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|  | SAN MARCOS POLICE DEPARTMENT | |
| | Policy 4.11 Employee Wellness and Resiliency | |
| | Effective Date: February 16, 2022 | Replaces: |
| | Approved:  _____ Chief of Police | |
| Reference: | | |

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to codify Government Code 614.015 related to Mental Health Leave, as well as outline the Department’s response to ensuring and promoting the resiliency of its employees by providing trauma-informed leadership and creating a culture that supports wellness through education, peer and family support systems, a critical incident stress management (CISM) program, police chaplaincy, and counseling.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Department that all employees are able to safely and effectively perform their essential job functions. Peace officers who experience a traumatic event in the scope of their employment will be allowed to use mental health leave as prescribed by law. Services will be provided to help employees preempt and resolve emotional difficulties associated with acute or chronic exposure to trauma in policing or family crises. The Department encourages employees to seek resources outside of this policy to ensure their wellness, and their family’s wellness.

The acceptance and success of this policy will be determined, in part, by observance of confidentiality. It is imperative that strict confidentiality govern all procedures, except when required by federal or state law. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that stigmatization linked to “asking for help” exists within police culture. Therefore, in order for the application of this policy to be successful, it is equally imperative that the Department cultivates a culture of education, understanding, and acceptance, in order to create an environment in which its employees feel supported and encouraged when reaching out to access necessary services.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. Chaplain. An individual with theological training and experience to offer spiritual and emotional care to the Department, its families, and the community.
- B. Traumatic event – an event which occurs in the peace officer(s) scope of employment when the officer is involved in the response to, or investigation of, an event that causes the officer to experience unusually strong emotional reactions or feelings which have the potential to interfere with their ability to function during or after the incident.
- C. Traumatic events may include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - 1. Major disasters which may include response to weather related events involving multiple casualties; or explosions with multiple casualties; or search and recovery missions involving multiple casualties;
 - 2. Incidents involving multiple casualties which may include shootings or traffic accidents;
 - 3. Line of duty death, severe injury or suicide of a department member;
 - 4. Death of a child resulting from violence or neglect;

- 5. Officer(s) involved shooting of a person.
- D. Mental health leave – administrative leave with pay granted in response to a traumatic event that occurred in the scope of the peace officer’s employment.
- E. Mental Health Professional – a licensed social or mental health worker, counselor, psychotherapist, psychologist or psychiatrist.

IV. PROCEDURES

- A. Trauma-informed leadership requires knowledge and awareness to recognize stressors in employees’ lives and take proactive, positive actions to mitigate negative effects. Trauma-informed employees embrace the idea they are not immune to the effects of acute and cumulative stress resulting from trauma. Many risk factors exist in professional policing that contribute to higher rates of suicidality, which must be acknowledged. All employees must move from awareness to action to intervene and prevent the impacts of trauma, thus ensuring their resilience. Achieving resilience requires a conscious effort.
- B. The Department’s conscious efforts will include, but not be limited to: education; family orientations for new employees and their families; peer and family support systems; a CISM program, Police Chaplains; and confidential mental health consultations.
 - 1. Education. The Department will utilize in-service, VINCIBLE and other resources to regularly communicate about resiliency, including but not limited to emotional intelligence and wellness, de-escalation, substance use, suicide prevention and critical incident stress. Additionally, the new fitness facility will be available to all employees at all hours, and the Department’s Fitness Committee will communicate regular programs and plans to encourage wellness.
 - 2. Peer and Family Support Systems. Employee wellness is not only a management issue, but it is ultimately everyone’s responsibility, including family members and all peers. The Department places peer responsibility with all employees and will provide ongoing training to better ensure mitigation of organizational and family stressors. Peers often will talk to each other long before expressing concerns to supervisory staff, so all employees must recognize their role in resiliency. Additionally, the Department will provide trained peer support specialists as part of the Peer Support Team. Talking about trauma and stress is foundational to the health of our Department. The goal of such dialogue is to normalize the stress responses experienced by employees, help employees through crises, and reduce suicide in the police profession, so as to ensure greater services are engaged. Such communication is confidential with the following exceptions, which will require supervisory notifications: danger to oneself or others; suspected child abuse or domestic violence; or other serious criminal conduct. An employee can request the information he or she shared be divulged to others in the Department to ensure greater services are engaged.
 - 3. Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM): The Department will schedule debriefings within a reasonable amount of time following critical incidents. Supervisors or Chaplains will be responsible for requesting a review of incidents that may necessitate a debriefing. Group debriefings will be mandatory for involved personnel unless otherwise directed by the Chief of Police.

4. Police Chaplains. Chaplains are available for members of the Department, their immediate family members, retired members of the Department and volunteers in times of serious injury, illness and death of loved ones, upon request, and other circumstances when needed. Police Chaplains will be notified when employees suffer serious injury or death. The content of the communication between the Chaplain and the person being counseled is confidential. If deemed necessary by the Chaplain, an individual seeking counseling may be referred to other professional services.
5. Supervisory Expectations. Supervisors shall visit with an employee when they become aware of suicidality, work or family related stressors that may overwhelm the employee, substance use disorders, or other stressors that affect an employee's wellness. Supervisors will recognize that the primary reasons associated with suicidality relate to finances, relationships, substance use disorders, retirement (loss of role), and access to firearms. When behaviors manifest that result in administrative corrective action or discipline, supervisors should already be evaluating any underlying wellness issues that may be triggering such behaviors.

V. MENTAL HEALTH LEAVE

A. Requesting Mental Health Leave

1. An officer directly involved in a traumatic event may request the use of mental health leave (the 87th Texas Legislature only included peace officers in the law). The request shall be made in writing through the chain of command. The request shall be treated as a priority matter and a decision on the granting of the leave will be made no later than 24 hours following the submission of the request. The request will be granted unless the chain of command can articulate specific compelling reasons to deny granting the leave.
2. A supervisor or coworker who becomes aware of behavioral changes in an officer directly involved in a traumatic event should suggest to the officer that he or she seek mental health leave and the assistance of a mental health professional.

B. Confidentiality of Request

1. Any request for mental health leave shall be treated as strictly confidential by all parties involved and shall not be discussed or disclosed outside the officer's immediate chain of command, and only as necessary to facilitate the use of the leave. Except for the immediate chain of command, the chaplain, or peer support team; any officer or supervisor who becomes aware of behavioral changes and suggests the officer seek mental health leave shall not discuss that matter with any third party.
2. Confidentiality may be waived by the officer seeking mental health leave. Confidentiality may be waived under circumstances which indicate the officer is a danger to himself or herself or others and department personnel must confer with mental health professionals.

C. Duration of Mental Health Leave

1. An officer directly involved in a traumatic event may request up to three working days of mental health leave.
2. Extensions of mental health leave may be available under certain circumstances. Any request for an extension shall be accompanied by documentation from a mental health professional providing services to the officer. The request may extend the leave by three working days. Each officer may request no more than two extensions, each supported by

sufficient documentation by the mental health professional. The Chief shall grant the extension(s) upon the receipt of sufficient documentation explaining the need for the extension.

VI. MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AVAILABLE TO MEMBERS

- A. Mental Health services available through San Marcos Police Department are as follows:
 - 1. Hays County Regional CISM Team
 - 2. San Marcos Police Department Peer Support Team
 - 3. City of San Marcos Chaplain Program
 - 4. City of San Marcos Employee Assistance Program
 - 5. Mental Health Service through designated City of San Marcos Contracted Mental Health Professional
- B. Contact numbers for above noted resources are found on City of San Marcos SmartForce.