

What is a Critical Incident?

Sometimes Incident Personnel experience stress reactions because of a particularly traumatic event, or because of the cumulative effect of stressful events. Incidents that cause stress are called Critical Incidents. Critical Incidents may cause unusually strong emotional reactions and could interfere with ability to work safely or function normally.

Examples may be:

**Personal traumatic injury/near miss
Family member severe illness or death
Aviation accident
Shelter deployment
Motor vehicle accident
Disaster recovery work
Co-worker critical injury or death
Incidents perceived as threatening
(both physically and psychologically)**

What are common reactions?

Physical:

**Fatigue
Insomnia or sleeping more
Nightmares
Chills
Nausea
Appetite changes
Restlessness**

**Mental: Confusion
Trouble concentrating
Trouble making decisions
Forgetfulness
Continually thinking of the event
Feeling like the event is happening again**

**Emotional: New fears, Depression
Feelings of guilt
Irritability, anger
Being easily frustrated
Feeling emotionally numb
Feeling helpless or anxious**

Results of Traumatic Stress

Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) is specifically designed to reduce the negative impact of the critical incident and to accelerate recovery to normal from an abnormal event. CISM helps prevent depression and long term psychological problems. Critical Incident Stress can significantly impact emotional and physical well-being. CISM support is considered most effective 24-72 hours after the critical incident.

HRSP Role in CISM

The HRSP assists incident personnel and the Incident Management Team (IMT) with human resource related issues and concerns.
HRSP role during a critical incident:

Serves as the point of contact for facilitating CISM.

Conducts defusing (listening process) with affected personnel and makes recommendations to the IMT for CISM support.

HRSP ensures logistical support to impacted personnel—telephones, meeting places, need for clergy, etc.

When CISM resources are needed, the HRSP serves as the liaison between the IMT and CISM resources.

The Critical Incident Stress Debriefing

A debriefing includes all personnel involved in the incident within the incident, plus 2-3 CISM Team members who serve as group leaders. No one is pressured to speak, but everyone is asked to attend to support the entire group. After the debriefing, CISM Team members are available to visit privately with group members as needed. A debriefing usually takes 1-3 hours. It is about personal and emotional responses, not the facts of the incident. The meeting is not a legal inquiry, an investigation, or blaming in any way. No notes are taken and recording devices are not

allowed. The discussion is private, however, participants are reminded not to say anything they would not want brought forward in a possible investigation. As needed, team members offer referral information to anyone needing follow-up counseling.

CISM Fire Peer Teams

In many geographic areas, CISM Fire Peer Teams are now available. They are led by personnel with strong fire backgrounds. Mental health professionals who have had experience working with fire personnel, are also part of the team and are available to oversee and advise. Due to the unique culture of fire and incident management, peer support team members help to establish trust and increase the effectiveness of CISM.

Benefits of CISM

CISM services are crisis intervention techniques; they are not mental health therapy. CISM helps to prevent mental and emotional repercussions. Participants reduce their stress levels and experience less stress symptoms. Factual information about CISM, given by the CISM Team members helps fill in knowledge gaps and provides more perspective on the incident.

For More Information:

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