

Training

Establishing requirements for trainings, continuing education, and recertification for peer support specialists is critical. Training guidelines list all required trainings, number of hours of training required, and timelines for completion. In addition to training in active listening, stress management, and CISM techniques (or other model if utilized), peer support program team members should be trained in all policies and procedures of the program, including confidentiality, ethical standards, and referral for continued behavioral health services.

Peer support specialists should be knowledgeable in the following topics:

- Mental wellness and mental disorders
- Suicide
- Substance use disorder (SUD)
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Basic wellness

Develop a schedule for how often and how much continuing education a peer support specialist will complete to remain on the team. This education should focus on skills training, education on new resources, cultural responsiveness, and additional topics relevant to current events in the behavioral health field.

Establish minimum standards for training and continuing education. A suggested minimum training schedule could include the following suggested courses but can also be tailored to meet the needs of your organization (details and links to resource websites are included below):

- Course in Basic Peer Support
- Critical Incident Stress (CISM) Management
- Psychological First Aid
- Mental Health First Aid
- ASIST – Applied Suicide Intervention Skills
- Agency Specific Orientation which includes information on the roles and responsibilities of a peer support team member as well as privacy and confidentiality regulations

Examples of trainings to be considered are listed below, but trainings should be considered that best fit your program mission:

[Psychological First Aid \(PFA\)](#)

The National Child and Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) provides a free, online version, which includes a five-hour interactive course, that puts the participant in the role of a provider in a post-critical incident scene. This course is for individuals new to critical incident response who want to learn the core goals of PFA, as well as for seasoned practitioners who want a review. It features innovative activities, video demonstrations, and mentor tips from the nation's trauma experts and survivors. PFA online also offers a learning community where participants can share about

experiences using PFA in the field, receive guidance during times of disaster, and obtain additional resources and training.

[Mental Health First Aid \(MHFA\)](#)

Mental Health First Aid is a skills-based training course that teaches participants how to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. The training addresses skills needed to establish rapport and provide initial support to someone who may develop a mental health or substance use problem or experience a crisis. DBHDID supports the delivery of MHFA, and trainings can be provided through the department at no cost to the agency.

[Critical Incident Stress Management \(CISM\) International Critical Incident Stress Foundation \(ICISF\)](#)

Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) is a model of peer support for supporting first responders and others who have been involved in critical incidents that leave them emotionally and/or physically affected by those incidents. CISM enables peers to help their peers understand problems that might occur after an event. This process also helps people prepare to continue to perform their services, or in some cases, return to a normal lifestyle.

The International Critical Stress Foundation provides CISM trainings at cost for individuals interested in becoming a part of a crisis management team or for an organization that is dedicated to helping individuals or groups recover from incidents. ICISF also offers other trainings courses online that could be used to supplement a peer support training program, including CISM Refreshers and Practice Scenarios on Critical Incident Stress Debriefing, Crisis Management Briefings (CMB), and Defusing.

[International Association for Firefighters \(IAFF\) Peer Support Training](#)

The IAFF Peer Support Training is delivered by IAFF master peer support instructors in two formats: 1) two days in person or 2) three days online. Both options require a fee, and more details on cost are found on the IAFF training [website](#).

After completing the training, members have been exposed to the knowledge and skills needed to provide support to their peers and have a basic understanding of common behavioral health issues affecting fire service professionals. As a result of participation in the training, they can serve as a bridge to community resources or behavioral health treatment when indicated and are able to build or enhance their peer support programs.

[Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training \(ASIST\)](#)

ASIST training is an interactive workshop that teaches participants to recognize when someone may have thoughts of suicide and work with them to create a plan that supports immediate safety. There is a cost for ASIST workshops that varies based on training sites. Visit this [website](#) for more details on sites and costs.

[QPR \(Question, Persuade, Refer\) Suicide Prevention Training](#)

QPR is a suicide prevention training for participants to be able to recognize the warning signs of suicide and question, persuade, and refer people at risk for suicide for help. DBHDID supports the delivery of QPR. Trainings can be provided through the department at no cost to the agency.

[Service to Self](#)

This one-hour online course is offered at no cost and is specifically designed for fire and emergency medical services personnel. Accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Pre-Hospital Continuing Education (CAPCE), the course addresses occupational stressors; mental health and substance use issues including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidality, and alcohol use; individual and organizational resilience; and healthy coping mechanisms including demonstrations of stress management techniques.

[Shield of Resilience](#)

This one-hour, online course is offered by SAMHSA Disaster and Technical Assistance Center (DTAC) at no cost. The training provides law enforcement officers with a foundational skill set to better understand and address the behavioral health stressors that are unique to law enforcement. It helps law enforcement officers learn to recognize signs and symptoms of stress, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicidal thoughts and actions.