



IAFF Local 302 Allentown Firefighters

Peer Support Team

Peer support policy

IAFF Local 302 is committed to providing peer support and referral services to Local 302 members who are experiencing occupational stress and trauma or dealing with a personal life stressor or crisis.

Currently, our Crisis Management Team supports Local 302 Members in the following ways:

- **CONFIDENTIAL** Peer support
- Staff Clinician Services
- Immediate response to the Death of a Firefighter

Our peer support policy statement

IAFF Local 302 recognizes that Firefighters may face emotional and psychological trauma due to their exposure to critical incidents and daily life stressors. Trained peers who are occupationally aware and may have similar lived experiences can listen, offer nonprofessional peer support and refer members for professional assistance and counselling. We commit to ensuring that **CONFIDENTIAL** peer support services exist for members of Local 302 and to provide training for peer support providers so they can effectively assist others, while protecting their own mental health and wellness.

Definition of peer support

A supportive relationship between people who have a lived experience in common in relation to either their own job stressor, mental health challenge, illness or that of a loved one.

Peer support is a form of employee assistance that links members who are experiencing personal or professional problems that may adversely affect their well-being with peers who are trained to provide compassionate support and resource or referral assistance. Peer supporters are not medical or behavioral professionals, and are not expected to diagnose mental health injuries or recommend specific treatments. Peer support includes critical incident stress management (CISM) but is not limited to this.

After a critical incident or during a life crisis, a peer supporter may listen to another firefighter's expression of feelings. The peer supporter can be an empathetic, active listener and provide information on available resources to assist the worker. This may involve

Supporting Mental Health in firefighters referring a member to the Local 302 Assistance Program, drug or counselling programs, or other counselling services. Peer supporters may reach out to members who they believe may need support. Alternately, peer supporters may respond when a member expresses a need or when a concerned family member contacts them regarding a spouse, partner, or parent. **Peer support must promote trust, allow for anonymity, and preserve confidentiality — unless the member appears to be at imminent risk for self-harm or presents a risk of harm to others.**

Ideally, peer support will be delivered one-on-one and in-person — at the workplace, a member's home, or an agreed-upon location — but support may also be offered or received electronically or over the phone.

Committing resources

IAFF Local 302 will ensure there is a lead peer support individual to coordinate the program and recruit volunteer peers. The lead person, or peer support coordinator, will have strong interpersonal skills, be accessible, and be a good communicator. The peer support coordinator will also ensure volunteers are supported to avoid burnout. Peer supporters will be offered specialized ongoing training in assisting others dealing with adverse psychological reactions to critical incidents or other stressful life events.

Local 302 will also ensure there is management commitment to the program and allow it to operate autonomously. It will also ensure there is funding for training and adequate resources to implement and maintain the program. All new peer supporters will receive training when they join the program, so they understand how to best support peers. After initial certification and appointment to the Crisis Management Team peer supporters will attend a quarterly group training session to practice skills, discuss issues, and cover new techniques and writings

Awareness

Every IAFF Local 302 member will receive a copy of this policy. It will also be posted at each Fire Station, Fire Administration office, and the Training Academy.

Annual review

IAFF Local 302 will review the peer support program annually. The membership will be involved in all aspects of the program and we will seek feedback from said members on the value and effectiveness of peer support. The Fire Administration and all members will receive a copy of the peer support policy.

Date created: _____ Annual review date: _____