

## What is a Support Officer?

No one is immune from crisis. Tragedy or sudden death can strike anyone at any time. Support Officers help those left in sudden shock and grieving understand what to expect in the days and weeks ahead following a crisis. This program exists to provide care when an individual's normal psychological and biological coping mechanisms are threatened. Support Officers offer their services free of charge, regardless of a family's financial situation. However, we depend on tax-deductible individual and corporate donations to provide this level of care.

In times of crisis, the Support Officers assist first responders throughout Skagit County to provide additional support for people outside the normal scope of first responders and allow emergency workers to get back into service more quickly. The goal of this program is to care for all members of our community to help everyone survive and eventually thrive following crisis.

The Support Officers are all volunteers and are "on call" 24 hours per day, 7 days a week. They can be requested through the Skagit 911 Dispatch Center for any incident. They are also paged out automatically for:

- A working structure fire of second alarm or greater
- A Critical Incident
- Injury or Death of a Firefighter
- Any incident including the possibility of a fatality or serious injury

## Who Are We?

The *Support Officer Community Care* program was started in March 2002. Since then they have touched thousands of families in Skagit County.

**Support Officers respond about 250 times a year and donate over 800 hours of service every year.**

We are a Division of the Skagit County Fire Chief's Association. Most Support Officers are Volunteer Firefighters in their local fire

departments and work closely with all first responders throughout the county. We are trained and well versed in the operations and activities of the fire service, emergency medical services and law enforcement to provide knowledgeable, compassionate care and support for all who are involved.

Support Officers have been trained to report to, and work within, the Incident Command System. Their first contact will generally be to the Incident Commander on the scene who will then direct them to the areas of need.

The Support Officer will coordinate total victim needs and continue developing a "post-event" plan of action involving appropriate support. This may include:

- Notification to the family members
- Identify immediate needs and assist in accomplishing them.
- Notification to other support agencies (with your permission).
- Establish (as the family allows) a natural follow-through relationship.
- Make note of any problem areas that will need future attention.

They will communicate with Incident Command and advise Command of their current tasks and any special needs. All of the Support Officers have had advanced training in Crisis Intervention, Personal Counseling, and have a working knowledge of Law Enforcement procedures, Emergency Medical Response, and work closely with the local hospitals, Coroner's Office and local funeral homes.

***You will never care how much we know, until you first know how much we care. You are not alone.***

## Helpful Tips for Dealing with Grief

### Within the first 24-48 hours

Periods of strenuous physical exercise alternated with relaxation will alleviate some of the physical reactions. Make sure you remember to drink lots of water and eat regularly.

### Structure your time — Keep Busy

You are normal and are having normal reactions. Don't label yourself as crazy. The shock of sudden grief can be overwhelming. Remember that you are having normal reaction to an abnormal situation.

### Talk to People — The most Healing Medicine

Talk it out. Do not numb the pain with the use of drugs or alcohol; it will only prolong the need to deal with the loss. You don't need to complicate a crisis with a substance abuse problem.

### Reach Out — Other People Do Care

- Keep your life as normal as possible.
- Spend time with others.
- Help those around you as much as possible by sharing feelings and checking out how they're doing.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feelings with others.
- Keep a journal. Write your way through those sleepless hours.

### Do things that feel good

Don't make any big or major life changes. Make as many daily decisions as possible to give yourself a feeling of control over your life but talk with others about any decisions that may have long term effects.

You WILL make poor choices for a few weeks. So take your time and talk it out with people who know and love you.

**Support Officer Community Care** is a non-profit 501(c) 3, not a public agency. Although we work with our county's first responders, we don't receive any tax funding. We depend on individual and corporate donations to meet our budget needs.

Your donations are gratefully accepted, are tax-deductible and will be put to good use supporting individuals in crisis throughout Skagit County.

## Support Officer Community Care

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**SUPPORT OFFICERS**  
meeting the needs  
of the community  
during times of crisis