



DENVER FIRE DEPARTMENT

PEER SUPPORT NEWSLETTER



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Editor: Kelli Gilchrist, FF



Denver Fire Peer Support Mission Statement:

We will present a trustworthy, well respected resource by maintaining the highest standards of integrity and effectiveness. We will invest time and effort into creating awareness of the peer support program to ensure that those in need know there is someone there to help “who has walked in their shoes.”

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Introductions:

Good morning all stations, it is time for your morning voc alarm... oh wait, I am not at Dispatch right now... Well, good morning all DFD members. Peer Support would like to re-issue, re-invent, and bring back our newsletter. We hope this can be a place to start, to open some conversation with a combination of humor, wellness, firefighter culture and lifestyle. Please do not hesitate to email feedback or ideas about topics that you would like to know more about.

Within each issue we hope to bring at least one or two articles, an introduction of a member of Peer Support, some wise words from guys on the street about some REALLY important issue to do with (gasp) feelings and/or overall wellness. We will also include a recipe submitted by a DFD member and a workout to try. **Be careful when attempting workouts!

Peer Support has its own email unrelated to the job which is denverfireps@gmail.com . It is monitored by a couple members of Peer Support. This is where you submit feedback, ideas for articles, and questions or concerns that you would like addressed by a member of Peer Support.

DFD MEMBERS ON “MAN HUGS”

“Man hugs are the manliest way to show your brother you care without getting all ‘girly-emotional”

– *Mark Butler, Lt.*

“They are the best way to remind you how nice it is to hug a lady.”

– *Charlie Karl, Capt.*

“They are awesome! But men aren’t always sure how to hug each other, so sometimes it’s awkward.”

– *Jeff Gilchrist, FF*

“They are awesome ... until they last too long...”

– *Carly Helwick, Lt.*

“They are ok as long as you shake hands first.”

– *Jimmy Hart, Capt.*



“Man to man hugs:
the two of them have confidence and know
how to channel their
inner girly side.

“Man to lady hugs:
Pure Luck.”

– *Anonymous Female Firefighter*

“Lingering hugs are awkward for everyone, don’t hug for too long—that’s the rule on the streets.”

– *Mark Ruzynski, Chief*

Justin Bunting, FF:

“What is a man-hug?”

Kelli Gilchrist, FF:

“when two men hug
each other.”

Justin Bunting, FF:

“Gross. Wait... who am I getting a hug from?”

Peer Supporter of the Month

Chuck Cordova, FF1



Your Denver Fire Peer Supporters are members of the fire department that are dedicated to offering support, assistance, and linkage to resources for our fellow firefighters and families. We understand the need for confidentiality, and realize that asking for any kind of assistance is a huge deal. We do not take this lightly and for that reason, we think it is important for you to know who we are as people. Each Peer Supporter was given a questionnaire to fill out in order to tell the membership a little bit about them.

Chuck’s current assignment is at Truck 2 on the A-shift. He has been with the department for 23 years. Chuck reported that he wanted to be a peer supporter because, “I just wanted to be there for any members who might need some help during difficult times.”

Chuck has been married, “for 24 great years with three grown children and two small dogs.” Chuck also says, “I am a spiritual person with a Christian background.”

In addition to personal questions, Peer Supporters were asked some REALLY personal questions that they felt comfortable sharing:

People always want to know what Superhero you would be if you could be one and Chuck says if he had the choice to be any superhero it would be Batman WITH one of his super powers being the ability to fly...

Chuck also likes to take long walks (like most people) and if he had his choice of where to go walk he said, “in the foothills.”

Chuck’s favorite band is the Temptations, with his favorite decade being the 70s. When I asked him why, he said, “hello! It was the 70s!”

Chuck was also asked to share his favorite quote which is,

*“True loyalty is only known
when there is sacrifice to be made.”*

Exposures Known and Unknown

By Zac Bousman, FF Engine 23



Why is it so hard for us to address this insidious demon that haunts so many of our own?



Our brothers, our sisters, our family, I have a few words to share along the topic of PTSD in first responders. We all know we would lay our life down in a heartbeat for that person working right beside us... so I am wondering why is it so hard for us to address this insidious demon that haunts so many of our own? I would love any of my friends to comment on how many firefighters, police officers, paramedics or military members they have personally seen affected by PTSD. We've had recent suicides locally... divorces? Are you kidding me? Our rate is astronomical! Hell, I'll put it out there. My first relationship ever wasn't until I was in my late twenties... I'm 43 now and two divorces down! WTF?!! We're taught from the beginning of our training how to desensitize, how to compartmentalize our emotions; both overtly and subconsciously. We have to do so. It's an effective tool, and when you've held too many dead children in your arms, done CPR on too many infants, seen too many bodies hit by cars and trains, stabbed, shot, burned, beaten and bloodied to the point they hardly look human anymore, you need that tool to suppress what any normal human would think/feel at that moment. It's a necessary tool so that you can complete the mission at hand.

The problem is we forget to put that tool away when we go home. I've seen myself do it in past relationships; "you can't hurt me," "you can't make me feel pain," (is what I'm thinking)... I'm just going to turn that switch off and become emotionally numb... That's how it starts! I know there will be some who think I'm putting too much out there, but I think that's part of the environment. We do it to ourselves too... "Man up, Zac!" "Gotta be stoic and not show the slightest sign of emotion, because that might be misconstrued as weakness."

How is it we can run into a building that has fire coming out of multiple sides, smoke banked to the ground, hot as hell, and nearly have to be dragged out against our will if the powers determine it's a lost cause; yet consider for a second, it would be weak of me to express to others any thoughts or feelings that are going through my head and bothering me. I think those of us who have 5-10-15-20 years on this job need to make a change for these 18-20 year olds just starting, so they aren't ashamed to seek assistance when the work is affecting them. The combination of what we see every day, with the amount of sleep deprivation we suffer could be equated to torture by some. The work load is increasing exponentially for our future firefighters. How can we change the environment to rescue our up and coming brothers and sisters? One more death would be too many, just because someone thought it would be easier to simply go away than to let their friends think that they were weak or sick.

Exposures Cont...

Bonnie K. Cady, MCJ, CACIII

No matter how hard they try to avoid it, they are still exposed. Feelings of disgust, pity, anguish, frustration, hurt, sadness, fear, anger and confusion may be a few of the emotions that go along with exposure. Who and what are we talking about? We are talking about professionals exposed to other people's trauma.

In the working world of helping professionals there are so many hazards that the worker faces every day that it would be impossible to capture it all in a few short paragraphs. But one thing is for sure: it does happen and it is going to continue to happen regardless of the stiff upper lip that many in the helping professions have, it can and does affect them. To call it trauma tends to sissify it, let's face it, at the time it is not traumatic as it is a problem that needs to be solved.

Olga Phoenix, in a recent article posited that the different types of exposure can be broken down into categories with overlap but distinction (May 2014). She notes that the way in which one is exposed may have distinct impressions on them over time. Andrew Karmen, in his book *Crime Victims*, considers that the person who experiences the impact of the trauma, particularly if targeted, usually a crime victim, is the primary victim; but, what about the family near the others who experience the result of that crime? Think of the parents of a murdered child or the surviving spouse of a victim of a fatal crash or how about the first responders? Or the doctors and clinical people who follow up? They too are victims from their exposure (Karmen 2013). Karmen lists different types of victims depending on their exposure as Primary victims: the one who experience the trauma firsthand. Secondary victims: experience the trauma as first responders, seeing the events as they unfold although not being the actual victim. Vicarious Victims: those who provide counseling, read files, treat physical and mental results of a trauma (Karmen 2013). Phoenix summarized yet another study, breaking categories further by stating that results of the exposure to the trauma often result in Compassion Fatigue and/or burnout (2014). Okay, so what does all that mean? It means that even though responders are good at what they do, taking their daily activities very much in stride, they are also affected by the events to which they are exposed.

Why does this matter? It matter because when one experiences compassion fatigue they wear down over time (Phoenix 2014) and may not be as responsive to a situation as they formerly had been. This ultimately may lead to burnout which is related to stress and frustration stemming from work (Phoenix 2014). Secondary trauma can result in many of the same conditions as the primary victim, including disruptions in daily living, relationships, sleep and symptoms that manifest physically or emotionally (Karmen 2013). Vicarious victims experience a greater degree of disconnectedness after a time as if to "unplug" their emotions to anything painful in life (Karmen 2013).

Obviously, none of these outcomes are cheerful and those in helping professions know, the incidence of depression, substance abuse and violence can increase over time to quiet the stress on the job. These can be direct results of ongoing exposure to trauma without taking time to refuel, seek support or debrief situations when needed.

Many professionals who treat those in the helping professions that experience ongoing trauma agree that the agency, organization, company or particular service/helping profession needs to have mechanisms in place to help the members of its organization manage the challenges that this exposure presents (Bloom, 2003). Self-assessment of noticing that one's world view has been affected by events at work, changes that would make one feel distrusting of others, hyper vigilance, or disruptions such as emotional numbness, avoidance or intrusive thoughts are key for an individual experiencing the effects of their exposure to know it is time to get support to manage the event or series of events that are causing the disruption (Bloom, 2003). It should be the responsibility of the employer, organization or agency to make sure that education and services are routinely provided to prevent problems in work performance and relationships as well as safety (Bloom 2003).

So, in effect, no matter how strong the stomach and mind are in the face of events, resolving any lingering thoughts, feelings or changes the event caused can have serious and unwelcome consequences. Exposure to trauma, whether it is one's own or that of another person, should be taken seriously to maintain the highest level of functioning and ability to perform on the job and in personal life.

References

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Phoenix, Olga. (2014). *Painful Truths About Vicarious Trauma: Statistics from the Field*. Home / BLOG / Vicarious Trauma / about / Painful Truths About Vicarious Trauma: Statistics from the Field. Retrieved from: <http://www.olgaphoenix.com/statistics-painful-truth-about-vicarious-trauma/>

Loading the Dishwasher and Other Hazards Three Principles for a Happy Marriage

Karen Jackson, Ph.D.

This is the first of a series of articles on healthy relationships.

All relationships have some degree of a power struggle: parent/child, wife/husband, sibling/sibling, friend/friend, and so on. There are some relationships that are appropriately hierarchical – such as in a fire department, military structure, and parent/child for example. But, there are also relationships that should not be hierarchical including romantic partners. The quality of a romantic relationship is in part dependent on the equality of the relationship. For simplicity, in this paper I will call the whole range of possible romantic relationships “partners.”

Have you ever been accused by your partner of being controlling? Have you ever accused your partner of being controlling? That term, “controlling” can be a hard one to actually nail down in a precise definition so I like to use examples. Let’s say that you absolutely, without a doubt, know the ultimate way to load the dishwasher. And now let’s say that you explain this method to your partner, and yet your partner continues to load they dishwasher the way they want to. Are you thinking: “but I DO know the best way to load the dishwasher!”? Ok, let’s say that you DO. Hands down, you are an expert on loading dishwashers. What I’m saying is that you don’t have the right to demand that your partner do it your way. You may be thinking, well, if I DO know the best way to load the dishwasher why doesn’t my partner just graciously accept the knowledge that I am willing to impart? Why should I be burdened by dishes that don’t get clean because of faulty loading?

Principle #1: Treat your partner with respect and dignity.

In this situation one person is attempting to impose their will on their partner. That is – YOU NEED TO DO IT MY WAY. In this situation there are two principles at stake. The first principle is the (alleged) best way to load the dishwasher. The second principle is treating ones partner with respect and dignity. I go back to my earlier statement: you don’t have the right to demand that your partner do things your way. If you insist on instructing your partner on a simple domestic chore, you are treating him or her like a child. You are imposing a hierarchical status on what should be a partnership.

Does this mean that one can never expect anything from their partner? No, not at all. Certainly there are covenants that partners have with one another. For example, most partners agree to be faithful, honest and so on. But, this is not really one person telling the other person what to do; rather it is an agreement that the couple made as they enter into a serious and committed relationship.

INDIAN FRY BREAD

Ingredients:

4 c unsifted flour
1 ¾Tbs Baking Powder
2 Tbsp. Oil
1 ½ Tbsp. Salt
1 ½ Tbsp. Sugar
Water
Fryer or Pan w oil to fry
Cinnamon & Sugar Blend
Or Powdered Sugar

Directions:

- Mix all dry ingredients
- Add warm water slowly until firm dough is formed.
- Knead well
- Allow dough to set/rise in a warm place for 20 mins
- Roll Flat ¼ or ½” thick (should not be sticky, add more flour if is)
- Cut into triangles
- Fry both sides until golden brown
- Place in sugar/cinnamon mixture or sprinkle with powdered sugar

Thanks for the Dessert
Recipe Mikey Poveda, FF!

(Loading the Dishwasher -Continued)

What if one person tells the other that they drink too much? Is that being controlling? The answer is that it depends. That is, if someone is having one glass of wine (a regular sized glass to be sure) every evening, and their partner rolls their eyes and comments each time – it sounds like it is controlling behavior.

What about when a person clearly has a problem with alcohol? In this case, let's say they get drunk until they pass out every night, they have had a DUI, and frequently call in sick to work due to a hangover. Does a person have a right to say something to their partner? If they do, are they being controlling? In the case of substance abuse, one person's behavior is having a significantly negative impact on the other person and thus they have a right to address it. Pointing out a substance abuse issue can also be a form of being loving and concerned. However, one person still does not have the right to demand that their partner stop drinking. Neither do they have the right to treat their partner in a demeaning manner. However, they do have the right to say that if their partner continues to choose to abuse alcohol they may choose to leave the relationship.

Principle #2: Be quick to praise and slow to criticize. Throughout a given day or week, notice how often you criticize vs. how often you praise your partner. Notice the same thing in regards to how your partner treats you. Sometimes it's important to bring up an issue that's chronic and really bothering us. If we let things go because we don't like conflict, eventually it builds up into a much bigger problem. But, sometimes we need to let trivial things go and not mention them.

Here are some examples of trivial things that should not be mentioned:

“Why do you always pick the slowest lane to drive in?”

“Why can't you park the car straight?”

“You're not really very good at telling a joke.”

“The coffee you make is terrible.”

Other topics that should not be brought up to a partner are basic characteristics that are not easily changed. If this is the case – making a statement about it will only serve to hurt your partner. **Unfortunately, these comments are often made with just that intention in mind and are not actually based on reality.**

These include statements like:

“Why can't you be more (funny, masculine, feminine, sexy, smart, muscular, thin ... ?)”

If you're thinking, “do people really say things like that to each other?” – good for you, but yes, there are those who make cutting remarks to their partners on a regular basis.

It's not only important to be careful about refraining from being overly critical; it's also important to let your partner know the things about them that you appreciate and admire. So, even if the coffee is too weak or too strong, it would be great to mention how nice it is to get up to a pot of coffee. Telling your partner how handsome or pretty they are goes a long way, too. Infusing a lot of good will into your relationship helps to strengthen it to get through tougher times.

Frequently doing small things to make your partner feel cared for and loved is a strong predictor of a strong marriage.

Principle #3: Fight Nice. How couples resolve conflict is the biggest predictor for whether they stay married or divorce. Those couples who are happier and tend to stay together are gentler with each other. Couples who get very angry, yell, or say hurtful things during a conflict are not only less happy, they are less likely to stay together. John Gottman, PhD., a family therapist and researcher, can predict with over 90% accuracy which newlyweds will divorce by observing how they communicate (refer back to Principle #1).

There will be more on how to fight nice and other relationship tips in the next installment on relationship issues.

DFD TOTAL WELLNESS TRAINING

DFD Safety and Training Division hopes to address some of the issues that have been discussed in this issue in this month's training out at the Glass House. Chief Heiss, Lt. Lacy and Lt. Brooks continue their work to bring the DFD up to speed with a Total Wellness Program that works for our members. Lt. Brooks kicks off the training discussing our physical health, the importance of firefighter physicals, exposure to nasty stuff, clean PPE, and his hope for rehab and wellness for the future. Following that F.I.R.E., Peer Support and the Carson J. Spencer Foundation team up to address a DFD specific training on how to support, recognize and address members in possible distress before things get out of hand. Finally, Dept. Psychologist, Karen Jackson, follows up with resiliency training. Many resources were given with a few are listed below.

RESOURCES:

www.mantherapy.com

800-281-2978

www.serveprotect.org

615-373-8000

ComPsych Guidance/ EAP:

877-327-3854

Kaiser Permanente: www.kp.org

National Suicide Prevention

Line: 1-800-273-8266

www.safecallnow.org

Fun website to check out:

www.artofmanliness.com

WORKOUT

We all know that research shows diet and exercise does all kinds of positive “stuff” for your body as well as your brain. Exercise is a constructive way to “reset.” Some wise words to members from an old retired guy...

“Take baby steps when trying these workouts or modify the weight as needed... If guys puke the first time they try a workout... likely there won't be a second...”
– Will Norden (Retired Capt.)

November Workout:

Submitted by Jesse Kerler, FF

10 – 9 -8 -7-6-5-4-3-2-1

Jump Squat
Clapping Push – Ups

5 ROUNDS

5 x Sprint Start – 100 meter
5 x Goblet Squat** @ 60lbs
5 x Jumping Lunge

5 ROUNDS

5 x Hang Squat Clean @155 lbs
5 x Push Press @ 135 lbs
5 x Box Jump @ 24” or more

5 ROUNDS

5 x Bench @185
5 x Dip
5 x Clapping Push-ups

5 ROUNDS

5 x Sand Bag Squat w/80lb Sandbag or Dumbbell
5 x Sand Bag Jump Squat
Sled Push or 100 meter Sprint

**Goblet Squat = hold dumbbell or Kettle Bell under chin, squat and touch elbows to knees

CAUTION NOTE/COMMON SENSE: Obviously ask questions or substitute exercise if unsure how to complete safely...

About our Organization

WHO ARE DFD PEER SUPPORTERS?

Peer supporters are recruited from the ranks of established firefighters and newer members of promise. Soon after their selection, peer supporters receive training in listening and counseling skills. In addition, they receive training in critical incident stress management (CISM) and Stress First Aid. Throughout their tenure as peer supporters, the department psychologist is available to them and their spouse to provide consultation, supervision and on-going training.



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HOW CAN PEER SUPPORTERS HELP?

Peer Supporters are prepared to assist department members in dealing with job stress, critical incidents, family problems, grief, and other issues of concern. Often an empathetic listening ear, a word of support, or a suggestion is all that is needed to assist with the problems at hand. When more specialized help is needed, peer supporters are prepared to provide referrals to other sources for help, such as financial management, legal assistance, help for substance abuse, etc. Peer Support services are free and CONFIDENTIAL. The only exceptions to confidentiality are situations involving criminal activity, threats to life and safety, or abuse.

All department employees and retirees, as well as members of their immediate families (spouses and children) are eligible for peer support services.

We're on the Web! Check the DFD Intranet – Click Peer Support!