

## Southwest Area Interagency Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Program

### Definitions

**Critical Incident:** Unusually challenging events that have the potential to create significant human distress and can overwhelm the usual coping mechanisms of an individual or a group. They are typically sudden, powerful events, which are outside the range of ordinary human experiences.

**Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM):** A comprehensive, phase sensitive, integrated multi-component approach to crisis intervention. CISM is a coordinated program of tactics that are linked and blended together to alleviate the reactions to traumatic experiences.

**Critical Incident Peer Support Program:** A coordinated support program bringing together trained individuals in CISM and communication techniques. It is a focused approach to ensure CISM trained personnel are available truly as *peers* to assist individuals or groups in crisis. Peers can bring a level of trust and knowledge when dealing with individuals in crisis as it relates to the work environment.

**Critical Incident Peer Group:** A group of individuals activated by the Critical Incident Peer Support Program Coordinator. This group consists of a leader and one or more members. Often, a designated member will assess the situation and associated response to the traumatic event, and then recommend to the Program Coordinator what the Peer Group make-up should be.

**Crisis Management Briefing (CMB):** This is a structured meeting designed to provide information about the incident, control rumors, educate about symptoms of distress, inform about basic stress management, and identify resources available for continued support, if desired. The goals of a CMB include providing factual information, instill a sense of leadership, reduce chaos, and enhance credibility. The CMB is designed to assist those involved directly or indirectly with the incident and is not intended for the media.

**Defusing:** A 3-step *small group* crisis intervention tool designed to assist a homogeneous group of people *after* an exposure to the same significant traumatic event. The purpose of a defusing is to mitigate the impact of the event, accelerate the recovery process, and assess the need for additional services.

**Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD):** A specific *small group* crisis intervention tool designed to assist a homogeneous group of people *after* an exposure to the same significant traumatic event. It is not a stand-alone process and should only be used as part of an integrated package of interventions within the Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) program. CISD's generally occur within the first 72 hours after the critical incident.

## Southwest Area CISM Common Understanding

The Southwest Area Critical Incident Peer Groups are trained to assist their fellow employees by listening without judgment while maintaining confidentiality. They are also trained in positive coping strategies for stress, and to help others validate their thoughts and emotions about an overwhelming trauma or loss. Membership on these teams will vary depending on peer availability, team make-up, and the responses to the event that has occurred.

Every event and personnel affected is different; however, the basic principles and type of support our Peer Groups provide is consistent. A *Common Understanding* is vital to ensure success; but more importantly, ensure the ultimate goal of providing the affected personnel the tools and coping strategies to make them successful in dealing with the event. This provides an overall structure to how our Peer Groups operate and gives insight for new members, as well as Agency Administrators on what to expect.

Qualified Peer Group Members will have training in Individual and Group Crisis Intervention which is usually available every year in at least one Geographic Area. The Southwest can use personnel who have not had this training; however, it is in a “trainee” capacity only with the following guidelines:

- The Trainee must be agreed upon by the CISM Peer Group Leader and SWCC.
- The Trainee must have attended/observed a refresher session or been a participant on SWA CISM Meetings/Conference Calls.
- The Trainee participation must be in a group setting only and is not to be conducting One-on-One Peer sessions.
- The Trainee must plan to attend the Individual and Group Crisis Intervention Course when feasibly possible.

Southwest Area Peer Group activations are coordinated between the Agency Administrator, Peer Group Leader, and SWCC. The following is a basic structure that SWA Peer Groups follow as directed by the Leader.

- **Pre-Response**  
Many of the logistical details are worked out and information is shared regarding what happened, the Peer Group is formed, and overall planning and organization occurs.
- **Agency Administrator In-briefing**  
The Leader meets with the Agency Administrator and additional details are discussed to better prepare for the upcoming Crisis Management Briefing, Defusing, and/or One-on-One's. This allows the Peer Leader to discuss with the Agency Administrator on the process and procedures that the Peer Group will use to assist the affected individuals.
- **Crisis Management Briefing**  
The Agency Administrator will initially lead a structured meeting designed to provide information about the incident and control rumors. The goals of a CMB include providing factual information, instill a sense of leadership, reduce chaos, and enhance credibility. The CISM Peer

Group will then educate and discuss symptoms of distress, inform about basic stress management, and identify resources available for continued support, if desired.

- **Defusing**

This is where the Peer Group meets with those more directly affected by the incident. The Leader will instruct the Peer Group and establish any needed sideboards or specific protocols.

- **One-on-One's**

Sometimes, more interaction is needed after a CMB and Defusing for individuals affected by the event. A Peer Group member will meet one-on-one to further discuss the typical reactions to traumatic events, reinforce the tools and coping strategies of CISM, and assist the individual with any follow-up needs.

- **Critical Incident Stress Debriefing**

This tool, as part of the CISM intervention is not often used by Southwest Peer Groups. It is used when the effects of an event are significant enough that more assistance is needed beyond the CMB and defusing. This tool requires the presence of a Mental Health Professional.

- **Peer Group After Action Review**

The CISM Peer Group will conduct an AAR prior to completing the assignment and will assess how things went in terms of successes and those things that can be improved upon.

- **Follow-up**

The Peer Group should follow-up with the key affected individuals approximately a week (or as designated by the Leader) after the CISM response. The follow-up should be a check on how affected personnel are doing and reinforce the tools and coping strategies if needed.

## **Responsibilities**

The guidelines below outline the general process of requesting Critical Incident Peer Support when individuals and/or units are involved in traumatic events.

### **A. Agency Administrator**

#### 1. Identification of Event

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 personnel involved in the incident.

#### 2. Request Critical Incident Peer Support

The Agency Administrator or designee is responsible for requesting Critical Incident Peer

Support from the Southwest Coordination Center (SWCC) when a fire related incident occurs. SWCC will work with the Agency Administrator and designated Peer Group Leader to decide on the size and makeup of the group. This may require the Leader to travel to the affected unit and assess the situation and make recommendations. The timeliness of a request is imperative so the individuals involved are better prepared to start dealing with the thoughts, emotions, and impact of what just transpired. Critical Incident Peer Support is designed to help the individuals involved deal with the emotional after effects of a traumatic event.

The date and time of Critical Incident Peer Support will be decided in conjunction with the CISM Coordinator and Peer Group Leader. Generally the process will take place within 24-72 hours after an incident.

### 3. Provide Information

The Agency Administrator or designee is responsible for providing the CISM Coordinator with information about the incident. The Agency Administrator is responsible for providing the local dispatch center with a budget code for expenses associated with Peer Group response (and Mental Health Professional, if applicable).

#### **B. Local Dispatch Center**

##### 1. Request Critical Incident Peer Support

The local dispatch, on behalf of the Agency Administrator, may be responsible for contacting the Southwest Coordination Center.

#### **C. Southwest Coordination Center (SWCC)/Peer Group Leader**

##### 1. Peer Group Leader Identification

The Southwest Coordination Center is responsible for identifying and contacting the Leader and to request services within one hour after receiving a request. Once the request is made, the Leader will contact the Agency Administrator or designee.

##### 2. Assess Type of Response

The Leader and SWCC will work with the Agency Administrator in assessing the needs of the affected individuals and determining the appropriate CISM intervention(s) to be used. This is also usually done with consultation with a mental health care professional.

##### 3. Provide Information to the Local Dispatch Center

The Leader will work with SWCC in identifying names of individuals to be ordered. SWCC will generate a support order so that the affected dispatch center is not impacted. Individuals will be ordered as THSP- Critical Incident Peer Support. This information will be passed to the local center.

#### 4. Advocates/COOP Staffing

SWCC may also provide recommendations to the local unit for pre-CISM or advocacy assistance. SWCC will also notify NICC, other GACCs, or local dispatch centers of the possibility of name requests for support personnel. The Agency Administrator or Peer Group Leader may also make these recommendations. This includes monitoring of “trigger points” which helps determine the need for advocacy or a pre-CISM response as identified below. The intent is not to overstep our involvement but to relieve managers affected who are not able to cover everything. Of most importance is the response of additional support and being there to assist our own.

##### Advocacy Roles

Peers that can immediately respond to assist those affected by an incident either on their own or by request are a vital role in providing support when an individual or their unit becomes quickly overwhelmed. Examples of types of support and assistance that can be provided include:

- Family Liaisons  
It is of critical importance that Family Liaisons of injured individuals get identified and established early-on. This typically is done in conjunction with the affected unit. As the information flow gets established, these liaisons can assist with keeping the family informed of a wealth of information and will be a conduit back and forth between the agency and family.
- Phone Calls  
Offices and individual personnel are inundated with phone calls from investigators, supporters, and others looking for information. It is important to have people available to screen these calls and cover requests so that those directly involved are able to focus on the immediate tasks at hand.
- Investigation Teams /Requests For Information  
Often, investigation teams are involved and they request information from the unit affected. Much of the time emergency operations are still being conducted. It is beneficial to assign a liaison or point of contact for teams to coordinate with rather than inundate an office, crew base,

aviation base directly with requests which overload phone and computer systems.

- Continuation of Operations (Staff Replacements)  
Dispatch Centers, Fire and Aviation Managers, Air Bases, etc. may need relief for staff members who have been affected. Operations must continue for day-to-day work and immediate action must be taken to replace staff. Often those affected are too busy to deal with it or consider staffing needs and appreciate it being done for them.
- Media and Press Involvement  
Calls and visits from the press are immediate. Assigning Public Information Officers and the establishment of information centers should be another immediate consideration.
- Logistics Support  
Investigation teams, PIO's, families, local/state/regional/national personnel involved at the unit require space and phones. Advocates assisting a unit are able to arrange for conference room space (off the base/dispatch/office affected) so that operations can continue. Families may want a place nearby to meet and wait for information updates and should be away from investigations, teams etc.
- Medical Assistance  
Hospital visits and/or providing transportation to those who have been injured for follow up doctor visits, physical therapy, etc. may also be required based on an individual's situation. Peers who are able to provide this support are valuable.

##### 5. Maintaining the Roster

SWCC is responsible for maintaining an on-call roster for all members. Peer Group Members should notify SWCC of any changes of their availability status.