

Critical Incident Stress Management Frequently Asked Questions

What is Critical Incident Stress Management?

Critical Incident Stress Management or CISM, is a peer driven and clinically supported program. It's an intervention developed specifically for dealing with traumatic events such as traffic crashes, child injury or death, or any event which causes stress on public safety personnel. It is a structured and professionally recognized process for helping those involved in a critical incident to share their experiences, express emotions and learn about stress reactions and symptoms. Participants may be given a referral for further assistance, if required. This is a voluntary process. Confidentiality is of the utmost importance during a meeting with mental health clinicians and peer debriefers; this is not subject to discovery.

What is a *Defusing*?

Defusing is an intervention that is a shorter, less formal version of a debriefing. It generally lasts 20-45 minutes, but may go longer and is best conducted within one to four hours after the incident. It is not usually conducted more than 12 hours after the incident. Like a debriefing, it is a confidential and voluntary opportunity to learn about stress, share reactions to an incident, and vent emotions. The main purpose is to stabilize people affected by the incident so that they can return to their normal routines without unusual stress. Where appropriate, a formal debriefing may also be required. This process targets the group of responders who were closest to the actual incident.

What is a *Debriefing*?

Debriefing is a proactive intervention involving a group meeting or discussion about a particularly distressing critical incident. Based on core principles of crisis intervention, the Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) is designed to mitigate the impact of a critical incident and to assist the persons in recovery from the stress associated with the event. The CISD is facilitated by a specially trained team which includes professional and peer support personnel. Ideally it is conducted between 24 and 72 hours after the incident, but may be held later under exceptional circumstances.

Often, a major incident will not just affect the provider but may affect the whole family. Providers are encouraged to take home the family brochure.

What kind of events should we consider for debriefing?

Any type of event that causes stress to any one responder or to multiple responders. Within the guidelines that the Lord Fairfax EMS Council works from we do recommend debriefings to be offered after the following events:

1. Suicide of a colleague
2. Line of Duty Death
3. Serious line of duty injury (can include training injuries / subsequent death)
4. Disaster/Mass Casualty Incidents (includes acts of terrorism)
5. Events involving children
6. Prolonged incidents
7. Personally threatening incidents
8. Excessive media attention
9. Accidental death of responders (examples: traffic crashes, police shooting)
10. Any event capable of causing emotional distress

Who are the people who will come to debrief us?

The Lord Fairfax EMS Council CISM Team has strengths in all areas of public safety (police, fire/rescue, and dispatch), Mental Health Clinicians, some of who are also peers to public safety, Clergy, and hospital staff.

Is the debriefing confidential?

YES, this cannot be stressed enough. The discussions are completely confidential. The debriefing will be documented using only the number of debriefers and number of participants. This is a contractual requirement by the Virginia Office of EMS and is done only for grant and statistical reasons.

Who may (and may not) attend?

Debriefings include responders who were actually involved in the event. No one is allowed to be in the debriefing if they were not on the actual call.

When should a debriefing be held?

A debriefing should be requested if stress symptoms continue beyond the first 48-72 hours of the incident. In the event of a very long incident, the incident command may call for an onsite debriefing. Overwhelming stress symptoms usually occur in the first 24-48 hours following a critical incident. The debriefing **is not a critique** of the actual event, discussion will be always be redirected.

What should I do if someone is in need of additional services? (Debriefing is not enough)

If additional services are needed following an event or debriefing, contact the Lord Fairfax EMS Council's CISM Team at (540) 665-0014 and we will work together to get the assistance needed.

What should I do if I recognize that someone will not open up in a group setting?

After the debriefing is finished, feel free to express your concern with one of the debriefers.

What should I do if I recognize that a certain incident is bringing up past incidents that have not been processed or resolved?

After the debriefing is finished, feel free to speak to the mental health debriefers about your concerns.

Can a debriefing be held if we find people with problems a month after a critical event?

Yes, this can be addressed at any time after the incident. Contact the Lord Fairfax EMS Council CISM Team at (540) 665-0014 with any questions.

What can we do when we have a new member who encounters their first serious event (bloody trauma, shooting, death) and they seem to have trouble on the call?

If the new member is the only one stressed over the call, a one-on-one meeting will be arranged with a debriefer.

We had a debriefing a month ago and one of our members is still troubled by the call. What should we do?

Contact Lord Fairfax EMS Council CISM Team at (540) 665-0014 and we will work together to get the assistance necessary.

I am a family member of a provider who is having a problem with a recent call. What can I do to help?

Contact the Lord Fairfax EMS Council CISM Team at (540) 665-0014 and we will work together to get the assistance necessary for your loved one. The Lord Fairfax EMS Council CISM Team also has a brochure for families that may help answer some of your questions. Contact the office at (540) 665-0014 or lfems@vaems.org and we will get copies to you.