



APSA Peer Support FAQs

What kind of help does the peer supporter provide?

Peer support is psychological first aid provided by a colleague rather than a mental health provider. Research has shown that when faced with acutely stressful workplace events, such as a bad outcome or medical error, physicians want support from a colleague. As a peer supporter, your colleague is there to help you process your reactions to the event and access your own coping strategies.

Peer support is not therapy or expert opinion on the case. Peer supporters are volunteers.

The conversation is confidential (see below regarding legal caveat).

How many sessions will be provided?

In general, peer support is expected to be once or twice for a given event. If you as a peer want further support, the peer supporter can help you think about what further resources you may be able to access, depending on your needs and the circumstances.

How will someone be matched with a supporting peer?

Since all of the peer supporters in the APSA program are pediatric surgeons, you will be matched with someone from our team of trained, volunteer peer supporters who is available to provide the support. Alternatively, if you would like, we can give you a list of peer supporters and you can choose someone from that list.

If a lawyer tells me not to discuss the case with anyone, can I still use the program?

Yes, with the understanding that any conversations you have with anyone about a case may be subject to a subpoena. Lawyers should, and likely will, tell you not to speak with anyone about the event outside of a peer protected setting such as M & M or an RCA. **This is to prevent the following scenario should the event result in a lawsuit:**

The plaintiff's attorney asks you if you ever discussed the event with anyone and you say that yes, you discussed it with a colleague in your organization. They then subpoena the colleague who states that yes, you discussed the event with them. The attorney then asks what opinion the colleague offered about the event. The colleague opines negatively on how you handled the case.

In general, lawyers are not looking to find someone such as a volunteer peer supporter who provided emotional support. Although there is a theoretical risk that a peer supporter may be subpoenaed, in practice we understand this risk to be minimal. And if a peer supporter were subpoenaed, the program is designed so that the peer supporter would not have any notes to refer to and would not have discussed the case with you from the vantage point of trying to analyze the care. Risk managers, risk insurers and defense attorneys across the country whose organizations are using peer support are supportive of these programs.



Peer Support ~ Surgeon Wellness