

# Establishing & Maintaining Your Peer Support Team

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*CureJoy*  
**WE RISE**  
BY LIFTING OTHERS



# Ron Stewart

## NOT a Counselor! Just a Knucklehead Firefighter



- Fire Chief @ Williamson Co. ESD #5
- Retired from Temple Fire & Rescue in 2022
- Established TFR Peer Support Team in 2019 & Wilco ESD 5 in 2022.
- Certified in Basic and Advanced Individual & Group Support.

**(NOT! a Professional Counselor or Therapist)**

- BS in Aeronautical Science
- MPA Sam Houston State University
- PhD in Leadership Johnson University (Year 2)
- Wife - Kris (30 Years in April!)  
Daughters Skylar (Owen) and Summer (Jon)
- Live Music, Ride Motorcycle, Travel

**(Resiliency Builders)**

# How Did You Get Started?

## *What is my Why?*

- *I realized that WE FAILED members and cost them their careers or lives.*
- Captain Fired for Drug Abuse.
- Firefighter who witnessed death of a child and left the fire service & struggled with mental health.
- Captain Crying in My Office
- Retirees Dying soon after retirement.  
(Alcohol, Cancer, Diabetes, Morbid Obesity, Chronic Smokers, Drinkers, Drug Abuse)



# Agenda

- **What We Do and Don't Do**
- **Professional and Personal Incidents**
- **Resiliency Builders  
(On and Off Duty)**
- **Defusing vs Debriefing**
- **9 Steps of Building Your Peer Support Team**

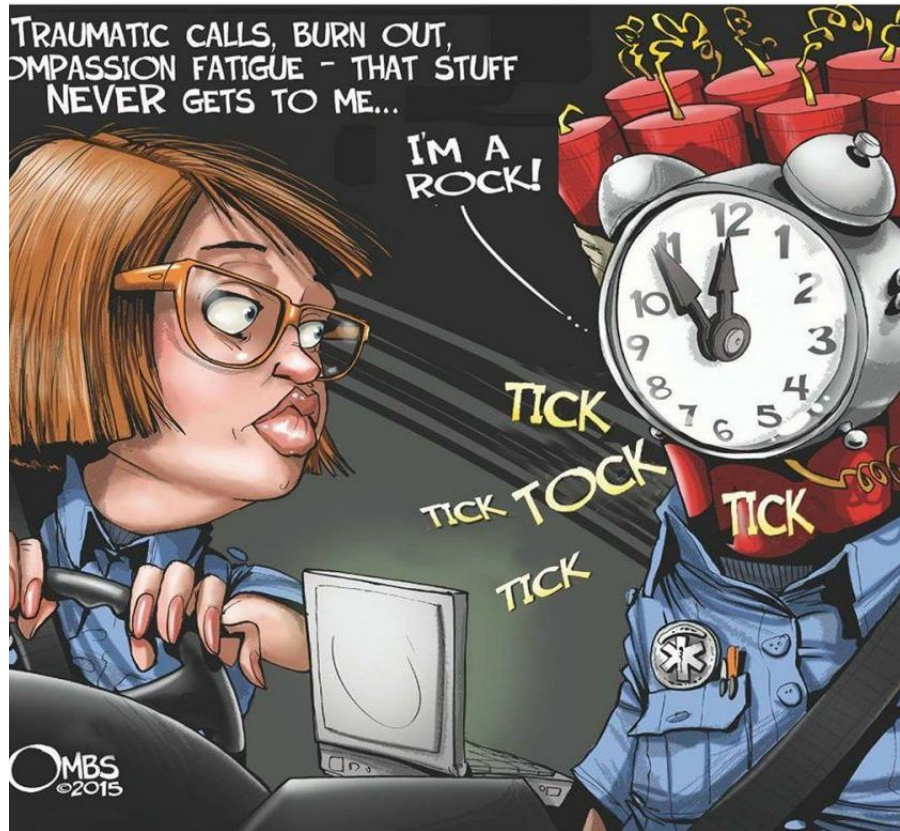


# Establishing & Maintaining Your Peer Support Team

## What Do We Do?

## What We Are Not ...

Photo Credit: Paul Combs



THERE IS NO SHAME IN ADMITTING YOU'RE HUMAN

*Peer Support team members are not therapists, simply friends.*

*We do not have to be an expert to help. But you do need some formal training.*

*We can offer tips on stress reductions, normalization of your experience, remove stigma of reaching out and refer as needed.*

*We do not take the place of Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) other organized & licensed resources.*

**WE RECOGNIZE, LISTEN, REFER AND FOLLOW UP**

Photo Credit: Paul Combs

# Establishing & Maintaining Your Peer Support Team

## Personal vs Professional

### Professional Incidents

- \* Difficult Call / Unable to Shake (Flashbacks, Dreams)
- \* M.C.I. / High Media Attention
- \* Long Hours/Lack of Sleep
- \* Children (Injured, Deceased)
- \* Extreme Circumstances
- \* Professional Mistake
- \* L.O.D.D.
- \* Death of Co-Worker

Photo Credit: Paul Combs



BY FIRE™

BY PAUL C

PAUL C  
BY PAUL COMBS  
FIRE ENGINEERING

IF ONLY IT WAS THIS OBVIOUS...

# Establishing & Maintaining Your Peer Support Team

## Personal vs Professional

### Personal Incidents

- Family Difficulties (#1 & #2)
- Financial Stress (#1 & #2)
- Grieving (Especially a Loss)
- Significant Life Change
- Critical Illness or Self
- Critical Illness/Death of Someone Close
- Substance Abuse

Photo Credit: Paul Combs



Peer Support Focus is Pro-Active.

## Resiliency Builders On-Duty

- Sleep (Shifts? Naps?)      Yoga, Stretch, Breathing
- Exercise      Turn off TV and Phone
- Laugh      Hydrate  
   ^ ^ ^
- Eat Together → → →      Talk
- Listen to Music      Read
- Get Alone in Silence

**11**  
**WAYS**  
**FIREFIGHTERS**  
**REDUCE STRESS**  
**ON SHIFT**

FIRE DEPT. FAMILY



# Peer Support Focus is Pro-Active

## Resiliency Builders Off Duty

*Same as On Duty +*

Disconnect from FD

Take a Vacation

Engage in a Hobby

Massage / Chiropractor

Attend an Event (Music, Sports, Theater)

Family Time

Spiritual Time

Talk to a Professional

**FIREFIGHTERS OFTEN DO NOT SEEK  
TREATMENT FOR JOB-RELATED  
MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES.**

**AN IAFF POLL FOUND THAT 81%  
WERE FEARFUL OF BEING SEEN AS  
WEAK OR UNFIT FOR DUTY IF THEY  
SOUGHT MENTAL HEALTH  
TREATMENT.**

- International Association of  
Firefighters



# Establishing & Maintaining Your Peer Support Team

**Defusing** – 3 phased, short term structured small group discussion provided within the first few hours after an incident. Up to 12.

## I Talk

- Reduce Intense Reactions to the Incident
- **Normalize** the Experience
- Reestablish Group to Avoid Isolation
- Assessment of the Group to Determine if Debriefing is Needed
- Provide Information of S/S of Stress Reactions (May or May Not Experience)

# Establishing & Maintaining Your Peer Support Team

**Debriefing** – Group meeting held off duty of with crews out of service to discuss a distressing critical incident usually held within 24 hours up to 2 weeks after the incident.

- Peer driven and clinician guided with the intent of mitigating psychological trauma and accelerate recovery.

## You Talk

- Provide Stress Education
- Means to Ventilate Thoughts of the Incident
- **Normalize.** Reduce fallacy of uniqueness and/or abnormality
- Educate on Possible Signs and Symptoms

# PEER SUPPORT GROUP STRONGER **TOGETHER**



How Do I Start From  
the Ground Up?  
9 Steps

**#1 - Support from  
Leadership**

**Training**

**Time Off**

**Financial**

# How Do I Start From the Ground Up?

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**2) Reach out to  
existing teams for  
info such as SOG's**



# How Do I Start From the Ground Up?

- **3) Reach out to and Vet a Chaplain & Counselors with *First Responder Trauma Training.***





# How Do I Start From the Ground Up?

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**4) Recruit Team Members & Send them to Formal Training.**

# How Do I Start From the Ground Up?

**5) Educate your Organization on the Program**

**Work to Create Buy In**

**Fail Early vs Succeed Early**





# How Do I Start From the Ground Up?

## **6) Officially Announce the Availability of Peer Support.**

- Leadership Support
- Meetings and Guidance from Chaplain, Counselors and Other Teams
- Team Trained to Basic Level (GRIN)
- Department Info Meetings



# How Do I Start From the Ground Up?

**7) Peer Support Team Should Meet Monthly or at Least Bi-Monthly**

**• 50% Attendance**





# How Do I Start From the Ground Up?

**8) Deliver Mental Health & Wellness Training/Education to Team and Department.**

**(Pro Active)**

# How Do I Start From the Ground Up?

## 9) Never Stop Networking



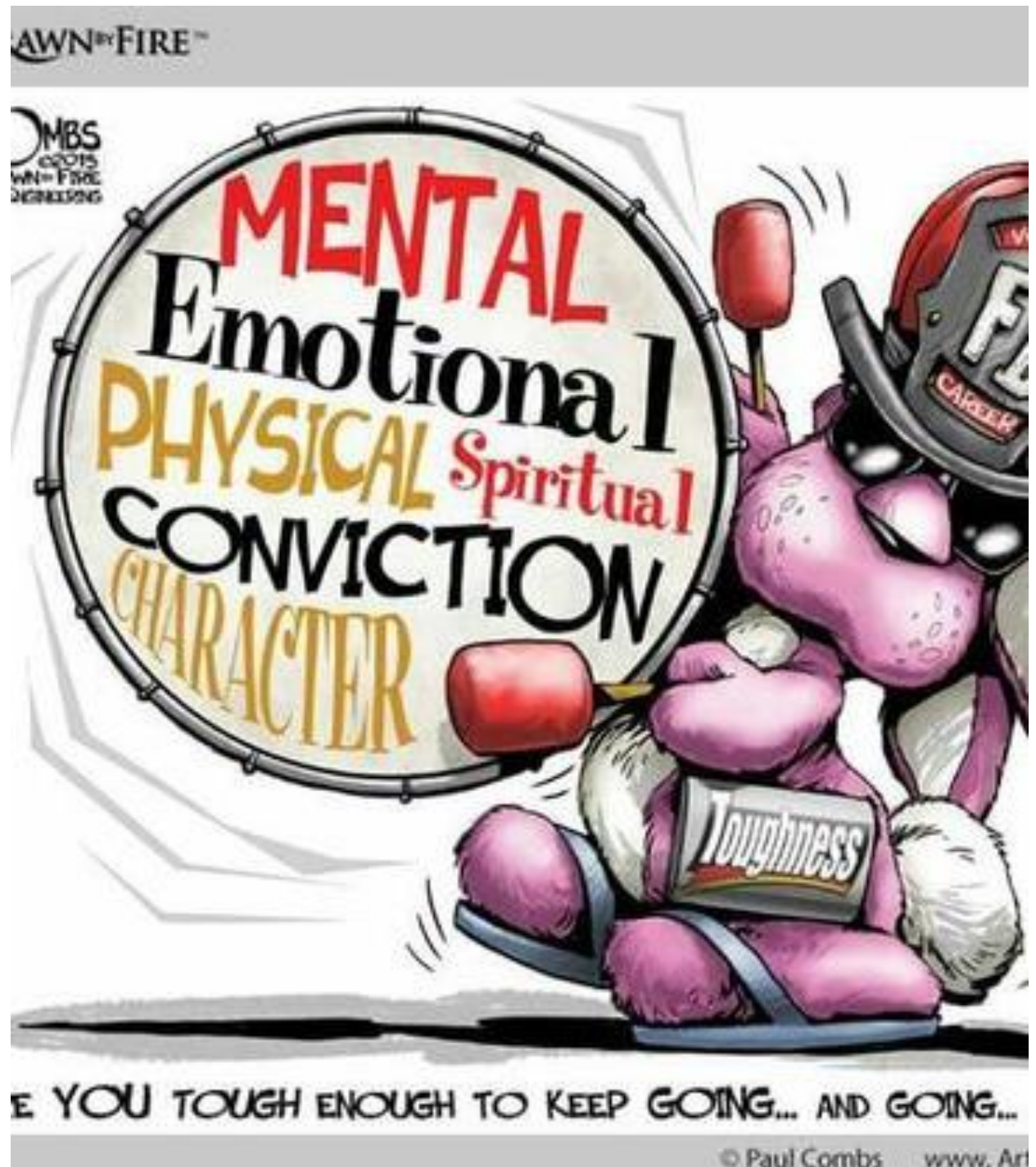
# Establishing & Maintaining Your Peer Support Team

## INTENTIONALITY

*Peer Support Team is an Element*

- Counseling Access
- Mandatory Defuse/Debrief
- Community Events
- Bi-Weekly Lunches
- Family Events
- Pride & Ownership
- Recognition
- Animal Therapy

Photo Credit: Paul Combs



# First Peer Support Team Meeting

Matthew 26:36-43

Jesus said, “my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow, stay with me.”

Peter  
James  
John



- 1) Recognized Stress
- 2) Acknowledged Stress
- 3) Asked Friends for Help

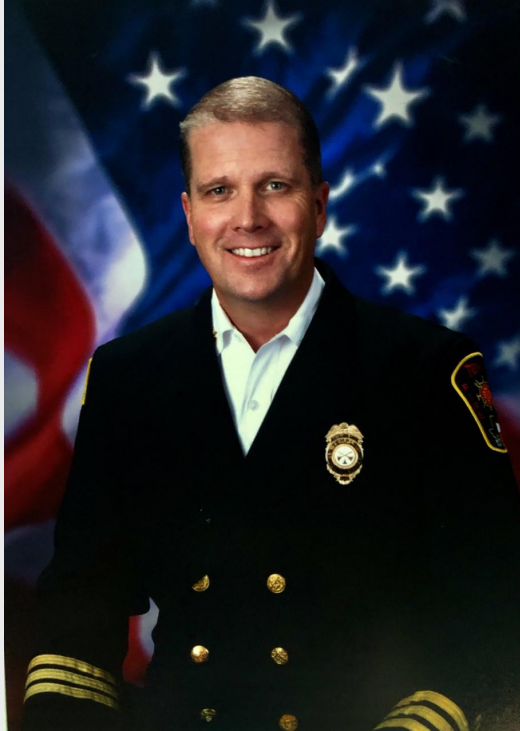
Genesis 2:18 “It is not good for man to be alone.”

Proverbs 27:17 “as iron sharpens iron so we sharpen one another.”

Proverbs 17:17 “a friend loves at all times and a brother is born for times of adversity.”

Proverbs 27:6 “words from a friend matters...”

# Contact Me



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***Discussion / Q&A***