

## **Help Available... to Survive EMS Stress**

### **Taking Care of Our Most Valuable Resources**

It makes little difference if you are a volunteer or paid, a novice or a veteran. Mixed in with the rewards and successes in EMS, you will be exposed to human tragedy, suffering, and people in crisis. You will take on certain risks and you may even be personally threatened or injured sometime during your career. There are times when the helper will need to ask for help.

The goal of our region's critical incident stress management program is to take care of you, the caregiver. CISM helps to ensure that you are emotionally and psychologically equipped with the right tools to survive the stress of EMS. You are very important to the health care system and emergency services in your community.

There are essentially two types of services offered by your regional CISM Team when requested. The Team provides debriefings and defusings after incidents that are difficult or particularly stressful for the responders. Each intervention has a distinctly different format. Neither format is a critique of individual performance nor the performance of the agencies involved in the incident. They are both designed to accelerate the individual responder's recovery from the experience. Attendance at either a debriefing or defusing is voluntary and confidential.

### **What is a Defusing ?**

A CISM defusing is primarily an informational and educational session within a day or even a few hours following the event. It can be a one-on-one or a group intervention. It is generally less formal and shorter than a stress debriefing. It provides an opportunity to learn about and understand the immediate impact of a difficult event, provides advice for action, and identifies resources for individuals to help in their physical and emotional recovery.

### **What Is A Stress Debriefing ? (CISD)**

A stress debriefing (CISD) is always conducted in a group setting. Only individuals directly involved in the incident are invited to participate. The debriefing is generally scheduled several days to several weeks following the incident and typically requires one to three hours to complete the session. Participants are asked to make a commitment to be available for the entire session that takes them through a structured, multiple step process.

A stress debriefing is designed to enhance and accelerate mental and emotional recovery from a difficult event and to prepare us for the next challenge. By identifying our reactions to the event, stress debriefings provide insights and help us understand how a difficult response changed us. The most common type of incident that results in a request for a stress debriefing is one involving the death or serious injury to a child. Multiple casualty incidents, suicides, prolonged rescues and scene times, or personally knowing the victim may also contribute to an event becoming a "critical incident" for the responders.

### **Potential Benefits of Attending a Stress Debriefing (CISD):**

- Provides education about stress management tools.
- Promotion of appropriate and healthy coping mechanisms
- Returns individuals to a pre-incident level of functioning.
- Helps organize and mobilize additional resources.
- Acts as a form of crisis intervention when needed.
- Promotes resolve of incident and lessens the impact of the event.
- Provides social and group support - Helps us avoid isolation.
- Shields individuals from additional stress.
- Lowers tension levels - returns emotional control.
- Restores cognitive orientation.

- Helps to normalize relationships and daily functioning.
- May inhibit delayed reactions to stress.
- Allows ventilation of feelings and emotions in a confidential setting.
- Provides peer support and encouragement.
- Keeps emergency service personnel healthy and on the job longer.
- Allows participants to see the "big picture" and offers closure about the incident.

### **How to Request a CISD**

Anyone can contact our regional CISM Team to confidentially discuss organizing a debriefing or defusing. To contact the Team, call 218-727-8770. This 24-hour number is the South St. Louis County 911 Communications Center that serves as the activation point for the Team. They will put you in touch with an On-Call Coordinator. The Coordinator will work with you to determine the appropriate type of service to provide and the best time and place for those involved.

Stress debriefings and defusings are provided free of charge to individuals and agencies who provide our emergency services. The team members are specially trained volunteers who understand and support the valuable service you provide.

### **Pre-Incident Education**

Our regional CISM Team also has available a variety of educational programs that deal with the stress of providing emergency response. These pre-incident presentations prepare you for the wide range of emotional and psychological challenges will you encounter providing emergency service. The overall objective is to increase your stress resilience so you can bounce back as quickly as possible. Just as OSHA attempts to provide for your physical safety, CISM provides for your emotional safety and recovery.

To contact the Team to arrange an educational session, call the Arrowhead EMS Association at 218-726-0070. AEMSA sponsors the Head of the Lakes CISM Team. Educational sessions can be customized to fit your available time and specific interests.

You are a very important part of your community's EMS system.  
Take care of yourself out there, including before and after the response.

### **Head of the Lakes CISM Team**

Serving Cook, Lake, St. Louis, Carlton, Itasca, and Koochiching County  
in Minnesota and Douglas County, Wisconsin