

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT (CISM)

Purpose:

The purpose of this Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) procedure is to provide intervention by CISM trained members within 24 hours of a critical incident. This is to minimize stress-related injury to district members directly involved. The procedure identifies application of “Critical Incident Defusing” and “Critical Incident Debriefing”.

Definition:

CISM Trained Member – A member of the CISM team that has completed appropriate training and has been assigned to the CISM Team by the district Chaplain, with concurrence of the Chief.

Background:

Research and experience show that immediate, focused professional intervention can, and does, significantly reduce the negative effects of exposure to traumatic events. An incident does not have to be a disaster of major proportions for personnel to experience the effects of a traumatic event. Proper intervention assists personnel in recognition of stress symptoms and enhances their ability to deal with distress.

The CISM team’s function is to provide support and professional intervention to mitigate the impact of stress reactions on district members. This should follow any situation which causes them to experience unusually strong emotional reactions having the potential to interfere with their ability to function either at the scene or at a later time.

CISM Process:

Company officers are responsible for proper identification and recognition of significant incidents that may qualify for recommended intervention. In recognizing “critical incidents”, the determining factor is not the incident itself, but the reaction of our personnel to the incident. When an incident is identified as critical, a request for debriefing consideration should be made as soon as possible. CISM trained members have the authority and responsibility of ensuring these services are provided.

- A. Initial Defusing: Defusing is primarily informational and shall be conducted shortly after the incident. The purpose is to offer support and information, allow venting of reactions, establish a need for a formal debriefing, and stabilize members so they can go home or return to service. Defusing shall include an update and status report on the incident

and related injuries, as well as a brief review of stress-related symptoms and techniques for stress relief.

Objectives:

1. Allow participants to tell what happened.
2. Allow for freedom of discussion on the “worst part” of participants.
3. Allow for venting of reactions to the incident.
4. Offer information on possible signs and symptoms of stress that participants may or may not experience and information on what they can do about it.

B. Debriefing: Critical incident debriefing is not a critique of district operations or personal performance at the incident. Performance issues will not be discussed during the debriefing. It is a confidential, non-judgmental discussion of the involvement, thoughts, reactions, and feelings resulting from the incident. It serves to mitigate the normal stress impacts resulting from exposure to a critical incident through venting of feelings and education.

Several types of debriefings may be conducted depending upon the circumstances of a particular incident. They may be conducted on an individual basis or, more typically, in small groups of not more than 20 members.

1. Formal Debriefing Meetings:
 - a. Conducted within 72 hours of incident.
 - b. Confidential, non-evaluative discussion of involvement, thoughts, and feeling resulting from the incident.
 - c. Discussion of possible stress-related symptoms.
2. Follow-up Debriefing:
 - a. Conducted weeks or months after incident.
 - b. Concerned with delayed or prolonged stress symptoms.
 - c. May be done informally.
3. Individual confidential consultation: Available at any time, as needed.

Objectives:

1. Provide stress education.
2. Provide a mechanism for venting of feelings before they can do harm.
3. Provide reassurance that what participants are experiencing is normal.
4. Forewarn those who have not been impacted that they MAY be impacted later and inform them of ways to deal with it.
5. Reduce the fallacies of “uniqueness” and abnormality”.
6. Provide positive interaction between groups.
7. Screen those who may not be ready to return to service.
8. Refer those requesting or requiring additional services.

The Critical Incident:

District response to incidents that expose members to unusually strong emotional involvement, which has the potential to interfere with their ability to function either at the scene or later, may qualify for “Critical Incident Defusing” and/or “Critical Incident Debriefing”.

- A. The following are examples of incidents that will require debriefing to be offered:
 - 1. Serious injury or unexpected death of a district member or other emergency personnel.
 - 2. Mass casualty incidents.
- B. The following are examples of incidents that may require debriefing:
 - 1. Serious injury or death of a civilian resulting from district operations (e.g. auto accident, etc.).
 - 2. Death or violence to a child.
 - 3. Loss of life following extraordinary and prolonged expenditure of physical and emotional energy during rescue efforts by district members.
 - 4. An incident in which the circumstances were so unusual or the sights and sounds so distressing as to produce a high level of immediate or delayed emotional reaction.
 - 5. Incidents that attract extremely unusual or critical news media coverage.
 - 6. Incidents that are charged with profound emotion.
 - 7. Personal identification with the victim or the circumstances.

On-Site Management/Defusing:

- A. Minimizing member’s exposure to both physical and visual contact results in fewer stress-related problems. Command should reduce this exposure by limiting physical and visual contact to only those members necessary to mitigate the emergency. Company officers, command officers, CISM trained members, and base hospital coordinators are responsible for identifying/recognizing significant incidents that may qualify for defusing/debriefing.
- B. On-site evaluation and defusing by a district member trained in CISM should be initiated for incidents such as those described in “The Critical Incident” as soon as time and circumstance permit, if indicated. In such situations, CISM trained members can observe, watch for acute reactions, provide support, encouragement, and consultation, and be available to help members deal with stress reactions. CISM trained members should be considered a resource available to command for assignment, as needed.

Activation of the Debriefing Process:

When an incident is identified as a “Critical Incident” that causes or has the potential to cause an adverse impact of personnel involved (as described in “The Critical Incident”), a request for debriefing should be made as soon as possible. Any command officer may initiate the debriefing process. This will be done from the scene by contacting PSCC. Company officers whose crew may have experienced a traumatic event may also initiate the debriefing process. Any personnel who recognize the need for activation may contact the Shift Officer. The Shift Officer will investigate and contact PSCC, if indicated, which will then activate the debriefing team.

Note: Only personnel directly involved in the incident will be permitted to participate in the CISM process. Participation in the CISM process is strictly voluntary.

Location:

Defusing/debriefing should be conducted in a location that provides ample space, privacy, and freedom from distractions.

The Debriefing Team:

The debriefing team will consist of professionals in stress-related counseling, as well as CISM team members. This team is typically pre-established as a group. The district team member’s role in the debriefing process will be to assist and support the professional counselors, as necessary. Any follow-up care will be administered under contract with the district.

Relieving Members from Duty:

Circumstances of a critical incident may result in a recommendation that those individuals or companies be taken out of service. Decisions may include returning members to their station(s) in an out-of-service status and allowing crew(s) to participate in a defusing. The Shift Officer shall determine what further actions are to be taken. In making this determination, the Shift Officer may confer with mental health professionals and/or CISM trained members. Appropriate steps should be taken to notify spouse, roommates, or family of the member’s status and to provide direction on how they can best assist the member through this difficult time. Under no circumstances is such action to be construed as negative toward the member. Members taken out of service are to be viewed and treated with the same consideration as anyone with an “on the job” injury.

Responsibilities:

The senior district chaplain will oversee the CISM program. The chaplain may appoint a qualified person as team leader to assist with CISM situations in his/her absence. Chaplains will take necessary training and continuing education to keep

abreast of changes in the field and availability of resources. Chaplains will train district members in CISM. The district will be responsible for funding the program and insuring confidentiality.

Confidentiality:

In all cases, the content of all interventions will be strictly confidential.