Anytown, USA Fire/EMS Department

Behavioral Health Program Development

The following are some recommendations that should be addressed when developing a Behavioral Health program. FBHA recommends the steps in order as described below. Such behavioral health issues include, but not limited to are stress, anxiety, depression, medical conditions, PTS and suicidal ideations.

The Fire Department/EMS organization considers its members to be the most vital function of their organization and as such is taking a proactive stance in this arena. The development of this office is a major step to providing the best mental health care they can to ensure the mental health safety of their members and their families. Programs and responsibilities to be developed by this department are as follows:

1. FBHA believes education is a key component of any successful behavioral health program. The awareness of such issues as anxiety, depression, PTS, addictions, suicidal ideations and much more brings to life the reality that some of us may suffer and that it is okay to ask for help. Within this educational process you tend to see those who want to become involved in the building of a behavioral health program for your organization. Our recommendation is to begin with behavioral health workshops to get buy-in from your personnel.

2. Peer Support Teams (PST)CISM Teams are a vital function within a behavioral health program; therefore the behavioral health program needs to adopt and sustain a peer support program. This group will be selected through a specific set of criteria’s, trained and then function as the first line of help for members of said organization who are seeking help. A Licensed Counselor will oversee the peer support program and when a peer support member needs to escalate a member’s issue they will contact the Licensed Counselor for guidance.

3. The third step is to develop a behavioral health guidelines/policies that will outline the steps involved on how to handle behavioral health issues when they occur. The guidance needed by officers and members is imperative to creating solutions when challenged with behavioral health situations.

4. In working with the Training Officer of an organization, the Peer Support Team (PST)CISM will develop classes on behavioral health for the members of their department. Such training will be based on the schedule of training on a yearly basis.
5. Develop a working relationship with the Department’s Employee Assistance Program (EAP). This is accomplished through training of staff counselors who might have the opportunity to work on a professional basis with the firefighters/EMS of your department and their family members. In addition, the PST or Training Officer will facilitate a working relationship with EAP counselors by inviting them for tours of the department, visit training sessions and with approval of the Chief complete some ride time to gain insight into the Fire and EMS culture.

6. Development of local counseling resources to assist those members who are uncomfortable in working with the fire departments EAP counselors. The local resources will be trained by an outside entity or the Training Officer to understand the functions of their department and its members. These counselors will specialize in PTSD, Depression, Marriage Counseling, Financial, etc. They will be available to members and their families who seek professional help.

7. With the understanding that faith plays a major role in some member’s life, the department will develop and sustain a relationship with local Chaplains. If needed, this group will also be trained to understand the culture of firefighters, EMS and family members.

8. The Department will develop programs and classes for family members of its firefighters/EMS. Family members are a key component to any behavioral health program. Recognition of signs and symptoms that members display, as well as in themselves are key to early intervention of any behavioral health issues.

9. The department will create a learning atmosphere on behavioral health, which will include behavioral awareness in the fire/EMS academies and fire/EMS officer courses.

10. A department may institute that the PST can respond to fire/EMS calls when needed due to the nature of the emergency incident. They will not be involved in any operational issues but there incase members on the call request their assistance and observe any emotional or behaviors resulting from the call.

11. The Department will build a relationship with recognized groups such as CISM teams, neighboring fire departments, police or other organizations to promote a good working relationship for all involved.

12. The Department will make a commitment to assist those members who will be retiring within a 6-12 month period. Emotional Detachment from the job is a realistic possibility so planning will take place to help the member adjust to his/her impending retirement.