

# PSPG PEER SUPPORT NEWSLETTER

February 2022



## PEER SUPPORT SHOUT OUT

Earlier this year, PSPG traveled up to Las Vegas, NM in response to a critical incident. The amount of support that attended was incredible and we wanted to send a shout out! Las Vegas was so grateful for the amount of support that was provided to the community, and we want to thank all of the agencies for their dedication and level of support they provided. Thank you:

**Bernalillo County Fire Dept**

**Albuquerque Fire & Rescue**

**Rio Rancho Fire Dept**

**Los Lunas Fire Dept**

**Bernalillo County Volunteer Chaplains + IFOC Volunteer Chaplains**

**Assistance Dogs of the West  
NM Behavioral Health Institute  
Community Based Services,  
Las Vegas, NM**

**“ ASK FOR HELP NOT  
BECAUSE YOU ARE  
WEAK, BUT BECAUSE  
YOU WANT TO REMAIN  
STRONG ”**

## WELCOME

Welcome to the first edition of the PSPG Peer Support Newsletter. This newsletter is meant to provide information about what Peer Support is, how it can help you or a peer, and to highlight Peer Support stories. We hope to have a newsletter out on a quarterly basis so stay tuned for more!

## What is Peer Support?

Peer Support is a program designed to provide support to fellow peers. It is not a counseling session, nor is it therapy. It is a conversation amongst peers whom you work with, are in the same department, who you see from time to time, etc.

Being a first responder can be incredibly stressful. The common stigma of simply “Getting Over It” is transforming now into support. When times get too heavy or overwhelming, we encourage you to reach out to a peer in your department and talk to them. These conversations do not have to solely involve work. Maybe it is a family issue, or a physical ailment. Whatever it is, a peer support member is available to speak with you.

These peer support members do not get paid for what they do. They are peer support members simply out of the kindness of their heart, because they truly care about their peers and wish to see them happy and healthy as they proceed in their careers.

If you or someone you know would benefit from speaking with a peer support member, reach out to your department. If your department does not have a peer support program, other departments around the state are willing to help!

# ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS

## “ALS”

There are 8 different active listening skills that are key to being a successful peer supporter. These skills help you not only hear what your peer is expressing, but it builds empathy with them because you are actively listening and being engaging. The 8 skills are:

1. Minimal Encouragers
2. Open -Ended Questions
3. Reflection/Mirroring
4. Effective Pauses
5. Paraphrasing
6. “I” Statements
7. Emotional Labeling
8. Summarizing

Let’s break down what Minimal Encouragers are. These are one word/short phrases that you say to stay engaged and to let them know you are listening. “Sure,” “Ok,” “Mmhmm,” are all minimal encouragers that keep conversations flowing. We all have a “go to” minimal encourager that we use every day, even if we don’t know it. Next time you have a conversation with someone, see if you can identify your “go to”. Be advised, although there are no “incorrect” minimal encouragers, there are some that can be used at inappropriate times and should therefore be replaced. Example: “I want to kill myself” Response: “Ok” Instead, maybe respond with “Why?”

## Meet A Peer Support Member

We asked Bernalillo County Firefighter  
**Gary Chavez**  
why he chose to become a Peer Supporter:



“I guess the main reason I got into this position and became involved with Peer Support is because I want to help those who help others. I want to change the culture of Behavioral Health in the Fire Service and with First Responders overall. I’ve always felt my calling was to help people and getting into the Fire Service was a way for me to do that. I have realized over the years in the Fire Service that the attitude towards mental health felt misguided. The idea that just because we’re firefighters, we’re not allowed to show emotions, has never sat right with me. We are humans first, we all have families, we struggle with family stress, financial stress, work stress, just like everyone else, but it has been the culture to just deal with it, keep it inside and don’t show weakness. I want to help the human side of this profession and help others deal with that stress and get them the help they need. I think most people want the people they care about to be taken care of, whether it be a family member, friend, or coworker. That’s how I feel about members of my department and other first responders. We are all in the same boat and deal with very similar situations and I want to be part of the solution in getting them the help they need. That is why I am a Peer Supporter, to support others.”

## “QUARTERLY TOPIC”

### COPING SKILLS

Coping skills are very important in order to deal with and overcome stress. Coping skills are what you do when you have a bad day. Do you go for a run, hike, watch tv, listen to music really loud? There are many coping skills to choose from, however, some are unhealthy. Drinking excessively, taking drugs, and picking fights are amongst those unhealthy coping skills. Finding what works for you when you have a bad day is important. Maybe it's time to try something new. What about yoga? Yoga has been proven to relax the mind and body and is a popular choice when it comes to exercise. Not only do you get in shape physically, but mentally as well.

In 2016, AFR Lieutenant Miguel Tittmann created Mind.Body.Fire. Lt. Tittmann recognized that the stigma firefighters were expected to follow of holding emotions in and never releasing them was unhealthy. On a mission to stop that stigma, this yoga training course was created in hopes to improve behavioral health and build resiliency. Chronic stress and PTSD are common in the fire department. Mind.Body.Fire is a program designed to not only help, but to prevent this stress. Although curriculum is currently on standby due to the pandemic, AFR is consistent with their cadets in the meantime to help shape resilient people so they can have long, safe, successful careers. Check out Mind.Body.Fire on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plypeiGdh1E>

## Metro Peer Support Team Members

Here at PSPG, we feel that Peer Support is an essential program for all agencies. Most agencies have established their programs and are having high success rates. Others may just be in the beginning stages of developing a program. Wherever your agency is in this process, we have a team of peer supporters who meet monthly to overview what is being done, who needs help, and how programs can be improved. This Metro Peer Support Team is here to promote peer support and how it has helped many in the field of first responders. If you or your department have questions on how to build a peer support program, or how to improve one in existence, please feel free to reach out to any one of our metro members.

Jennifer Rodgers PSPG  
[j.rodgers@pspg-nm.com](mailto:j.rodgers@pspg-nm.com)

Mary Philips RRF  
[mphilips@rrnm.gov](mailto:mphilips@rrnm.gov)

Ryan Floersheim RRF  
505-896-8296  
[RFLOERSHEIM@rrnm.gov](mailto:RFLOERSHEIM@rrnm.gov)

Lt. Miguel Tittmann AFR  
505-768-9336  
[mtittmann@cabq.gov](mailto:mtittmann@cabq.gov)

Gary Chavez BCFD  
505-250-7549  
[grchavez@bernco.gov](mailto:grchavez@bernco.gov)

Sammy Sierra LLFD  
[ssierra@loslunasnm.gov](mailto:ssierra@loslunasnm.gov)

Felicia Maggard BCPD  
[fmromero@bernco.gov](mailto:fmromero@bernco.gov)

Paul Gonzales BCPD  
[pmgonzales@bernco.gov](mailto:pmgonzales@bernco.gov)

Ashley Martinez VCPD  
[ashley.martinez@co.valencia.nm.us](mailto:ashley.martinez@co.valencia.nm.us)

## 2022 PSPG Peer Support Class Schedule

**Basic Peer Support:**  
April 25th-26  
August 22nd-23rd  
November 21st-22nd

**Advanced Peer Support:**  
February 22nd-25th  
June 7th-10th  
November 6th-9th

Visit our website [www.pspg-nm.com](http://www.pspg-nm.com)  
Or call 505-888-5499 to get registered!

## Quarterly Challenge

Each edition of this newsletter will have a “Quarterly Challenge” where we challenge you to try something new. This edition’s challenge is to go and find a new healthy coping skill. It may take a bit of trial and error, but go for it! Try yoga, baking, bowling, cooking, etc. Find something new and exciting that you can have to look forward to when you need to take a break from the stresses of every day life.



Public Safety Psychology Group  
8341 Washington St NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87113  
505-888-5499  
[www.pspg-nm.com](http://www.pspg-nm.com)