

## Surf Life Saving New Zealand – Lifesaving Policy Statement

<b>CONTENT CODE:</b> SLS020	<b>SUBJECT:</b> Critical Incident Management Procedures	
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### Background

Surf Lifeguards operate in an environment where the occurrence of traumatic events is likely. These can include many types of incidents both on the beach and in the area surrounding the Surf Club.

Members may experience many different reactions to these events, hence there is a need to offer support and ensure they are looked after in a fair and reasonable manner. Surf Life Saving New Zealand (SLSNZ) Peer Supporters are able to offer both individual and group support to Members at any stage.

### STEP 1 – Incident Occurs

The following situations may be times that a SLSNZ Peer Supporter may be of assistance to members:-

- An extraordinary or a first experience
- Death / Drowning
- Resuscitation – successful or unsuccessful
- Injury to a Patrol Member
- Rescued person known to Patrol Member
- Rescued patient with extensive injuries
- Patrol Member in danger (surf etc.)
- Strong media involvement and interest
- A large number of members are involved
- On request

### STEP 2 – Psychological First Aid

An incident that may be considered small or minor may trigger a large reaction in some members. This may be due to a previous incident they have experienced, or an accumulation of smaller incidents and life pressures that cause a build up effect. Therefore different people will have differing levels of reactivity to the same event.

### Role of the Patrol Captain

1. Carry out a Primary Review and Assessment of Patrol Members involved in incident ie:-
  - Change in personality
  - Withdrawal behaviour (most dangerous)
  - Excessive talking of incident
  - Avoidance behaviour after incident
  - Members numbed by experience
  - Members aggravated / agitated
2. Contact your CDO or RPSM or RLEM.

If a Patrol Captain or other member is concerned for themselves or others, the CDO or RPSM or RLEM should be contacted without delay and informed of the incident and those involved or affected. A list of names and contact details of CDOs or RPSM or RLEM can be found in each Patrol Operations Manual (POM). The SLSNZ staff member will then contact and appoint (in consultation with the Regional Programmes & Services Manager) a SLSNZ Peer supporter to travel to the location and assist in the defusing process.

### 3. Defusing

Defusing is an opportunity for the SLSNZ Peer Supporter to facilitate a group discussion for the members who are involved. This does not replace good support or professional counselling. Defusing is a short sharp session that takes place within a few hours of an event, is less formal and structured than a debriefing session and aims to stabilise the affected persons.

This session needs to be implemented as soon as possible after the incident has occurred to ensure that members' needs are well looked after. A session which enables the group to talk about the incident is most beneficial in a small group of members – and best with the all those involved in the incident in attendance.

#### **Defusing Guidelines**

Ensure that when conducting a defusing session it is seen to be an appropriate and therapeutic intervention. If possible try to gain an understanding of the expectations from the session.

The setting needs to be conducted in a quiet and comfortable area that is free from interruptions and disturbances. Ensure that there are no telephones – in particular mobile phones. Refreshments should be provided at the end of the session, preferably non-alcoholic.

Try to gain all possible information about the event and be prepared for the session. Around an hour can be put aside for a group of around 6 - 8 people (ideally two peer supporters). The session is very much as sharing process. It is essential that all members approach the session with a supportive, understanding and approached with a positive look. It is essential that there is no atmosphere of criticism or blame for the process to be beneficial to all members.

#### **STEP 3 – Debriefing**

*NB! Psychological Debriefing is carried out for SLSNZ by EAP Services. A SLSNZ Regional Manager will organise this session.*

Psychological Debriefing aims to reduce the impact of a crisis event, as well as accelerating the normal recovery process. The differing forms of debriefing intervention include on scene support (limited and brief), defusing (short and unstructured) or debriefing sessions which is a structured group discussion that is designed to put an event into perspective for those involved. Only those involved with the incident, a SLSNZ Peer Supporter and the Facilitator (EAP) should be present.

Psychological Debriefing is facilitated by a health professional assisted by the peer support officer. The debriefing session is very much as sharing process. It is essential that all members approach the session with a supportive, understanding and approached with a positive look. It is essential that there is no atmosphere of criticism or blame for the process to be beneficial to all members.

#### **Benefits of Debriefing**

- Stress reduction
- Chance to ventilate pent-up emotions
- Trigger to deal with past events
- Opportunity for stress reduction education
- Emotional reassurance
- Forecasting of symptoms that may materialise later
- Normalisation of reactions
- Improve group cohesion
- Reduce potential for future tensions
- An opportunity for screening and referral

#### **Post Debrief Follow-up**

After the debriefing session has taken place, appropriate documentation needs to be fulfilled and an assessment of members' state assessed. This includes their immediate safety - ensuring they are in a suitable state to drive home etc. This is done in consultation with the SLSNZ Peer Supporter and / or the District Manager.

Members who were involved in any stage of the debriefing process will need to be contacted approximately two weeks after the initial session for a follow up assessment. The SLSNZ Peer Supporter 'will check in' with the Member(s) and gauge whether professional counselling needs to be sought in regards to what they have experienced and how they are coping. (Referral)

The Patrol Captain and / or Club Captain needs to alert and re-contact the SLSNZ Peer Supporter if any similar events occur to the same individuals. This is to ensure that retriggering and accumulation of traumatic events does not occur

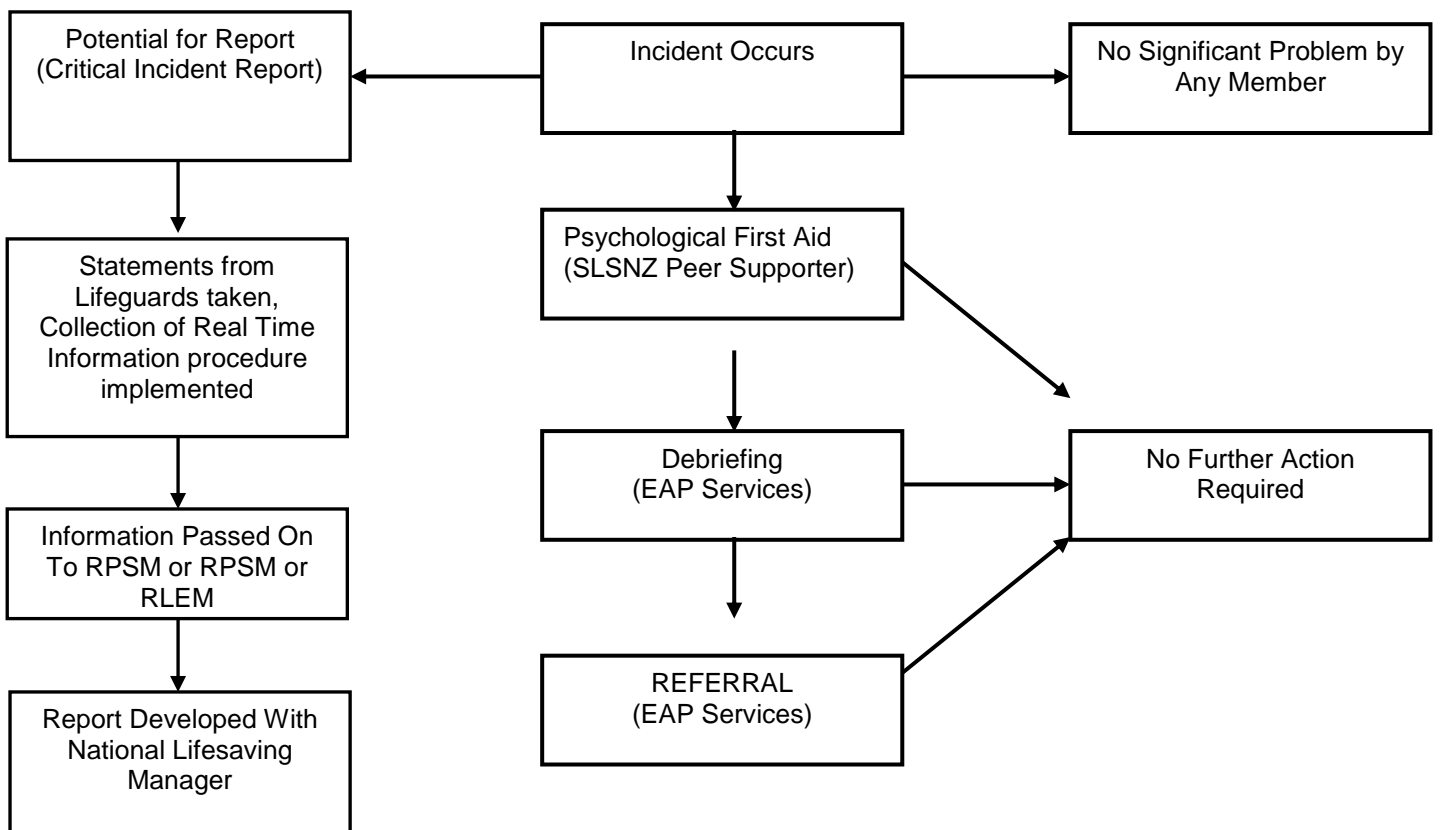
**STEP 4 - Referral**

Members may need to be referred to a trained councillor for follow up assistance in dealing with the incident. The SLSNZ Peer Supporter may need to contact the Counsellor and brief them on the situation, keeping all member details confidential.

The SLSNZ Peer Supporter will need to ensure that a confidential, undisclosed report is produced for distribution to SLSNZ Peer Support Programme Coordinator.

SLSNZ plans to only collect the data from these forms which are completely confidential between the SLSNZ Peer Supporter and the Member. The statistics on the form are collated to assist in monitoring the success of the programme as well as assist with funding.

**SLSNZ Critical Incident Management Procedures**



## **Critical Incident Reports**

SLSNZ intends to investigate and make available to the Police and Coroner reports on all drowning within the coastal environment which surf lifeguards are utilised. As the expert body in this area it is hoped we will be able to assist in the identification of contributing factors and appropriate risk management/mitigation measures.

### **Step 1 – Incident Occurs**

SLSNZ staff are notified and Critical Incident Debrief (CID) procedures are implemented.

### **Step 2 – Collection of Information**

The Peer Supporter or SLSNZ staff member or appointed person is tasked with collecting:

1. Lifeguard statements
2. Contacting SurfCom to collect 'live information' (real time data)
3. Site photos if able
4. Patrol Captain report forms
5. Incident report forms

Information is sent to the Regional Programmes & Services Manager or Regional Lifesaving Services and Education Manager

### **Step 3 – Report Development**

The RPSM or RLEM and National Lifesaving Services and Education Manager bring all SLSNZ information and recommendations and submit the report to the Coroner.

## **Further Information and definitions**

### **Trauma**

For the purpose of this policy, a traumatic event is defined as being physically and emotionally overwhelming ie where emotion overwhelms rational or logical thought processes. Trauma can disrupt the basic personal belief systems of the survivor – including trust, security, predictability and controllability.

People may experience a range of differing reactions to traumatic events including shock, fear, anger, helplessness, sadness and shame. These are all completely normal reactions to an event that may be considered extraordinary.

Other effects may include tension, sleep disturbances, dreams and nightmares, fearfulness, intrusive memories and feelings, numbing, irritability, depression, social withdrawal, physical sensations, mental reactions and self-medication. Usually these reactions are only experienced for a few weeks. By utilising the support offered by a SLSNZ Peer Supporter, a Member can rapidly decrease the time it takes to come to terms with their experience.

### **What is Peer Support?**

Peer Support is a Member Protection Programme where people within SLSNZ are trained to assist Members who are affected by highly stressful events or have been subjected to stressors that are having adverse effects on their daily coping and operational functioning.

### **Who are SLSNZ Peer Supporters?**

A SLSNZ Peer Supporter is a person who shares the same or similar work environment and provides first contact support to Members, referring on anyone who requires more specialised assistance. These people will have received specialised training in stress management.

The SLSNZ Peer Support program is a confidential process, which means not disclosing personal or identifying information, except in very rare circumstances where it is thought a person may cause harm to themselves or others. In this instance immediate support from an appropriate source should be obtained. In all other situations before any information is disclosed, permission must be obtained from the individual concerned.

The SLSNZ Peer Support process assists people to set realistic expectations and develop effective coping strategies to manage the impact of exposure to stressful events. The goal is to return Members to pre-incident levels of wellness and performance as soon as possible and without long term detrimental effect. This is achieved by providing knowledge and a series of strategies to prevent and alleviate the impact of stress associated with traumatic events.

## Role of a SLSNZ Peer Supporter

SLSNZ Peer Supporters must have received appropriate training, organised by SLSNZ and have these skills updated by attending a refresher course annually. SLSNZ Peer Supporters are to be the first point of call in the event of an incident, and are accountable to the District Manager and SLSNZ Peer Support Coordinator.

Following exposure to stressful events the Peer Support Officer may;

- Provide initial support to members and their 'Significant Others' to alleviate symptoms and encourage a prompt return to independent functioning and coping in their lives
- Assist members to understand the impact of a stressful event
- Educate members on stress reactions and natural coping mechanisms and strategies they possess
- Assist in the referral process to health professionals for further counselling for members when required
- Play a role in the organising and staging of formal psychological debriefing sessions for effected members when deemed necessary

The types of interventions employed by the SLSNZ Peer Supporters may include, but are not limited to;

- Psychological First Aid
- Defusing
- Family / Significant other support
- Organising and assisting in Psychological Debriefing
- Follow-up / Referral

## GLOSSARY

<b>Psychological First Aid</b>	This is comfort and support offered immediately to people who have been exposed to a traumatic event. Because personal reactions to trauma differ widely the supporter should be able to adapt responses to the needs of the traumatised person.
<b>Defusing</b>	A shortened version of the debriefing, which should take 20-45 minutes to complete. Should be applied within as close to possible after the incident (Max 24 hours) with small groups of 6-8 people.
<b>Debriefing</b>	A structured group process designed to mitigate the stress of a stressful event. It is designed to hasten the normal recovery process of a homogenous population who are experiencing normal reactions to an acutely distressing event.