

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS RESPONSE (CISR)

GUIDE FOR LEADERS

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What is a Critical Incident (CI)?

A critical incident is “an unusually challenging event that has the potential to create significant human distress and interfere with one’s usual coping mechanisms (International Critical Incident Stress Foundation Inc, 2024). Critical incidents can impact an individual’s ability to return to their normal state of wellbeing. Examples of critical incidents in health care can include, but are not limited to; violence or threats of violence, unanticipated poor patient outcomes, major incidents with multiple casualties, pediatric deaths, suicide, and abuse.

Note: This definition of a critical incident differs from the definition set out in *The Health System Governance and Accountability Act*.

Critical Incident Stress

Critical Incident Stress (CIS) refers to the reaction someone may experience after being part of, or seeing, a critical incident. The reaction may happen right away or appear hours, days, or even weeks later. CIS is the body’s normal response to an abnormal event. Everyone reacts differently to a critical incident and these reactions are normal (Lifesaving Society, 2017).

Examples of stress symptoms include:

PHYSICAL	COGNITIVE	EMOTIONAL	BEHAVIOURAL	SPIRITUAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headaches • Back/Neck Stiffness • Difficulty Sleeping • Decreased Appetite • Upset Stomach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replaying the Event • Memory Problems • Poor Attention Span • Difficulty Making Decisions • Slowed Problem Solving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling Overwhelmed • Shock • Anxiety • Fear • Anger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crying • Withdrawal • Restlessness/Irritability • Increased Substance Use • Changes in Normal Habits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of Meaning or Purpose • Anger at God/Clergy/Universe • Change in Faith Practices • Questioning One’s Beliefs • Impacted Sense of Safety or Trust

Critical Incident Stress Response (CISR)

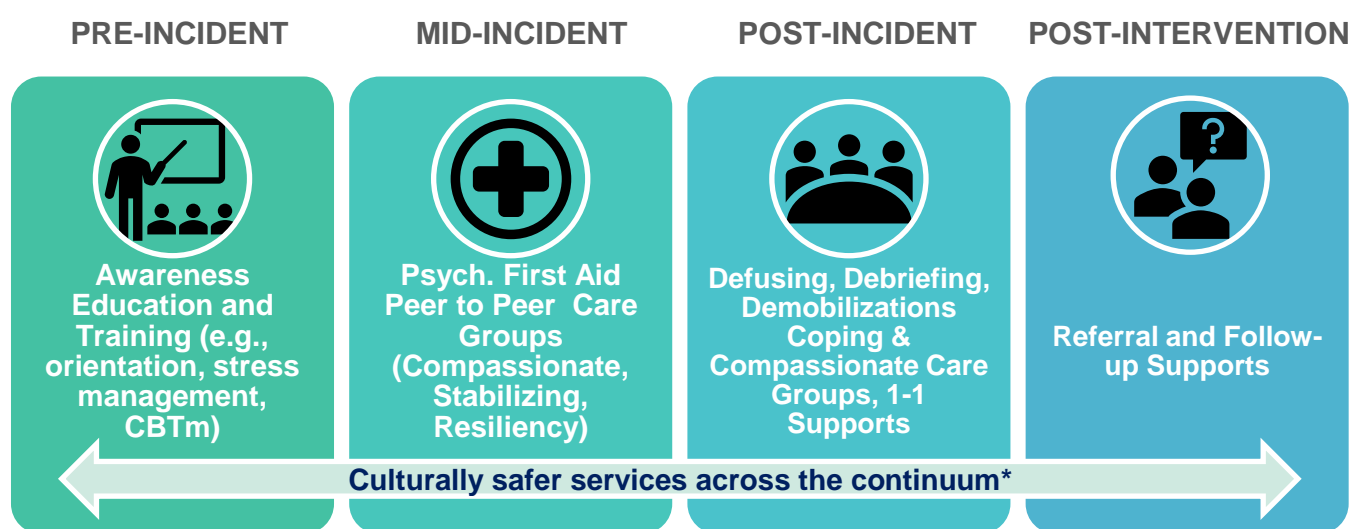
What CISR IS

- Voluntary and confidential.
- A crisis intervention program with different intervention options (for example; defusings and debriefings).
- A process to support the natural recovery process

What CISR Is NOT

- A review or critique of performance.
- A process to review policy or procedures.
- A treatment, psychotherapy, or replacement for therapy.
- A replacement or substitute for administrative supports.

Critical Incident Stress Response (CISR) Process



*Staff are unique individuals with diverse backgrounds, cultures, and life experiences. These factors shape how they process and express stress and trauma, as well as their approaches to healing and accessing support. The Wellbeing Team strives to be aware and inclusive of these differences, and endeavors to create spaces where staff feel safe and respected. When appropriate, we collaborate with leadership or peers to tailor wellbeing and CISR supports to meet staff needs.

How Leaders Can Support Their Teams

During challenging times, your team will look to you for guidance and support. Here are a few ways to help your team:

1. Acknowledge the Emotional Impact of Past Critical Incidents/Crisis Situations

Recognize challenges may stir up emotions linked to past critical incidents or high-stress periods, which can intensify an individual's response. Acknowledge some team members may be particularly vulnerable or experiencing personal circumstances that influence their response. You may reach out to the Wellbeing Team for guidance on supporting team members who may need extra care.

2. Foster Open Communication

Encourage staff to share their concerns and feelings. Regular check-ins, through group huddles or one-on-one conversations, can help maintain open communication. Remind team members that it's okay to ask for help and regularly share the resources available.

3. Model Self-Care and Wellbeing Practices

Take time for your own wellbeing, and become aware of and utilize available resources. Supporting others while experiencing your own reactions can be challenging. Remember to practice self-care, including: staying hydrated, eating a balanced diet, following a healthy sleep routine, maintaining connections with supportive relationships, practicing mindfulness or meditation, staying connected to meaningful activities outside of work, and incorporating physical activity into your routine.

4. Promote the Use of Wellbeing Resources

Ensure that staff know about and are familiar with how to access available wellbeing resources. Make these resources easily accessible and encourage their use. All health providers have access to the provincial Wellbeing Hub found on the Shared Health, Health Providers homepage.

What to Remember Following a Critical Incident

Following a critical incident, leadership support can make a meaningful difference in helping staff navigate their responses. It may be beneficial to consider the following:

- Relieve staff from their duties (if possible).
- Take care of staff by asking if employee(s) would like to go to a quiet space, call a supportive peer, take a walk, etc.

- Offer words of support, as an example, are you okay, would you like to talk, can I call someone for you.
- Contact the Wellbeing Team and/or other supports available at your site, i.e. CISM/CISR teams, or spiritual health.
- While investigations may need to start immediately and occur concurrently, take steps not to assume, make judgments or minimize the impact of the situation

Guidelines for Leaders when Requesting a CISR Intervention

After a critical incident, employees may experience heightened stress and their usual coping mechanisms may be temporarily overwhelmed. A defusing or debriefing session may allow those involved to share their experiences, reactions, and reflections, helping to reinforce personal coping strategies. A consultation with the Wellbeing Team may help determine the most appropriate service response. When contacting the Wellbeing Team, please consider:

Timing of Defusing and Debriefing:

- A) Defusing typically occurs within 24 hours of the incident to provide immediate support.
- B) Debriefings are typically scheduled within 72 hours post-incident.

Participants: Defusing and debriefings are intended for employees directly involved in the incident, including volunteers or students in the area at the time. Situations and teams are unique, and determining the individuals to include in services may be discussed during the initial consultation.

Confidentiality: Information shared during interventions is confidential. Staff are encouraged to respect this privacy and avoid discussing the session's content outside the meeting. No detailed notes will be taken by group facilitators.

Role of Supervisors and Managers: Supervisors and managers generally do not participate in defusing or debriefing sessions arranged for impacted staff. The culture of teams can be unique and the presence of leadership can be discussed during the initial consultation. Alternately, leaders can request separate 1:1 or group supports.

Voluntary Participation: Attendance is voluntary. Leaders may encourage staff to attend CISR services and/or provide alternative support options while ensuring the voluntary and confidential nature of the service(s) is consistently communicated. A member of the Wellbeing Team can provide consultation to discuss resources available and how best to tailor services to the needs of staff.

Debriefing Notice Script

Please feel free to use this template when inviting your staff to attend a debriefing:

You are invited to attend a confidential debriefing to talk about **(situation description)** that happened on **(date)** and how it may be affecting you. The debriefing will occur on **(date of session)** at **(time)** in the **(session location)**. It will last approximately 60-120 minutes.

Please note participation is voluntary; although you are encouraged you are not required to attend. Everything shared in the meeting is confidential. Only people directly involved in the incident will be present.

Led by **(insert provider)**, the session will provide guidance for managing stress and addressing emotional responses in a healthy way. This is an opportunity to connect with others, receive validation and resources to support you.

Please be on time and be prepared to stay for the entire debriefing session.

If you have any questions about the debriefing, please call **(supervisor)** at **(contact number)**.

Wellbeing Center of Expertise Contact Information

NAME	TITLE	SITE / SERVICE	CONTACT INFORMATION
Frank Cantafio	Executive Director	Shared Health	431-294-6865 fcantafio@sharedhealthmb.ca
Vacant	Manager	Shared Health	
Terry Johnston	Wellbeing Leader	Shared Health	431-371-1895 tjohnston3@sharedhealthmb.ca
Caprice Kehler	Wellbeing Leader	WRHA	431-323-9153 ckehler2@sharedhealthmb.ca
Claire McCannell	Wellbeing Leader	PMH	204-841-8458 cmccannell@sharedhealthmb.ca
Chelsea McClelland	Wellbeing Leader	WRHA	431-323-0697 cmcclelland@sharedhealthmb.ca
Jessica Morgan	Wellbeing Leader	ERS	204-915-7568 jmorgan6@sharedhealthmb.ca
Ogai Sherzoi	Wellbeing Leader	CCMB/ Shared Health	431-323-4022 osherzoi@sharedhealthmb.ca
Christa Veitch	Wellbeing Leader	PMH	431-270-0153 cveitch2@sharedhealthmb.ca

For general questions or after-hours support, please access support through your wellbeing team at 204-926-9040 or 1-844-820-2010 (toll free) between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. daily.

Manitoba Blue Cross Contact Information

Manitoba Blue Cross EAP 24/7:

204-786-8880 or 1-800-590-5553 (toll free)

workplacewellbeing@mb.bluecross.ca

WELLBEING TEAM CISR OFFERINGS

Consultations

Participant(s): Any leader seeking support for an impacted employee and/or team

Anticipated Length: Up to 1 hour

Delivery Method(s): Phone, Virtual, In person

Description: Consultations offer a collaborative discussion between a leader and a member of the Wellbeing Team to develop tailored responses that best support an employee or team impacted by stress or recent events.

1:1 Support

Participant(s): Any employee

Anticipated Length: Up to 1 hour

Delivery Method(s): Phone, Virtual, In person

Description: A private session providing one to one support following a critical incident. These sessions explore an individual's reactions, normalize experiences, share resources and make recommendations for additional supports where appropriate.

Wellbeing Check-In

Participant(s): Any employee

Anticipated Length: Up to 1 hour

Delivery Method(s): Phone, Virtual, In person

Description: A supportive and confidential check-in to discuss wellbeing, offer support, share resources and facilitate additional supports needed.

Critical Incident Stress Response Training

Participant(s): Any employee – for groups of 3 or more

Anticipated Length: determined in collaboration with leadership

Delivery Method(s): In person (preferred), Virtual

Description: This comprehensive training program equips employees with essential skills and knowledge to effectively respond to critical incidents. Participants will learn about the psychological impacts of traumatic events, strategies for providing immediate support, and techniques for managing stress and promoting resilience among colleagues. The training emphasizes a thorough understanding of current Critical Incident Stress Response processes ensuring consistency in standards and team preparedness.

Critical Incident - Psychological First Aid

Participant(s): Employees involved in a critical incident

Anticipated Length: As required

Delivery Method(s): In person

Description: This support service provides on-scene/site wellbeing assistance and psychological first aid during or immediately after the incident to individuals affected by a critical incident. It focuses on addressing immediate emotional needs while creating a safe space for employees to process their experiences. Participants will receive guidance on coping strategies and information about additional resources to aid in their recovery, ensuring they feel supported during and immediately after the critical incident.

Critical Incident - Defusing

Participant(s): Any employee – for groups of 2 or more

Anticipated Length: 1 to 2 hours

Delivery Method(s): In person (preferred), Virtual

Description: A facilitated session held within the first 24 hours following a critical incident, providing a confidential and supportive environment for participants to process experiences, share insights, and offer mutual support. This voluntary session encourages open dialogue to help reduce stress, enhance resilience, and foster a sense of mutual support and healing.

Critical Incident - Debriefing

Participant(s): Any employee – for groups of 3 or more

Anticipated Length: 1 to 2 hours

Delivery Method(s): In person (preferred), Virtual

Description: This confidential and voluntary session is facilitated by a CISR trained team member and/or Wellbeing Team member typically scheduled within 72 hours to two weeks following a critical incident. During this session, participants will have the opportunity to share their experiences, reactions and thoughts, and explore available support resources to support their recovery.

Compassion Care Coping Group (CCCG)

Participant(s): Any employee – ideal for groups of 6 to 12.

Anticipated Length: 45 to 90 minutes

Delivery Method(s): In person (preferred), Virtual

Description: Compassion Care Coping Groups are structured support sessions designed to provide emotional and psychological assistance to individuals who have experienced stress, trauma, or challenging events, such as those working in high-stress professions like emergency services or healthcare. These groups typically focus on: A) Compassion: Fostering self-compassion and compassion towards others by creating a safe and non-judgmental space for participants to share experiences and feelings. B) Care: Providing tools and strategies to care for one's mental and emotional health, emphasizing the importance of self-care practices to maintain well-being. C) Coping: Equipping participants with effective coping mechanisms to manage stress, process difficult emotions, and build resilience.