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Critical Incident Stress Management

USACE Environmental and
Natural Resources Conference
Fort Worth, Texas

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What is CISM?

- A comprehensive peer-driven stress management program; includes pre-crisis preparation, stress education, and intervention.
- It helps people recover more quickly from abnormally stressful events.

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What is a Critical Incident?

- An "event which has the potential to overwhelm a crisis response." [1]
- A Crisis Response is "a response to an event wherein 1) an individual's psychological homeostasis is disrupted, 2) the usual coping mechanisms have failed, and 3) there is evidence of distress and significant functional impairment."[1]

Huh??

[1] Everly, G.S. & Mitchell, J.T.,(2001). "The Basic Critical Incident Stress Management Course: Basic Group Crisis Intervention (3rd Edition)" International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, Inc.

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What is a Critical Incident?

"Any event that causes unusually strong emotional reactions that have the potential to interfere with the ability to function normally."[1]

A P Photo

[1] Everly, G.S. & Mitchell, J.T.,(2001). *Ibid*

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Examples of Critical Incidents

- Fatality or trauma, particularly involving:
  - Children
  - Body recovery
  - Resuscitation attempt
- Suicide (or other sudden death) of co-worker

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Examples of Critical Incidents

- Extended disaster relief duty
- Exposure to grieving families
- Adverse or intense media coverage
- Assault on employee

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Impacts of Critical Incident Stress

- Decline in the mental health and well being of co-workers
- Potential for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Functional impairment = Decline in productivity

Bottom Line:

Costs US businesses $300 billion annually

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How Does CISM Work?

- Peers explore and normalize personal reactions through intervention and support
- Follows ICISF protocols and standard of care
- Provides emotional first aid

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Interventions

- Not an investigation
- Not a operational critique
- Confidential (no records kept)
- Structured group discussions led by CISM peer supporter.
- Attendance is important but participation in discussions is not mandatory.

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What is a Peer Supporter?

- Volunteer cadre
- Motivated / empathetic
- Trained to ICISF protocol and standards
- Available for quick response and delivery of CISM services

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CISM and EAP

- CISM complements the Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- EAP provider will participate in interventions as needed (SWD contracts adjusted)
- All interventions stress EAP as an additional resource available to employees

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Who uses CISM?

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SWD CISM Program

- Task force formed, NRM field,districts and SWDO; became program management team (CIPMT)
- Program established by BG Melcher, 2000
- 30 peer supporters from all disciplines, trained by ICISF instructor
- All employees have access to services through CIPMT

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SWD CISM Program

- **SWD CISM Program Responses:**

  Began with the I-40 response, June 2002

  Has served 50 Corps employees

I-40 Recovery CISM Response

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Feedback from SWD Intervention Participants

- " I thought the [support] was great. It gave us an opportunity to…understand how the event had affected each of us differently. Just understanding that the feelings…were normal and that things would get better with time also helped."
- "…the peer support of the CISM team is a clear example of the Corps philosophy of People, Process and Communications."

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Future Directions

- Increased education and preparation materials
- Returning FEST employees
- Proposal to establish national CISM program within USACE

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SWD CISM Program

Permission Slip

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Ask yourself:

1. Is it good for my customer?
2. Is it legal and ethical?
3. Is it something I am willing to be accountable for?

If so, don't ask for permission. You already have it.

Just do it!

Just did it !