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. Leaders have the difficult task of separating *need to have* from *nice to have.*

Our goal is to provide answers to questions leaders in your organization may ask.

Although we will outline the benefits to programs such as these, we recognize there are also barriers to building such a program, such as:

- Concerns of liability and risk
- Lack of funding
- Lack of management support
- Misinformation or misunderstanding of program purpose

Building buy in means getting to "yes" - and getting to "yes" means answering questions and addressing concerns that remove barriers, reduce risk and reinforce benefits.

1. What is peer support?

Peer Support is an informal process of one person providing help and support to another colleague in need. Those that serve in a peer support program (PSPs) 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 – should be 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.

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.

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.

For more, read our blog: *Does Peer Support Really Work?*
Also, visit our start a support program page.

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

Crisis response teams (sometimes called CISM or CRT) 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 response protocol also dictates appropriate referral for anyone needing professional care.

Crisis 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.

For more, visit our [crisis support](#) page.

3. What is the difference between Peer Support and Employee Assistance Program (EAP)?

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

Because peers are already "on the job", they're usually the first to identify distress and provide immediate care. Because rapport is already established, colleagues tend to trust and accept peer support more than "outside" help. As such, peers are often able to credibly refer and enhance participation with next level support.

4. 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.

Because, this is primarily a volunteer-based response, the main cost of this program (at least initially) will be basic training for support team members. Basic training cost can run between $130 and $300 per person / per day.

Be sure to get the most *bang for your buck* - don't *buy* more than you need. **Only purchase training that your team needs to satisfy program goals.** The type of skills your team will need will determine the number of training days. Consider these examples for a "formula":

Skills needed	Course title	# of training days	Estimated # of students	Estimated course cost
Basic skills for helping individuals dealing with a difficulty	Support Strategies for Individuals	2 days @ $290.00	22 students X $290.00	$6380.00 (excluding instructor travel)
Stabilizing skills for helping groups in crisis	Stabilizing Support for Groups in Crisis	2 days @ $290.00	16 students X $290.00	$4640.00 (excluding instructor travel)

Also, consider overtime and/or "comp time" for calls after regular work hours. Some team members may consider "after-hours" support as voluntary and decline compensation; while other organizations may need to consult with employees' union or counsel regarding compensation (since this program will be sanctioned by the organization).

It's vital to address these concerns **prior** to the installation of the program. Conflict arises when expectations are not known or not met. If you think these issues are relevant in your agency / organization, prepare to discuss them with stakeholders.

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

Speaking of costs, this program is cost-saving because it is personnel affirming.

Peers provide confidential space for employees to vent freely without worry of judgment, ridicule or retaliation. Peers can then validate concerns, reframe distortions, explore options, encourage decision-making and more.

After venting, employees usually feel <u>catharsis</u>. After discussing options, employees usually feel <u>clarity</u>. After making a decision, employees usually feel <u>energized</u>. These outcomes leave people **feeling better**. And that's the goal of peer support: *help hurting people hurt less and feel better*.

But, don't take our word for it…

In 2014, Harvard Business Review (HBR) published an [article] stating: "Employees who felt they worked in a loving, caring culture reported higher levels of satisfaction and teamwork [and] showed up to work more often…People who worked in a culture where they felt free to express affection, tenderness, caring, and compassion for one another were more satisfied with their jobs, committed to the organization, and accountable for their performance."

The American Psychological Association (APA) released a [study] in 2012 stating: "Employees who feel valued are more likely to report *better* physical and mental health, as well as higher levels of engagement, satisfaction and motivation, compared to those who do not feel valued by their employers."

In an interview with [Annuals Review], Professor of Business Administration and Psychology, [Dr. Jane Dutton], discovered compassion at work lowers rates of absenteeism and turnover, decreases healthcare costs and increases levels of engagement.

Dr. Dutton also found that compassion did not just have a positive result to the one giving and receiving it, but to the organization as a whole. Knowing compassion was the culture, employees felt pride in their organization, which was shown to reduce negative behaviors (like retaliation, litigation, etc.).

In short, demonstrations of compassion result in the following:

- Increase in gratitude
- Increase in work satisfaction

- Increase in pride in the agency / organization
- Increase in engagement / cooperation with others
- Increase in thriving - both on and off the job
- Decreasing retaliation
- Decreasing absenteeism
- Decreasing litigation
- Decreasing healthcare costs

For more, read these blogs: How Caring Benefits the Bottomline, The Cost of Not Caring and Cost / Benefit Analysis: The Case for Supporting Peer Support.

6. 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.

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 involves a strict recruiting and vetting process. Team members must uphold strictest confidence, while acting in the best interest of those they serve according to the level of their training.

Policy and protocols must be explained to all team members during new member orientation. We also encourage 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". It is imperative that peers have access to (and supervision with) mental health professionals - often known as a "clinical consultant".

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 and providing an outlet for clinical supervision, the peer can safely and effectively practice within his/her role and responsibility.

If you want a high-value, low-risk program, then policy is mandatory (for all the reasons mentioned above). For more, read our blog: The Importance of Policy (and why I wouldn't run a program without one).

Need help drafting policy and designing protocols? We've developed an online **Coordinator Course** that covers everything from *building buy-in* to drafting policy to collecting stats, reporting outcomes and more.

Email info@crisissupportsolutions.com for information on this online course.

7. Why select CSS to deliver peer training?

The CSS difference: after years of research and field-work, we've developed an exclusive 6-part protocol© as a guide for helping <u>anyone</u>, at <u>any</u> time dealing with <u>any</u> difficulty. This protocol is the foundation of all our trainings, but we don't stop there.

Because we want to be good stewards of time and money, we want to be intentional with our training - delivering knowledge and skills that will result in team capability. For this, we ask you to complete a "needs assessment" so we can analyze and present customized options for your team. CSS wants to work with you to deliver training that fits your schedule without breaking your budget.

Depending on the size of your organization and potential rate for growth, CSS also offers a train-trainer option as a cost-saving, long-term training solution.

CSS has taught peer teams across the country for federal, state and local agencies and organizations. CSS is honored to have trained dedicated peer teams within the U.S. Secret Service, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration, Environmental Protection Agency, North Carolina State Police, Georgia Sheriff's Association Chaplain's Division, Border Patrol, APG Fire and Emergency Services and many more.

Our instructors and training programs are consistently rated "outstanding". Here are a few recent student comments (unedited):

- *"Information, reflection, energy level of presenters was the best teaching approach that I have seen. If they could teach more courses or subjects it would be beneficial. Great course!"*

- *"The knowledge, training and experience of the instructors were on point and helpful - regardless of your background as a peer."*

- *"The labs gave great opportunity to begin the process of becoming comfortable with others' discomfort"*

- *"It was helpful personally and professionally. I believe that I can apply the training in my own life."*

References available upon request.

8. Next Steps?

We'd like to send you a FREE **"Step-by-Step Guide to a Sustainable Support Program"** with a bonus pocket card.

Email info@crisissupportsolutions.com to request this FREE guide today!

Interested in our **Coordinator Course**? Learn to draft policy, design protocols, develop orientation, collect stats, report outcomes and more in this online training course.

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