Police Department, or a Emergency Medical Service (EMS) employee, who has undergone training to assist a licensed Mental Health Professional in the debriefing process. A list of trained peer debriefers will be maintained by the Captain of the Administrative Division.

PROCEDURE

- A. To reduce the likelihood of post-trauma stress reaction, the following procedures shall be followed after a Berkeley Police Department employee is exposed to a traumatic incident:
1. A debriefing can be requested by involved officers, dispatchers, or other personnel aware of the incident.
 2. The selection of a defuser/debriefer shall be made with the assistance of the administrative Division Captain
 - a. A list will be kept by the Administrative Division Captain of qualified peer support personnel.
 - b. Employees may talk to a peer support member or a psychologist without notifying the Department.
 3. If the affected employee has caused injury or death to another (i.e., vehicle accident, shooting, etc.), the peer support member shall not discuss the facts of the incident with the employee until after the Department and Internal Affairs Investigators have completed their interviews. This includes all outside agency interviews, if conducted (i.e., District Attorney, FBI, etc.).
 4. Attendance at the debriefing shall be mandatory for all involved employees; however, participation in the discussion is not required.
 5. A debriefing shall be scheduled if requested by the involved employees, or at the direction of the Administrative Division Captain. If possible, the debriefing shall be within 72 hours.
- B. The employee providing defusing/debriefing shall provide emotional support by:

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1. Defusing any shock reaction or excessive anxiety the employee may be experiencing.
 2. Providing information regarding possible reactions the employee or his/her family may experience.
 3. Suggesting resources and referrals the employee or family members may require.
 4. Advising the employee of Departmental practices and policies and making the employee aware of what to expect as a result of the incident.
- C. The affected employee's supervisor shall ensure that he/she gets home safely.
- D. If an employee's actions cause death or a life threatening injury to someone (shooting or vehicle accident, etc.), the Commanding Officer, in addition to the other appropriate provisions of this order, may schedule a mandatory appointment with a licensed mental health professional. The mandated visit shall be educational and informative in nature and arranged through the Administrative Division Captain.
1. The visit with the psychologist is to provide the employee the opportunity to discuss the incident in a completely confidential environment. Any subsequent counseling is completely voluntary.
 2. The psychologist shall:
 - a. Provide helpful information to the employee regarding possible psychological reactions to the incident.
 - b. Advise the employee of stress management techniques to make the return to the Work environment smoother and easier.
 - c. Not furnish information about the visit unless he/she determines the employee is experiencing complications which may result in danger to the employee or others.
- In such a case, the psychologist shall notify the Captain of the Administrative Division.
- E. If an employee's actions cause death or a life threatening injury to someone (shooting or vehicle accident, etc.) the Commanding Officer, in addition to the other appropriate provisions of this order, may:
1. Grant paid administrative leave to the employee for a period of time as determined by the Chief of Police, if the employee is scheduled to work immediately following the incident.

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- F. If an employee's actions cause death or serious injury to someone (shooting or vehicle accident etc.), the Commanding officer, in addition to other appropriate provisions of this order, may:
1. Direct the employee to contact his/her Commanding officer to discuss a temporary reassignment.
 - a. A temporary reassignment will insure a lapse of time before exposure to the possibility of similar additional traumatic incidents.