



Responding to Critical Incidents— For Supervisors

The impact of a critical incident may make it more difficult to interact in everyday life and work.

The term “critical incident” refers to a profoundly disruptive workplace event, especially one occurring suddenly and resulting in loss of life, near death experiences, catastrophic injuries, and threat of harm to self and others.

Critical incidents in the workplace include robberies, homicides, active shooter incidents, natural disasters, death of a coworker, on-the-job accidents, sudden and unexpected layoffs and business closures, and other abrupt events that pose an overwhelming threat to our sense of safety and wellbeing.

When critical incidents occur, whether in the workplace or in our personal lives, our bodies and emotions respond in self-protective ways. The mental, emotional, physical, and behavioral reactions we experience are generally normal reactions to an abnormal event. They may include grief, numbness, difficulty concentrating, stomach upset, and intrusive recollections of the event.

Supervisors play a key role in helping employees cope with the impact

of critical incidents by normalizing reactions, re-establishing a sense of safety, facilitating return to work and life, and providing access to additional care as needed.

Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) serves as a best practice approach for facilitating recovery and return to work following critical incidents. A range of different CISM strategies can be made available following the incident, and supervisors should make sure all employees are aware of and take part in these crucial resources, while also not requiring or forcing employees to participate.

The goals of CISM services are:

- ✓ To exercise leadership and re-establish a sense of safety, security, and direction
- ✓ To acknowledge what's happened, communicate care and concern and facilitate transition to recovery
- ✓ To normalize the common mental, physical, emotional, and behavioral reactions to the incident
- ✓ To inform employees on how to help themselves recover from the impact of critical incident
- ✓ To facilitate return to pre-incident levels of productivity in work and life
- ✓ To identify those who may need more support

To assist in these goals, a range of CISM services, typically provided by

a licensed therapist with specialized Critical Incident Response training, may be offered following a traumatic event. These services include:

- ✓ Management team meetings to plan and coordinate response
- ✓ Crisis Management Briefings (CMB) to support large groups of employees
- ✓ Small group debriefings for those most impacted by the event
- ✓ Individual, on-site support as needed
- ✓ Access to additional EAP and behavioral health care and support as needed

KEEP IN MIND

When dealing with critical incidents, everyone responds differently. Supervisors should be kind to themselves, patient with others, and encouraging in their employees' pursuits of self-care.



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