

Cuyahoga County Critical Incident Management Team Activation

I. PURPOSE

To provide personnel of the Department with the policy pertaining to activation and utilization of the Cuyahoga County Critical Incident Stress Management Team (CISM).

II. POLICY

The Cuyahoga County Critical Incident Stress Management Team (CISM) has assembled and trained a group of peer support and mental health professionals to provide mental health interventions to department employees in need of such assistance. It is the policy of the Department to pursue available means by which steps are taken to provide proactive measures in employee health issues. CISM will be available to respond to assist with trained peer and mental health professionals to firefighters in need of such assistance as the result of a stressful incident. Department employees utilizing such services will have the option of asking for the same services for a spouse or immediate family member when the situation creates a traumatic impact on such family members.

III. DEFINITIONS: For the purpose of this Directive, the following definitions will be applicable:

A. CRITICAL INCIDENT:

Any event that has emotional power to overwhelm an individual's usual ability to cope and which may interfere with the functioning of a person's coping mechanism immediately or in the future.

B. PEER SUPPORT TEAM:

A team composed of emergency services personnel in conjunction with a mental health care professional with training in Critical Incident Stress and is a volunteer with the Cuyahoga County Critical Incident Stress Management Team.

C. DEBRIEFING:

A closed confidential discussion of a critical incident relating to the feelings and perceptions of those directly involved prior to, during, and after a stressful event: intended to provide support, education, and an outlet for views and feelings associated with the event. Debriefings are not counseling or an operational critique of

the incident.

D. PEER SUPPORT MEETING:

A private discussion involving a stressful incident or situation between peer support members and an employee, or others upon request of the employee and with approval of the peer support team.

E. PEER SUPPORT TEAM MEMBER:

A member of CISM trained in Critical Incident Stress Management to recognize and understand stress reactions during and after critical incidents. **PEER SUPPORT TEAM DEBRIEFING:** A closed confidential discussion with a person or persons involved in an incident and Peer Support Team Members.

G. DEFUSING:

A brief confidential discussion between person(s) involved in a critical incident and peer support members **IMMEDIATELY** following an incident. The purpose of a defusing is to restore the member(s) / employee(s) cognitive functioning and to prepare him / her for future stress reactions from the incident.

H. MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL:

A board certified mental health professional approved by CISM, chosen to assist Peer Support Team Members when needed.

IV. CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT:

It shall be mandatory that Peer Support Team members maintain strict confidentiality in matters discussed in peer debriefings, defusing, or peer support meetings. Any statement of discussion with peer support team members while acting in his / her peer support role shall remain confidential and do not get reported to any community or department representative.

Participants will be advised of the confidential nature of each meeting at the beginning of each and every meeting, debriefing, and / or defusing. Peer Support Team members becoming aware of any exception will discuss the exception only with the CISM mental health professional.

No notes or list of names of attendees are taken at any responses by the CISM Team. There is **NO WRITTEN RECORD** of any services provided with the sole exception of anonymous statistical information.

V. PROCEDURES

A. Access to the CISM Team may be made on or off duty, 24 hours a day, regardless of rank, through one of the methods addressed below. **The following access points were developed to ensure the internal customer ease of access, anonymity and most important, confidentiality.** The CISM Team or member activation will occur only after a careful pre-deployment assessment by one of the CISM Team Senior Support Staff.

Employees experiencing emotional stress may initiate contact with a peer support person at any time through their immediate supervisor. The Department Supervisor will immediately be notified of that request and CECOMS (216-771-1363) called to activate CISM .

The CISM Team shall be notified any time that **emergency care providers are to be released from duty** due to the negative impact from an incident. **Whenever possible, prior to the release of any personnel, an initial assessment and the most appropriate intervention shall be applied.**

Any departmental member may access the CISM Team at any time through CECOMS (216-771-1363). This can be accomplished by simply requesting access to the CISM Team and **leaving a valid callback number; no further information will be requested or required.**

Departmental Supervisors at any level may request the CISM Team at any time through CECOMS (216-771-1363). Whenever possible, due to the nature of this request, **the supervisor should utilize the phone to ensure confidentiality.**

1. A defusing is to be held as soon as possible after the conclusion of an incident. Defusing procedures will be activated when the following types of stressful incidents occur or as needed:

- a. Death or serious injuries to an employee.
- b. Other incidents as determined by an employee or supervisor.

2. In cases of serious violent injuries to a Department employee, the employee shall be offered the opportunity to participate in a defusing as soon as possible following the incident.

B. Responsibilities

1. The appropriate Shift Officer or his / her designee is responsible for notifying the Department Supervisor of an incident and give them information about the incident and employees involved.
2. CISM members when notified will respond to the location specified by the supervisor who made the call.
 - a. CISM Team members will conduct an appropriate service immediately following an incident.
 - b. Team members will follow-up with the initial contact person involved in a service following a critical incident within thirty (30) days to insure that any prolonged or delayed difficulties are addressed and to initiate referral if necessary