

What does a Peer Supporter do?

- Supports StGSP personnel either as groups and/or individuals suffering normal reactions following involvement in a traumatic or critical incident. The incident need not even be traumatic but significant to a person or group. This support may occur immediately after an incident or within a few days
- Allows sharing of a peer's vulnerability and other emotions without the risk of losing status or "face"
- Maintains strict confidentiality regarding any matters discussed.
- Provides a referral system for professional counselling if required
- Provides support to you at any time

A Peer Supporter may:

1. Approach you after the incident or within a few days
2. Help you look at options and solutions
3. Provide practical support and information
4. Tell you about the availability of other sources of help
5. Take time to have a coffee, a chat, or be with you when you need it
6. Provide support to the family of an affected searcher
7. Be available to searchers on site at an incident
8. Be involved in debriefing on the way home from incident
9. Assist in debriefing after an incident.
10. Provide one-on-one support over the phone or in person

A Peer Supporter will not:

- Provide counselling
- Be judgmental
- Contact anyone without your consent unless there is a clear threat to your well-being
- Make decisions for you without your consent

Peer supporters are available whenever support is needed

Team Leaders are able to provide access to peer support for you at any time:

Margaret Maxwell*	9885 3140
Shirley McInnes*	9870 2541
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Bushwalkers Search & Rescue and St.Gwinear Ski Patrol Combined Peer Support Group

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Peer Support Program

**CRITICAL INCIDENT
STRESS MANAGEMENT**

What is Critical Incident Stress?

Stress is a normal reaction that helps us function at our best. From time to time search and rescue personnel may be involved in incidents that put strain on their normal ability to cope. The peer support program is a formal structure that enables peers to provide support to co-workers. In any incident, the individual's reaction to the event is what makes the event critical, not the size or type of incident.

These peer supporters are trained to help you if you would like to talk to them. They are not psychologists but they understand that you may be affected or disturbed by some event and may require assistance in dealing with or understanding its consequences.

Many organisations have peer support groups. We now have members in StGSP who can provide this service.

Common stress reactions

Reactions differ widely. Indications include:

- sleep disturbance
- nervousness
- anxiety
- poor concentration
- physical signs such as nausea, headaches
- unexpected changes in behaviour.

Affected people may feel detached from friends and family or irritable for no apparent reason. Individuals may take varying amounts of time before these effects are felt.

Why do these reactions occur

Everyone has basic beliefs about themselves and those around them. A disturbing incident may result in a person questioning those beliefs. The incident may be a death or injury to someone with whom they can identify. Most people think disturbing events happen to "other people" and not to themselves.

The incident has the effects of unbalancing their view of the world and causing the reactions mentioned. The incident may not even result in mishap but may remind a person of past events that will create a reaction.

Some people may also believe they are being singled out for misfortune or punished for past wrongdoing. This increases the negative view they have of themselves and their situation.

How long will reactions last?

It is difficult to predict. Some people will recover within a few minutes or days while others may take weeks or longer to regain their personal control.

Are you coping?

If you feel the need for support as a result of a call out or a stressful incident contact a peer supporter as soon as possible.

How can others help?

By following a few guidelines, it is possible to be a great help to others experiencing critical incident stress.

1. Spend some time with the person concerned
2. Offer a listening ear but don't intrude on the person's privacy
3. Help with any arrangements they may require
4. Don't take their emotions personally as this is probably part of their reactions to events
5. Don't tell them "lucky the situation isn't worse" as they probably won't feel lucky
6. Help them to re-establish a normal routine as soon as possible
7. Include them in the activities of others if they are willing
8. Explain that re-occurring thoughts and dreams are not unusual and they usually decrease over time.
9. Encourage them to be involved and active some way

Individuals have the right to choose the peer they wish to contact