


INDIAN RIVER COUNTY EMERGENCY SERVICES GENERAL ORDER			
	Subject: Critical Incident Response Policy		No. 2017-xx
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	Initiated By: John King, Fire Chief		
	Approved By: John King, Fire Chief		

Critical Incident Response Policy

PURPOSE

To establish guidelines for the operation of the Critical Incident Response Policy. The sole purpose of the policy, and the major concern of this Department in providing the services of the policy, is to assist employees in coping with what they experience at certain traumatic events, and to provide support and education about critical incident stress.

POLICY

It is the policy of the Indian River County Fire Rescue to provide emotional and psychological support to all employees and their families involved in critical incidents.

DEFINITIONS

Critical Incident – Any event or incident that has the potential to cause a strong, emotional response or reaction.

Critical Incident Stress Management Team (CISM) – The CISM Team shall consist of employees trained in stress-related intervention and mental health professionals oriented to the workings of a fire rescue department.

Debriefing – Specially structured confidential group meetings affecting employees involved in a critical incident typically 24-72 hours with the CISM Team and notification to the mental health professional.

Defusing – A process inclusive of all personnel involved in the incident. The defusing is held shortly after the incident (within a few hours) and should last a maximum of sixty (60) minutes. Defusing is conducted by a CISM Team member, in a positive, supportive, and caring atmosphere.

Mental Health Professional (MHP) – A member of the CISM Team of Indian River County that includes any licensed mental health counselors, licensed clinical social workers, psychologists, or psychiatrists, trained in critical incident stress management.

One-on-One Support – A process in which team members assist employees who are showing obvious signs of distress resulting from their participation in a critical incident. CISM Team members advise and counsel the Incident Commander, or designee, on topics of stress management and on specific issues related to the critical incident. For post-incident support, the CISM Team leader may assign a team member to the involved employee and his/her family members.

Peer Supporter - Designated Department employees who volunteer to be available to anyone within the agency for support on issues of concern to the employee. Peer Supporters are within a specific group. Not all Peer Supporters are a part of the CISM Team; however CISM Team members may be Peer Supporters. The county will provide training and support for up to fifteen personnel per shift to be Peer Supporters.

Stress Management Advisory Committee - Committee comprised of the CISM Team Leader, Team Members and a Mental Health Counselor, and Volunteer Experts.

SELECTION OF CISM/PEER SUPPORTERS

The Emergency Services Director shall designate the maximum number of Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Team Members and Peer Supporters necessary to provide for response to critical incidents and day-to-day support for Department employees.

Eligibility requirements for the CISM Team Member and Peer Supporter positions are as follows:

1. Non-probationary Department Employee.
2. Proven proficiency in the following:
 - a. Department/Public Relations
 - b. Position Management
 - c. Professional Behavior
 - d. Judgment and Decision Making
 - e. Task Accomplishment

3. No history of untruthful or deceptive behavior as evidenced through past performance review documentation/discipline history.
4. No history of breach of confidentiality as evidenced through past performance review documentation/discipline history.
5. If applicable by time and grade, the last three (3) annual evaluations met Department standards/expectations.
6. Must be of rank below Battalion Chief.

All applications must be accompanied by supervisory endorsement that will include the Supervisor's reasoning of why he/she believes the candidate is qualified for consideration as a CISM Team member or Peer Supporter. This reasoning must include documentation supporting the above criteria.

CISM AND PEER SUPPORTER TRAINING

Research on fire rescue personnel at the federal, state, and municipal levels has indicated that Peer Support (both proximate and long-term) is one of, if not the most, beneficial types of help traumatized people can receive.

Unless previously completed, all employees appointed to a CISM Team or Peer Supporter position should be scheduled to attend a basic CISM or Peer Support course. All employees for the CISM Team or Peer Supporter group must successfully complete the applicable course to retain appointment. The District will make the training available to all CISM Team and Peer Supporter members. Additional training beyond the basic is strongly encouraged. All Stress Management Team members will follow guidelines set forth in the Standard Operating Procedure.

ACTIVATION/NOTIFICATION OF THE CISM TEAM

The CISM Team will be activated by the Battalion Chief and deemed Mandatory or Discretionary as follows:

1. **Mandatory Activation** when any of the following incidents occur:
 - a. Death or serious injury to any employee of Indian River County Fire Rescue, occurring on or off duty.
 - b. Death or serious injury to another at the hands of any employee of the Indian River County Fire Rescue, occurring off duty.
 - c. Any mass casualty incidents.

2. **Discretionary Activation** may be called for any of the following:
 - a. Incidents involving the death or serious injury of a child.
 - b. Accident cases involving death or serious injuries.
 - c. Other law enforcement or emergency service agencies requesting CISM Team assistance.
 - d. At the discretion of the Emergency Services Director or his designee.

Once the CISM is activated, the following procedures shall be followed:

1. Battalion Chief will contact the current CISM Team Leader and provide a summary of the incident. In case the Team Leader cannot be contacted, the Assistant Chief will be called.
2. The Team Leader or Program Coordinator, using a call-out list, will contact CISM Team members and the Mental Health Professional.
3. The CISM Team members will first report to the Team Leader/Program Coordinator for their assignment and information on the incident.

CISM TEAM FUNCTIONS

1. On-Scene Support

Team members shall maintain a low profile, acting as observers, and are restricted to the outer perimeter unless otherwise directed. CISM Team Members who observe adverse stress reactions shall report these findings to the Team Leader. If the Team Leader believes the affected person is incapable of performing his/her assigned duties, the Battalion Chief shall be notified with recommendations.

During major incidents in which the CISM Team is activated, the Team Leader shall be allowed in or near the command post as an observer and act as a liaison to the Incident Commander. The Team Leader shall not become involved in the operations of the incident nor have any command authority.

Under some circumstances, it may be necessary for CISM Team Members to conduct one-on-one interventions at the scene. The interventions will be brief and supportive in nature. Under no circumstances shall group interventions be done at the scene.

2. Off-Scene Defusing

Off-scene defusing can be an individual or group process, but will be accomplished using the approved International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF) protocol. If possible, a defusing shall be conducted

within one to three hours after the incident, and in a comfortable, quiet location away from the scene.

The primary purpose for the off-scene defusing is to educate employees of the possible stress reactions, and to educate employees of proper care for themselves (i.e. food, rest, things to avoid, etc.).

Employees are encouraged to unwind” during this session and ventilate their feelings and emotions, if they are comfortable in so doing. CISM Team Members shall make themselves available for individuals who would like to talk one-on-one after the defusing.

CISM Team Members shall ensure the defusing does not turn into a critique of the incident.

After all employees involved in the incident have been released, the CISM Team Leader will consult with the Battalion Chief to decide if it is in the best interest of those involved to attend a mandatory CISM debriefing would then be held with 72 hours. Such decision will be relayed to Fire Rescue Administration.

3. Formal Debriefing

The formal debriefing process serves to mitigate the stress impact resulting from exposure to a critical incident, through ventilation of feelings and emotions, along with informational and educational components.

The debriefing has proven to be the most beneficial and accepted method of intervention. It produces a therapeutic effect and hastens the recovery process by allowing participants to understand their own stress responses and to see that others have similar responses.

A formal debriefing shall generally be held between 48 to 72 hours after the incident. The formal debriefing shall be conducted by the CISM Team Leader with the assistance of team members and attended by the Mental Health Professional (MHP).

Media personnel or uninvolved observers shall not be allowed in the debriefing. Note taking, recorders, or video equipment shall not be allowed.

All employees involved in the formal debriefing shall give their full attention to the session. Therefore, no radios, pagers, telephone calls, or any other interruptions shall be allowed.

Employees are reminded that the formal debriefing session is not a critique. Judgment calls or use of rank authority are not appropriate for a setting of this nature.

SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITIES

AT THE SCENE

A CISM Team Member, designated by the Team Leader, shall respond directly to the scene when applicable.

The Team Member shall make personal contact with the involved employee(s) and separate him/her from the scene as soon as practicable.

The Team Leader shall assume responsibility for assuring the remaining sections of this procedure are implemented.

AT THE STATION

The Team Leader or designee shall make notification to the MHP and request his/her response.

The involved employee(s) shall be allowed to contact his/her spouse/significant other, if desired.

Upon arrival of the MHP, the Team Leader or designee shall brief the MHP on the circumstance of the incident, and the MHP shall be provided with all reasonable assistance.

INJURED EMPLOYEE

In the event the involved employee is injured and/or hospitalized, the supervisor and Team Leader will make every effort to follow this procedure within the constraints of emergency medical priorities.

In the event the involved employee is seriously injured and hospitalized, the Director of Emergency Services, or his designee, or such other person as may be requested by the injured employee, shall respond and make contact with the employee's spouse and family.

In the event an employee is fatally injured, the Line of Duty Death Standard Operating Procedure will be followed for CISM/Peer Supporter procedures.

A CISM Team Member shall be assigned to contact each involved employee and provide support and assistance until such time as the involved employee is stabilized at home. The involved employee may elect to contact a person of his/her choosing in lieu of a CISM Team Member or Peer Supporter.

When the involved employee's chosen support person arrives:

1. If the person is an employee of Indian River County Fire Rescue, the CISM Team member will leave.
2. If the support person is a non-member of the Department, the Team Member will remain available until relieved by the proper authority.

If the CISM Team Member is an on-duty employee, the employee shall be excused from other duties. If the team member is an off-duty employee, the Battalion Chief shall authorize reasonable overtime. The CISM Team Leader, or the involved employee's supervisor, shall make the necessary contact with the CISM Team member.

IMMEDIATE POST INCIDENT CONSIDERATIONS

The involved employee shall be afforded the following considerations:

1. He/she shall be allowed to calm down in a stable, private location.
2. With prior Command approval, the employee shall be permitted to clean up, shower, and/or change clothing, prior to undergoing a debriefing/defusing.
3. Personal needs of the employee should be met as soon as practicable to include family response, religious needs, and the intake of food and/or liquids if desired.

When the MHP arrives:

1. The MHP will be introduced to the employee and offer his/her services at that time.
2. The MHP shall provide the employee with a way to contact him/her should the need arise.

CONFIDENTIALITY

It shall be the duty of all CISM Team Members and Peer Supporters, while acting in that capacity, to keep information communicated to them as confidential.

Debriefings, defusings, and one-on-one interventions, including topics discussed and employees involved, shall be maintained in the strictest of confidence. The Team shall provide emotional support for the employee(s) involved in a critical incident. A Team Member shall not act as an investigator in a criminal and/or administrative investigation of the incident.

The purpose of the Team's involvement at any incident shall not include fixing blame or responsibility upon any employee, and team members shall not permit this type of discussion to enter into any conversations.

No notes or any other records shall be made of any defusing, debriefings, or interventions.

Ordinarily, defusing and debriefing will not be the subject or focus of internal investigations and team members shall not be questioned concerning their knowledge or involvement in these sessions. However, Team Members are required by Department policy to disclose all violations of law. Team Members are required to disclose all violations of Department policy regarding acts or behaviors that could constitute criminal acts, place the Department at risk of civil liability, or place other employees or citizens at risk if the act or behavior were repeated. Team Members are required by Department policy to notify the appropriate Battalion Chief of any employee they believe is not fit for duty.

Per F.S.S. 491.0147, all sessions conducted by a licensed mental health professional are confidential, and considered privileged communication and not subject to subpoena.

Except as required in an official proceeding, team members must maintain confidentiality and will sign a Memorandum of Confidentiality per the Stress Management Team Standard Operating Procedure. Failure to do so shall result in immediate removal from the team and may result in disciplinary action.