

Crisis Support Solutions, LLC

Be Capable



Top FAQs Leaders Often Ask:

Learning more about Peer Support and Crisis Response

Thank you for downloading Top FAQs Leaders Often Ask. This guide is designed to address preliminary questions leaders often ask when considering a peer support program and crisis response team.

We recognize that there are various programs that leaders are asked to consider and fund. We also recognize leaders having the difficult task of separating *need to have* from *nice to have*. With this guide, our goal is to introduce peer support and crisis response as a cost-saving, support-providing and morale-improving *need-to-have* program for your organization.

Although we have seen program benefits first-hand, we recognize that there are often barriers to building such a program, such as:

- Lack of funding
- Lack of management support
- Misinformation or misunderstanding of program purpose
- Concerns about liability and potential lawsuits

This guide will address the following questions most leaders ask:

1. What is a peer support program?
2. What is the difference between peer support and crisis response?
3. How much is this going to cost?
4. What is the liability associated with a program like this?
5. What are the benefits associated with a program like this?
6. If I approve, what comes next?

(1) What is a peer support program?

Peer Support Programs (PSPs) are catching fire all over the country. These programs are widely accepted in emergency response services (like fire, rescue, paramedics and police).

Peer Support is an informal process of one person providing help and support to another colleague in need. Those that serve in a PSP are known as “Peers”. Although PSPs are volunteer programs, becoming a Peer is a discerning process. The process by which one becomes a Peer - and the guidelines for the program as a whole – is typically outlined in policy.

There is often an application and vetting process for becoming a Peer. Once accepted into the program, Peers then attend basic training and orientation. Because support and stabilization are “soft” skills, programs commonly encourage and fund annual in-service education and Peer development opportunities.

As mentioned above, PSPs operate with a written policy and follow strict standards of practice (or protocols). Peers are NOT mental health counselors or clinicians. In fact, PSPs do not *compete* with other helping entities, like Employee Assistance Programs (EAP); instead, they *complement*.

Peers are trained to listen, assess and address immediate concerns. Because Peers are colleagues, building relationships and establishing themselves as empathetic and trustworthy, Peers are able to carefully and credibly refer those in need for additional assistance.

Utilizing Peers in a highly stressful work environment is most effective in terms of prevention. Through training, Peers learn to read the “signs”, notice subtle (or not so subtle) changes in behaviors and recognize life-changes that create distress. Because it’s not enough just to recognize signs and symptoms, Peers are also trained compassionately to move toward those experiencing distress. In many cases, Peers are able to identify and diffuse concerns before it reaches crisis levels.

A Peer once told me a story of the positive impact he made on another. A colleague knocked on his door one afternoon and handed him a bullet. The man said, “I want you to have this.” As the Peer stood there surprised, the man continued, “This was the bullet that I was going to put in my gun a few years back. You never knew that. I was actually sitting there thinking of going home and taking my own life when you stopped by and asked how I was doing. I tried to fake it and told you that I was fine. But you didn’t buy it and invited me for coffee. We talked. I don’t

remember what all you said, but I did remember how much you cared.” The man confessed that he would have committed suicide that night, except for the fact that someone in his department noticed him and cared enough about him to offer him a cup of coffee and a listening ear.

That’s the power of peer support! Peers are uniquely positioned to notice and engage those who are hurting and in need of care. An organized and engaged PSP communicates that you are interested in helping your people hurt less and feel better – and a better feeling workforce is a more productive workforce.

(2) What is the difference between peer support and crisis response?

Crisis response teams (sometimes called CISM or CIRT) are gaining popularity as the primary method for providing “emotional first aid” for survivors following a critical incident. A critical incident is an event that is powerful and unexpected. Because the event is personal to those involved, this creates an overwhelming state of distress known as “crisis”. This state of crisis will naturally - and negatively - impact how one thinks, feels and behaves. It is this crisis state that requires immediate intervention and stabilization.

Depending on the size and scope of the tragedy, the critical incident could create a crisis for a select few or an entire community. As soon as the scene is safe, a group of trained Peers, Chaplains and Mental Health Professionals – often known as a Crisis Response Team – strategically engage with those in crisis. Building on the basic training received, these volunteers attend additional crisis intervention training. This training teaches team members to work effectively with individuals, small and large groups in crisis.

Based on strict protocols, the response is strategically organized and tactically executed. Crisis Support Solutions protocols have been field-tested and operational in various organizations for over a decade. All intervention methods are designed to stabilize and secure those in crisis. By listening and assessing, team members quickly triage and address immediate needs to reduce suffering. Crisis intervention protocol also dictates appropriate referral for anyone needing professional care.

Crisis Support Teams provide much needed stabilization and direction to a destabilized and chaotic climate. Because it is leadership that funds and approves the Crisis Team to intervene, managers are regarded as investing and promoting health and healing for their personnel. This positive regard for leadership by personnel is pervasive. Even those not directly involved in the incident speak well of leadership response, believing that they (and their families) will also be cared for if/when in crisis. This level of caring and commitment is reciprocal – investing in people equates to people investing in your organization.

Having said that, you might be in an environment that critical incidents are few and far between (and for that, we are grateful). Even though a tragedy is a matter of “if” not “when”, one could argue there is just not enough to justify the cost and personnel to form and sustain a team. For situations such as these, we recommend organizing a crisis community collaborative. By collaborating and joining resources, the community builds a network of crisis response team members from emergency services and other helping professions that share the responsibility and the cost.

(3) How much is this going to cost?

Although employees volunteering their time provide peer and crisis support services, there is still a cost associated with building and maintaining such a program.

For those starting a program, or interested in having a certified program, we recommend investing in Crisis Support Solutions seven-step process. These steps include:

1. Policy development and implementation
2. Designing operational protocols
3. Creating recruiting and vetting standards along with application and interview process
4. Completing basic training
5. Attending orientation and ongoing supervision
6. Gathering statistics and report outcomes
7. Continuing development

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These seven steps ensure a sustainable and effective program. Many programs employ (or designate) a “Coordinator” to manage and maintain these seven steps.

For those with more money than time, consider hiring Crisis Support Solutions to build and certify your program by providing consultation and training to your Coordinator and selected team. For those with more time than money, we have created an online do-it-yourself (DIY) kit complete with templates and detailed instructions for building a certified program.

For those needing this program but struggling to fund it, consider grants. We recommend researching grants for implementing peers support, providing crisis intervention, suicide prevention, emotional first aid, train-trainer and so on. Applying for a grant may be the perfect way to secure funding – and since most grants require statistics, step six is already engineered to gather and report data (while maintaining confidentiality) to funders and backers seeking results.

Finally, consider sharing the cost - and the benefits - by initiating a crisis community collaborative. Each entity will benefit from having their own peer support component, while networking with those in the fields of emergency services, mental health, medical, education, clergy, etc. to create a community response to crisis.

These seven steps can be funded in phases. For the final step, continuing development, we have built an exclusive “membership site” to access new training sessions, webinars, coaching calls, mini-refresh courses and articles that we update monthly. This site, and these steps, ensures knowledge and skills stay current as team members feel capable.

(4) What is the liability associated with a program like this?

Liability is a key concern when starting a peer and crisis support program. Managers and attorneys alike often worry about confidentiality and/or a Peer’s lack of expertise in handling perceived “life-and-death” situations. As a result, there is concern for negative attention, scrutiny or even potential lawsuits.

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Liability is defined as the state of being responsible for something or someone. Leaders recognize that all programs carry some risk. The key is to manage those risks while incurring a benefit. Mitigating liability, and potential risk, is a beginning, middle and end undertaking.

Mitigating liability begins with understanding the mission and purpose of your program. Along with creating mission and purpose statements, it is also imperative to create and promote core values, such as, trustworthiness, compassion, kindness, integrity, etc. The type of values that your program promotes is the type of volunteers your program will attract.

Mitigating liability not only involves policy and protocols (steps one and two), but quality volunteers to adhere to such standards. This is why step three – creating a recruiting and vetting process - is so important. Peer and crisis team members must uphold strictest confidence, while acting in the best interest of those they serve according to the level of their training (step four).

Operational policy should be presented to all team members during the orientation process (step five). Protocols must be practiced during basic training and continued development. It is encouraged for team members to sign statements of confidentiality, core values and understanding of peer responsibilities.

Confidentiality is often a concern since most states do not yet recognize communications among “Peers” as privileged. Although there are a few states that have passed laws protecting communications within peer support programs, the practice of confidentiality is traditionally policy-based. Regardless of state laws, it is imperative for peers to work within their limits and under structured “supervision”. Step five of the seven-step process includes access to and supervision with trained mental health professionals.

Because no Peer or peer program is perfect, violations can occur. When violations in confidentiality, conflicts of interest, role confusion, etc. occur, we encourage you to return to your policy. Your program’s policy should include guidance on consequences, discipline and possible termination. However, by investing in continued development (step seven) and providing an outlet for clinical supervision, the Peer can safely and effectively practice within his/her role and responsibility.

(5) What are the benefits of having a program like this?

Those that have a peer support program and crisis response team can attest that benefits outweigh potential risks. There are many benefits, but consider these two:

- Cost savings.

Although you may not be able to put a price on a human life, managers do know the costs associated with employee time, training, productivity, etc. Managers also know that people are less effective when they are experiencing distress. Even though peer support and crisis response requires funding, it is minor in comparison to the costs associated with loss of time, diminished productivity and possibility of hiring and training new staff, etc.

- Create culture of care.

In his book, Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don't, Simon Sinek writes, “Returning from work feeling inspired, safe, fulfilled and grateful is a natural human right to which we are all entitled and not a modern luxury that only a few lucky ones are able to find.”

Imagine an environment where employees feel safe to be vulnerable and admit when struggling. Imagine an organization committed to caring for employees and – not just talking about concepts of wellness – but inspiring it. Now imagine employees working in an organization that demonstrate this care as their *culture*.

Sinek goes on to write, “Customer will never love your company until the employees love it first.” Leaders are well aware when there is a morale problem in their organization. Morale drops when employees don't feel heard, validated, understood, cared about and more. Peers are trained to be a compassionate presence – to listen, validate, offer options, support and more. With each Peer contact, the message that management is interested and investing is shared across the organization.

Crisis Support Solutions believes in the “power of the Peer”. For more, please read our post: [Creating Culture in a Peer Support Program](#).

(6) If I approve, what comes next?

As previously mentioned, Crisis Support Solutions has created a step-by-step process for building and maintaining a peer support program and crisis response team. For a custom cost quote, email dorie@crisissupportsolutions.com.

Dorie has designed, coordinated and trained peer and crisis support programs at the federal law enforcement level for over a decade. As CEO of CSS, Dorie will assess your program and generate a *solutions-based* report. This report will include current strengths and a proposed path for program certification. For budgeting and scheduling purposes, the quote will include costs and a timeline to meet immediate needs, along with long-term funding requisite for growing your program.

For more on these seven steps, [email Dorie](#) to receive her eBook: Building and Maintaining an Exceptional Peer Support Program

About the Author & CEO

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Dorie is the CEO, partner and co-founder of Crisis Support Solutions, LLC. Dorie is committed to the [Crisis Support Solutions](#) (CSS) mission to help people help each other. Dorie and CSS believe that the only way to survive a difficult time is alongside the compassionate presence of a trusted soul. With training, connecting and coaching the core of CSS work, Dorie develops content and curriculum for in-class training or online support via webinars, coaching calls, refresh courses, quick guides and more.

Before going full time with CSS, Dorie worked for the past twelve (12) years as a Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Specialist and Peer Support Program Coordinator at the [Federal Law Enforcement Training Center](#) (FLETC) with the US Department of Homeland Security at Glynco, GA. As Peer Support Program Coordinator, Dorie spent countless hours updating policy, drafting procedures, garnering support from leadership, connecting with counterparts in other agencies, exchanging ideas, learning from missteps, training team members and all for one single purpose: so that volunteers could be proud members of a Peer program that reflected the value and worth of their service and the people they served.

From this background, Dorie has designed several Coordinator courses (to include "Seven Steps to Start Up" - a coordinators guide to develop and/or enhance a peer support program in their agency). CSS recognizes that coordinators and champions alike need information, organization, understanding and encouragement in order to strengthen the most capable and cost effective support resource in any organization: Peers.

Dorie has been in the helping business her entire career. Whether as a legal advocate in a battered women's shelter, a treatment planner at a drug and alcohol rehab center or a chaplain at a hospital, Dorie has been present with people in crisis and recognizes the great responsibility that comes with caring for those in need. No longer providing direct client services, Dorie is now committed to helping people help each other as leader of the CSS team. Dorie's vision is to be a "force multiplier" - sharing information, education, networking opportunities and daily encouragement to those on the "front lines", providing direct support.

About Us

We are Crisis Support Solutions
and our mission is to
help people help each other.

*Our goal is to empower “helpers” to be credible, courageous
and caring supporters because we believe that the only way to survive
(and thrive) is along side the compassionate presence of a trusted soul.*

We do this in three main ways:

1. By providing you exceptional education and skill-based training.
2. By providing you a secure space to connect and encourage one another.
3. By providing leadership and direction in this ever-growing field, introducing concepts and conversations that challenge the status quo and shift current paradigms.

For complete listing of products and services designed to help you
- and your organization -
be more capable in crisis

email info@crisissupportsolutions.com



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