

## Critical Incidents

Emergency responders face stressful, dangerous, and unpredictable situations every day. We are routinely exposed to human tragedies and to events requiring that life and death decisions be made instantly. Usually we are able to cope well with these situations and accept them as part of the work we do. However, some events impact emergency responders more strongly. These have the potential to produce physical, emotional, and behavioral reactions that impair our ability to function normally at work and at home because of the stress they create. These events are known as *critical incidents*. The reactions we experience are normal human responses to extreme stress, but they can make us feel anything but normal.

### *Situations Likely to Become Critical Incidents Include:*

- Injury or sudden death of a child
- Injury or death of a co-worker
- Victims known to responders
- Suicide, murder
- Mistakes made, equipment failure
- Difficult or prolonged rescue
- Mass casualty incidents
- Gore, disfigurement, decapitation
- Excessive media attention
- Several difficult calls in a short time
- Responders' first time for patient death

*There are many other situations that may cause an event to become critically stressful for a group or an individual.*

## Who Can Request Services?

YOU CAN. Anyone involved in emergency services or public safety can call to request any of the services of the CISM team. The Arrowhead CISM team has served firefighters, law enforcement personnel, dispatch staff, first responders, search and rescue personnel, ski patrols, ambulance crews, and hospital emergency department personnel since 1990. There is no charge for any of our services.

For help during or after an emergency call  
**218-625-3581**

This 24-hour number is answered by the St. Louis Co. Communications Ctr. They will put you in touch with the on-call CISM team member. For education resources and trainings, email [cism@arrowheadems.com](mailto:cism@arrowheadems.com) or call the Arrowhead EMS office at 218-726-0070. See our website for more information.

[ArrowheadEMS.com/cism](http://ArrowheadEMS.com/cism)

### COUNTIES SERVED

Aitkin	Itasca
Carlton	Koochiching
Cook	Lake
Douglas, WI	St. Louis

  
**arrowhead EMS Association**  
**emergency medical services**

Arrowhead EMS Association  
4219 Enterprise Circle • Duluth, MN 55811



## *Critical Incident Stress Management Team*

Taking Care of the People  
Who Provide Emergency Services  
in Northeastern Minnesota  
and Douglas County, Wisconsin

**Management  
Education  
Prevention**

## Why Stress Management?

Emergency responders play an essential role in our communities. We are expected to respond to and manage events and crises that others may be running away from. There are physical and emotional risks associated with taking on these responsibilities. Even when not actively involved in responding to a critical event, we can be stressed by constantly living in a state of readiness.

We often work long hours under stressful and unpredictable conditions, witnessing pain, suffering, loss, grief, and physical destruction. Over the course of a career, we are at a greater risk of physical injury and psychological damage than are our friends, neighbors, and family who have less demanding jobs and volunteer positions.

Managing the stress we experience is the key to preventing burn-out and to building personal and professional resilience. Stress management can help us recognize when stress is causing problems for ourselves or our team members. It is an invaluable tool for recovering from critical incidents, helping us to continue serving our communities after the hard calls.

Just as physical health and fitness help us perform well, so mental health is an important part of our individual and team functioning.

The Arrowhead CISM team is composed of our peers—emergency responders with experience in the kinds of calls that can be most challenging—plus mental health professionals with experience in emergency response.

## Critical Incident Debriefings

Critical Incident Stress Debriefings (CISDs) are group sessions for emergency responders who have been directly involved in a difficult event that has created strong feelings or responses for one or more of the team members. The session is facilitated by a specially trained team made up of emergency workers with years of experience in the same field as the participants, plus one mental health professional educated to work with emergency responders.

A CISD is **NOT** a critique of the event or of any team or individual performance. The session **IS** a time for participants to sort through the facts of the event, the distressing issues associated with the event, and the physical and emotional reactions they may have experienced during and after the event.

### FACTS ABOUT CISDs

- CISDs are usually held 2-7 days after an event
- CISDs are strictly confidential
- Names of participants are not released
- Only personnel directly involved participate
- Participation is optional
- CISDs typically last 1½ to 2 hours

### BENEFITS of CISDs to PARTICIPANTS

- Reduce symptoms of acute stress
- Promote rapid recovery
- Improve coping skills for future incidents
- Reduce feelings of isolation
- Enhance ability to be productive on the job
- Reduce tension with family and friends
- \* Build trust within a team
- Help prevent delayed psychological reaction

## Other CISM Services

### DEFUSINGS

A one-on-one or group session that happens shortly after an incident, or during an incident that lasts more than one shift. Shorter and less formal than a CISD, it provides a chance to discuss the event and its effects with a trained team member. Defusings can take place at the staging area of the scene, at the department, or by phone. Participants are given information about the event and advice to guide them through the recovery process.

### CRISIS MANAGEMENT BRIEFINGS (CMBs)

CMBs are information sessions presented by the emergency management team with the help of CISM team members. They are designed to reduce stress for responders and others involved by providing factual information about the current situation and resources for dealing with an ongoing stressful event. They are usually held during or immediately after the event. CMBs have been used for school shootings, floods, toxic spills, wildfires, on- and off-duty fatalities, and other major events that affect a whole department or community.

### FOLLOW-UP

CISM team members are available to talk with any responder continuing to be troubled by reactions to an event.

### RESILIENCE TRAINING

CISM team instructors visit departments to teach about preventing severe stress reactions, building team support, and planning for stress management. Request the CISM Training Brochure for details.