

# 10 Benefits of Peer Support



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When first responders develop [symptoms](#) of depression or begin to struggle with addiction or thoughts of suicide, their first inclination is often just to “suck it up” and keep going. Their primary focus is helping others, so when they are the ones who need help, they may not feel there is anywhere for them to go.

The good news is that if you are living with addiction, alcoholism, depression, PTSD, and/or other mental health issues, you are not alone. These disorders, among others, are exceedingly common among first responders due to the nature of the job. Often, you can find an amazing amount of support simply by turning to the people you work with who are also working toward recovery.

Peer support in the form of a formal [peer support program](#) (PSP) offers first responders a range of benefits. Some of these include:

1. *Meeting with people who speak your language:* When you are in a support group setting, it's common to share your experience and talk about what you've been through and what you've done—things that relate to why you are there and seeking support. It's helpful to know that you are speaking to a group of people who understand the lingo. You don't have to explain acronyms or procedure; everyone in the group gets it because they live it every day, too.

2. *Learning from people who have been where you are:* You will meet people in your peer support group who started out where you are and have seen what you have seen — and moved forward to a place of recovery. This provides you with a regular reminder that healing and hope are real.
3. *Support that is available at all hours:* First responders work 24 hours a day. Chances are someone from your peer group is on shift or available when you need to talk to someone.
4. *Tools that are applicable to the job:* Dealing with [mental health](#) issues, substance abuse, and [addiction](#) while staying on the job is easier when you get treatment and actionable tools that you can apply right now from people who know what they are talking about.
5. *Assistance with communication:* Learning how to communicate what you've experienced and what you need requires practice; you can find a safe [place](#) to do that in a peer support group.
6. *Increased family support:* Families of people struggling with addiction and mental health disorders benefit from supporting each other — as do families of law enforcement and other first responders. Often, you can find [resources](#) for your family through your peer support group.
7. *Attention to health issues:* There are certain health problems that are common among certain professions or in certain regions given the nature of the job. Your peer support group will be able to help you know what to look for — and what to do to prevent or manage specific issues.
8. *No judgment:* No matter what you've been through, what you say or how you say it, your peers have likely been through it, seen it before, or heard it from someone else. There is no need to fear the judgment of the group when you are doing nothing more than sharing your experience on the job.

9. *Directed advice*: Need help with a specific issue you are facing on the job right now? A peer support group can help in a way that a general addiction or mental health support group may not.
10. *The opportunity to give back*: If there are no peer support programs near you, you can learn how to set one up through the guidelines provided by the [International Association of Chiefs of Police](#) (IACP) psychological services section.

The people you work with, who understand you and know what you have seen and experienced, are often the best first resource when you are struggling. Knowing [when to reach out and ask for help](#) is the first step in taking advantage of all that peer support has to offer.

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