



Mental Health Support  
for First Responders

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# Critical Incident Stress Management

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Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) is an effective approach because it empowers individuals, in the context of their workplace, to define and maintain their own and others' health through education, communication, and enhanced social support. The CISM approach allows individuals to verbally express stress reactions and share coping strategies after a traumatic incident.

While the evidence is still varied about whether the CISM approach prevents PTSD, it should be maintained in the workplace as part of a broader approach to health promotion. Debriefing also provides an opportunity to explore lessons learned and what could be done differently in the future. Organizations need to determine their own policies as to when CISM is mandatory and when it is voluntary. There should also be a distinction made between defusing and debriefing and when one or the other is appropriate.

The following links can assist your organization in creating a CISM program:

**The International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF)** provides training for individuals interested in becoming a part of a crisis management team, or for an organization that is dedicated to helping individuals or groups recover from incidents.

<https://www.icisf.org/>

**The Crisis Response (CISM) Team: General Guidelines for Team Development**

<https://www.icisf.org/sections/cism-teams/team-resources/>

**A PRIMER ON CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT (CISM)**

<https://www.icisf.org/a-primer-on-critical-incident-stress-management-cism/>

**Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD), aka the “Mitchell Model” Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD)** is a specific, 7-phase, small group, supportive crisis intervention process. It is just one of the many crisis intervention techniques which are included under the umbrella of a Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) program.

<http://www.info-trauma.org/flash/media-f/mitchellCriticalIncidentStressDebriefing.pdf>

**STEPS TO DEVELOP A CISM TEAM**

Once your agency is committed to developing a long-term strategy for an employee wellness or a CISM-type program, it must take several steps, of course modified to fit the size and resources of the agency.

<http://www.ccisf.info/STEPS%20TO%20DEVELOP%20A%20TEAM-1.pdf>

**Recommended Practices for CISM teams**

<http://www.ccisf.info/CISM%20TEAM%20recommended%20practices%20update%2010%2010-2.pdf>