

# THE COMPANY OFFICER:

## Frontline Peer Support



# Our Discussion Today

## Introduction

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## Understanding Peer Support in the Fire Service

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## The Role of Company Officers in Peer Support

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## Implementing Peer Support Strategies

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## Training and Resources for Company Officers

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## Overcoming Barriers to Peer Support

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## Q&A

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# Introduction





# Introduction

I'm Bill, and I look forward to sharing with you my vision and passion for Peer Support in the Fire Service.

- 34 Years in the Fire Service
- Retired from River Oaks Fire Department as Fire Chief
- 28 Years in the Garland Fire Department
  - Captain at Station 1 A-Shift
  - Member Peer Support Team
  - Commander of Honor Guard
- Firefighter Advisory Committee to the TCFP
- President of IAFF Local 1293
- Zone B Trustee Texas State Association of Fire Fighters
- District 11 Representative — IAFF Behavioral Health Committee
- Director — TSAFF Peer Support Team
- Director — IAFF District 11 Peer Support Team
- Master Instructor — IAFF Behavioral Health





# Introduction





# Introduction

**How many of your departments have a Peer Support Team?**

**New team in development?**

**Well established team?**

**How many of your departments utilize CISM?**

**In conjunction with Peer Support?**

**We are not using Peer Support?**

**We are working to transition to Peer Support?**

**How many of your departments equip your company officers with Mental Health Awareness training?**

**How many of your departments magically transform someone into an officer on a transfer list, equipping themselves is their responsibility.**



# Introduction

- **Importance of Mental Health in the Fire Service**
  - Historically it has been overlooked
  - Firefighter are regularly exposed to high-stress life-threatening situations
  - Culturally, discussion of issues has been discouraged, “suck it up buttercup”
  - Prioritizing mental health can create and maintain a strong resilient fire service





# Introduction

- **Role of Company Officers Beyond Operations**
  - They serve as mentors, trainers, and role models
    - They shape the culture and well-being of their crews
    - Do more than just ensure tactical efficiency and safety on the fireground
  - Second only to family, they are with the crew more than anyone else
  - Create a culture of trust and open communication
  - They are the key to building a resilient, healthy, and high-performing workforce





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# Understanding Peer Support in the Fire Service





# Understanding Peer Support in the Fire Service

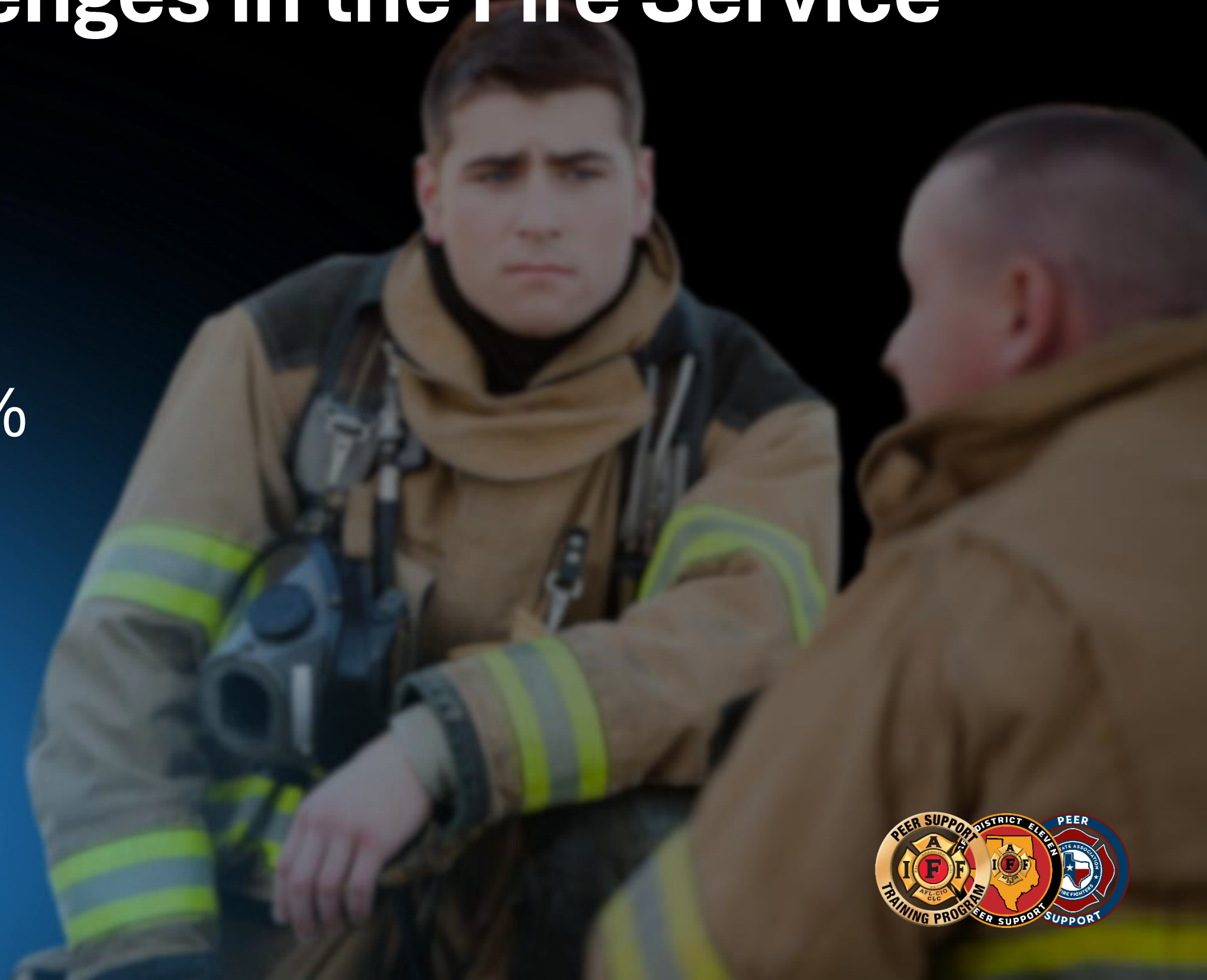
- What is Peer Support?
- Why is it important?
  - Reduces Stigma
  - Encourages Early Intervention
  - Fosters a Culture of Resilience
  - Prevents Burnout
  - Reduces PTSD
  - Improves Overall Well-being





# Understanding Peer Support in the Fire Service

- **Mental Health Challenges in the Fire Service**
  - PTSD
    - Prevalence – 20%
  - Depression
    - Prevalence – 23% - 33%
  - Anxiety
    - Prevalence - > 20%



# Understanding Peer Support in the Fire Service

- **Mental Health Challenges in the Fire Service**
  - Cumulative Stress
  - Burnout
  - Suicide
  - Stigma Around Seeking Help
    - 92% of firefighters identified stigma prevented them from seeking treatment





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# The Role of Company Officers in Peer Support





# The Role of Company Officers in Peer Support



- Being the First Line of Defense
- Identifying Signs of Stress and Trauma
- Creating a Supportive Team Culture
- Effective Communication & Active Listening Skills



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# Implementing Peer Support Strategies





# Implementing Peer Support Strategies

- Building Trust and Approachability
- Encouraging Open Conversations
- Recognizing When to Refer to Professional Help
- Handling Confidentiality and Ethical Consideration





# Implementing Peer Support Strategies

## Building Trust and Approachability

- Culture
- Lead by Example
- Check-In
- Active Listening
- Confidentiality
- Psychological Safety
- Showing Vulnerability
- It's a Marathon not a Sprint



# Implementing Peer Support Strategies

## Encouraging Open Conversations

- Supportive and Judgment Free Environment
- Lead by Example
- Check-In
- Active Listening
- Informal Settings for Conversations
- Seeking Help is a Sign of Strength
- Demonstrate Empathy, Approachability, and Genuine Concern





# Implementing Peer Support Strategies

## Recognizing When to Refer to Professional Help

- Persistent Changes in Behavior
- Signs of Severe Stress, Anxiety, or Depression
- Substance Abuse Issues
- Trauma-Related Symptoms
- Self-Harm or Suicidal Thoughts
- Decline in Job Performance and Safety Concerns



# Implementing Peer Support Strategies

## Handling Confidentiality and Ethical Considerations

- Confidentiality
- Boundaries and Role Clarity
- Avoiding Conflicts of Interest
- Non-Judgmental Approach
- Mandatory Reporting
- Emotional Well-Being of the Officer
- Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusivity





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# Training and Resources for Company Officers





# Training and Resources for Company Officers



- Peer Support Training Programs
- Mental Health & Wellness Resources
- Collaboration with Behavioral Health Professionals



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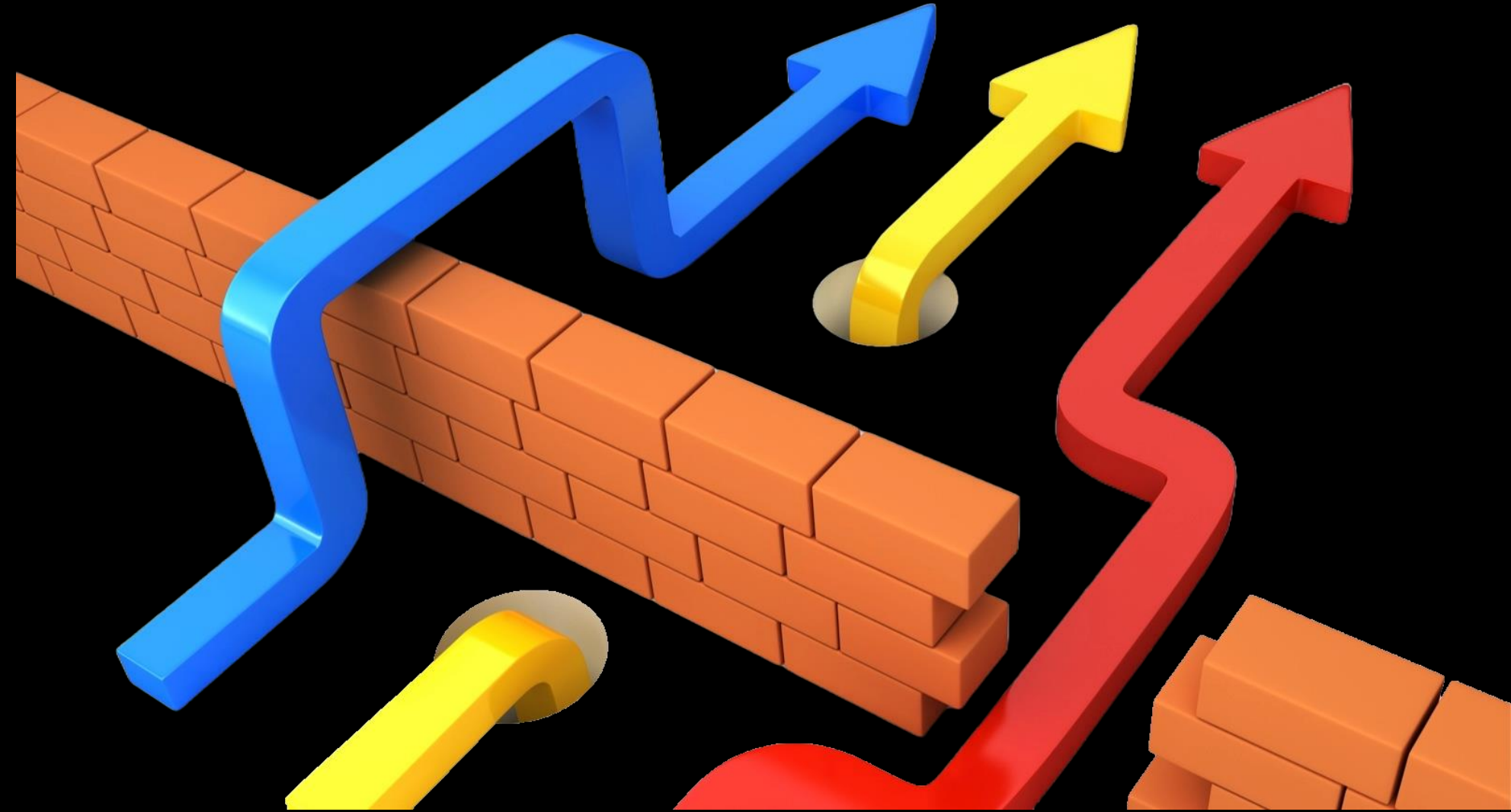


# Overcoming Barriers to Peer Support



# Overcoming Barriers to Peer Support

- Addressing the Stigma in Fire Departments
- Breaking Down Resistance to Help-Seeking
- Leadership's Role in Supporting Mental Health Initiatives





# Overcoming Barriers to Peer Support

## Addressing Stigma

- Leadership Buy-In and Example-Setting
- Education and Training
- Normalizing Mental Health Conversations
- Peer Support Programs
- Access to Confidential Resources
- Changing Language and Culture
- Post-Incident Support and Follow-Ups
- Recognizing and Rewarding Mental Wellness Advocacy
- Providing Mental Health Screenings and Wellness Programs
- Encouraging Family Involvement



# Overcoming Barriers to Peer Support

## Breaking Down Resistance to Help-Seeking



- Leadership-Driven Change
- Peer Support and Mentorship
- Confidential and Accessible Mental Health Resources
- Training and Education
- Redefining Strength and Resilience
- Integrating Mental Health Into Everyday Operations
- Family and Social Support Involvement
- Addressing Job Security Concerns





# Overcoming Barriers to Peer Support

## Leadership's Role in Supporting Mental Health Initiatives

- Set the Tone for a Supportive Culture
- Develop and Implement Mental Health Policies
- Provide Training and Education
- Support and Expand Peer Support Programs
- Ensure Confidential and Accessible Resources
- Lead Post-Incident Stress Management Efforts
- Address Resistance and Break Down Stigma
- Allocate Funding and Resources
- Collaborate with Mental Health Professionals
- Create a Long-Term Commitment to Mental Health



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