



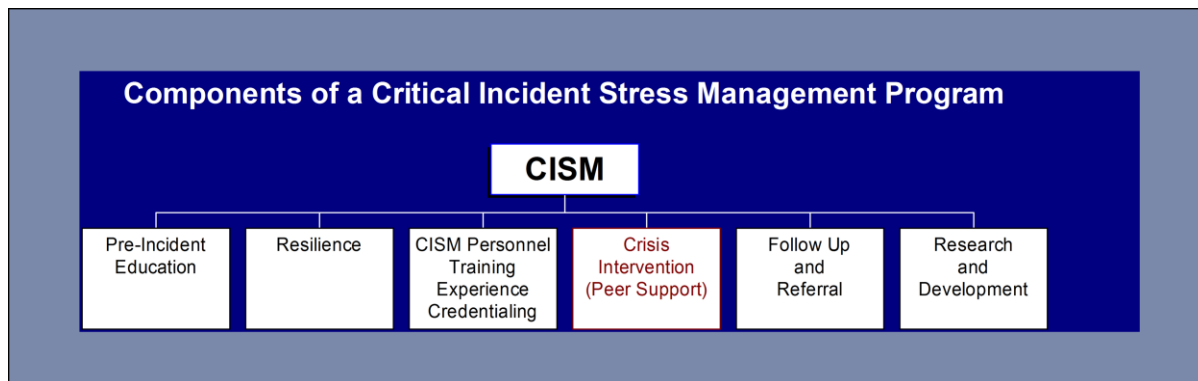
# BLM Critical Incident Stress Management

FAQs CISM

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Q. What is the Critical Incident stress Management Program?

A. CISM program is **comprehensive**, in that it: promotes **pre-event stress and crisis management education**, planning and policy development, as well as training and preparation for the management of traumatic stress through resilience. The program also contains a set of **crisis intervention** tactics which have proven to be helpful when applied by **trained and qualified** CISM personnel at the right time, under the right circumstances and for the right individuals or groups after they've experienced a critical incident. The CISM program continually seeks out follow-up care and referral resources and continues to improve through research and development.



### Q. What is the purpose of CISM and where did it come from?

A. CISM is a peer-driven stress management program that combines pre-crisis preparation, stress education and post-event response to help people recover more quickly from abnormally stressful job-related incidents and trauma, collectively known as "critical incidents." CISM does not replace professional counseling and other services available to employees through Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), but rather compliments that program. CISM concepts were first developed during the 1970s and then widely applied in the 1980s for police, firefighters, Emergency Medical responders and other emergency personnel. The success of the program grew across the nation as other agencies sought help for their employees that were dealing with life changing stressful events. Today, CISM is accepted and used worldwide.

### **Q. What is a critical incident?**

**A.** A critical incident is any unexpected, traumatic event that affects an individual's feelings of personal safety, their ability to perform daily activities, and their ability to concentrate on their normal job duties. Simply put, a critical incident is a traumatic event (or perceived life-threatening event) that has sufficient power to overwhelm an individual's ability to cope. A critical incident **is not defined by the incident itself**; it is defined by individuals and/or an organization's **reaction to what occurred**. In a career where you perform hazardous duties and you risk personal safety as part of the job:

A critical incident is **the one** that disturbs the balance between thinking and emotions; because they are so **unexpected and upsetting, they can manifest notable cognitive, physical, behavioral, and emotional outcomes, even in experienced, well-trained, and resilient people**.

### **Q. What are some signs or symptoms of critical incident stresses?**

**A.** Stress reactions activate physical and mental defense systems. "Fight or flight" is a stress response closely associated with survival. It generates effective actions in the face of danger. Resistance and resilience to stress help restore people to normal function. Certain severe traumatic events, however, threaten both the physical and mental health of those affected. An unusually intense stress response may interfere with the body's immune system, rational thinking and one's emotions. Severe stress impairs a person's ability to respond to further challenges. Extreme stress disrupts performance and threatens health. It may leave permanent psychological scars if it is not managed carefully. Individuals react differently to critical incidents and they may or may not experience some or all of the following symptoms. If you do recognize any of the symptoms listed below, don't worry. Your own reactions are normal and very appropriate in response to your critical incident experience.

- Re-experiencing the event
- Flashbacks
- Nightmares
- Difficulty sleeping
- Exhaustion or hyperactivity
- Guilt
- Depression or anxiety
- Anger or irritability
- Marital or family problems
- Numbing, withdrawal, or isolation
- Decline in job performance
- Memory loss or confusion
- Loss of appetite and/or nausea
- Uncontrollable emotions

### **Q. What is Stress?**

**A.** Stress is the "wear and tear" our bodies experience as we adjust to our continually changing environment. Stress has physical and emotional effects on us and can create positive or negative feelings. As a positive influence, stress can help compel us to action; it can result in a new awareness and an exciting new perspective. As a negative influence, it can result in feelings of distrust, rejection, and anger. These can lead to health problems including headaches, upset stomach, rashes, insomnia, ulcers, high blood pressure, heart disease, and strokes. In adjusting to different circumstances, stress will help or hinder us depending on how we react to it.

**Q. Can CISM eliminate stress from my life?**

**A.** No. The goal of the CISM program is not to eliminate stress, but to learn how to manage it and how to use it to help us. Insufficient stress acts as a depressant and may leave us feeling bored or dejected; on the other hand, excessive stress may leave us feeling "tied up in knots." What we need to do is find the optimal level of stress that will individually motivate but not overwhelm each of us.

**Q. How can I request a CISM intervention?**

**A.** The Agency Administrator is responsible for identifying an event as a critical incident. The Agency Administrator is the highest ranking agency line officer with direct responsibility for the location of the incident/personnel involved in the incident. Critical Incident Peer Support Groups are mobilized through the normal dispatch channels (the dispatch/coordination system). Requests for CISM services are made to the appropriate Geographic Area Coordination Center. BLM States in Geographic Areas who are signatory to Coordinating Groups who charter a formal interagency CISM program utilizing the ICISF model may work directly with the CISM Coordinator for that Geographic Area (i.e., Southwest, Great Basin). BLM States that do not have access to a formal interagency ICISF CISM program will make requests for CISM services through the National Critical Incident Response Program Manager. CISM Coordinators providing services for BLM employees must be credentialed in strategic response to crisis.

**Q. What is the timing for requesting an intervention?**

**A.** Crisis intervention processes generally start no sooner than 48-72 hours after an incident. Crisis intervention services can also be provided within a few weeks or longer depending on the incident. It is important to allow time for affected individuals to disengage operationally, and re-connect with family or friends. It usually takes a few days after an incident has occurred for stress symptoms to begin to show and a person may not realize they need CISM until they have begun to experience stress symptoms. Once this occurs individuals are typically emotionally ready to benefit from peer support.

**Q. Who are the Peer Supporters?**

**A.** Critical Incident Peer Support (CIPS) Group member is a highly respected and trusted person from any of the different organizations or specific functions within the national fire program or other disciplines. A Peer Support Group member is someone who has volunteered to take the training required to support impacted individuals with information and assist Licensed Mental Health Care Clinicians (Trauma Specialists) in the delivery of various crisis intervention protocols. crisis management briefing, one-one-on support, debriefing, etc.).

**Q. What do Peer Supporters do?**

**A.** Peer Supporters understand the stress of the work environment. They want to listen and be of help to peers who need or want the opportunity to talk. Peer Supporters value trust, and they respect the need for anonymity and confidentiality. Communication between a Peer Supporter and a peer is considered confidential, except for those matters that involve a life threat or a violation of the law. Peer supporters can travel to the fire line, spike camp and other remote locations.

**Q. Counseling vs. a Peer Supporter – what is the difference?**

**A.** Counseling is therapy and can only be conducted by a licensed mental health professional such as a psychologist or social worker. Peer Supporters are trained to practice emotional first aid where those involved in a critical incident are given the opportunity to talk about what happened from their perspective and how the incident is affecting them personally.

Peer Supporters are not to be used as a replacement for this professional care and should never function independently. This would put them outside of the scope and boundaries of competence they've been trained for which is to provide immediate, supervised, incident specific and supportive crisis intervention through the BLM's established Standard of Care. Critical Incident Peer Support Groups as well as Critical Incident Stress Management Coordinators (CISM Coordinators) providing crisis intervention services for BLM personnel will be trained and credentialed by the International Critical Incident Stress Foundations (ICISF) and follow BLM requirements for certification and formal ethics, conduct, and confidentiality policy.

**Q. What types of support do peer supporters provide or don't provide?**

**A.** Peer supporters are trained to do initial crisis intervention for many types of problems. Some of the more common issues are work-related, such as dealing with the emotional reactions after a line of duty death, serious accident or injury, suicide, witnessing a gruesome accident, especially those involving children, etc. When peer supporters identify that additional or professional counseling is needed, appropriate referrals are made through Employee Assistance Program (EAP). If and when several employees are adversely affected by the same event, the CISM program offers group interventions.

What Critical Incident Peer Support does not share with the field of crisis intervention is the range of the populations served. For example, CIPS does not focus on primary victims such as vehicle accident victims, burn victims, primary injured personnel who are hospitalized, program mediation or issues with work place morale, unexpected death of a co-worker, substance abusers, victims of sexual assault or victims all of whom are typically served through various other crisis intervention programs.

**Q. How is the CISM program connected with EAP?**

**A.** The Peer Support Program can be seen as the connecting link between the employees and EAP services. The Peer Support Program and Employee Assistance Programs often complement each other to help employees, especially for follow-up care after crisis interventions services. EAP information and education resources are provided following crisis interventions for follow up care. EAP services are almost always recommended by Peer Support Groups for any needed follow-up care.

**Q. What are some specific examples of how the CISM Peer Support process and the Employee Assistance Program are different?**

**A.** Peer support is an immediate, short term intervention while the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a professional service that provides counseling, coaching, and grief support, consultation, financial and legal information free of charge to employees. While EAP services include response to crisis and trauma, EAP cannot provide peer support which is the foundation of the ICISF intervention models we utilize. The demographics of employees and their willingness to use an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) are considerably different than wildland fire personnel, especially younger firefighters most often seen by our current peer support program.

**Q. How can the program benefit management?**

**A.** CISM represents a powerful, yet cost-effective approach to crisis response. It is adapted and used effectively in a variety of business and industrial settings. As critical incidents cover the spectrum of distressing human experiences, swift and early preventive mitigation of traumatic impact can serve management by improving an employee's general sense of well-being, productivity, attendance, and long-term costs associated with Workman's Compensation benefits.

**Q. Who can become a peer supporter?**

**A.** Effective peer supporters typically possess a range of skills and competencies across key knowledge domains. Commonly desired traits are superb communication and listening skills, ability to bring organization to chaos, demonstrated leadership ability or potential, ability to stay calm under pressure, and previous experience or training. It is important that individuals be chosen who have experienced critical incidents and *recovered successfully from them*. It is also important to have a variety of experience represented so that the proper peer supporter can be matched with the incident or groups involved. There are desirable personal qualities such as maturity, good judgment, empathy, teamwork, and personal and professional credibility. Application forms may be obtained from the respective Geographic Area CISM Coordinator or the National Critical Incident Program Manager.

**Q. What kind of feedback has been received for CISM?**

**A.** The fact that more and more requests for Critical Incident Stress Management or Critical Incident Peer Support services are being received and responded to indicates that the concept has reached the threshold of "acceptance." The skepticism and hostility towards "CISM" seems to not only be decreasing but has been embraced and supported by some of the most "hard core" and oldest icons within the wildland fire community.

Each year, several geographic areas recruit and retain personnel across all generations both former and current to attend Peer and Group Support Training and participate in the program. Many of those who participate have been recipients of CISM or Peer Support services themselves and found it to be hugely beneficial.

**Q. What other agencies are using CISM?**

**A.**

- American/International Red Cross
- National Park Service
- National Park Service (NPS)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)
- U.S. Forest Service
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Military
- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
- U.S. Department of Defense (Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard)
- Various police and emergency management response agencies