

CISM Lesson Learned

By: Lt. Col. Thomas Grady, Berkshire County Sheriff's Office, ICISF Member

As a member of a Critical Incident Stress Management Team, I am always impressed at how valuable that this process can be for participants and team members. The common thread for people involved in CISM is a sincere desire to help others. The training that we receive as team members helps us have the skills to conduct defusing's and debriefings and prepares us for the calls that we will respond to. What I have observed from other team members and myself, is that we all have strengths and challenges.

So what are some of the challenges?

- Confidence in our skills, feeling like we are less proficient than other members of the team
- Feeling like we could have done better
- Getting emotionally pulled in
- Not debriefing the team at the end of a session
- Knowing when to say no to a call because it hits too close to home
- Feeling out of our comfort zone

These are only a few examples of challenges, I am sure that others could come up with multiple items on their lists.

So what do we learn from these challenges?

- Realizing that we are part of a team and that we all bring unique strengths
- Self-care
- Knowing how to set boundaries for ourselves
- Developing strategies for gaining trust
- Participating in continuing education to build skills and confidence
- Acceptance that we do our best to help and that we cannot necessarily control the outcome

Being part of the CISM world is rewarding because we know the value of the process and we know that it helps others. There are times when people will comment on how beneficial a debriefing was or how the educational materials provided helped the people in their lives understand what they were experiencing. There are also those times when no one comments and we are left to wonder, did we make a difference, did the participants benefit? We will not always know the answers however if we always assign a team member to follow up a few days after the session, we can get a better idea if people found it beneficial or if further follow up needs to be done.

Sometimes, being part of a CISM Team, we are far too critical of ourselves. If we can think back to our training, which tells us that this process is peer driven and clinically guided, then we can take a little pressure off ourselves. We are not providing therapy. We are providing a short-term helping process. Some of our goals are to help stabilize and mitigate the crisis response and to educate and provide resources to participants so that they can navigate through their reaction to a critical incident.

(ICISF Core Course Manual Fifth Edition)

So getting back to lessons learned, what I take away from this process is that none of us will ever be perfect, we will learn from others as they will learn from us. We will hit some bumps in the road along the way and I believe that is normal. We are peers helping peers and we do not have all of the answers nor are we expected to. We are trained to help and I hope that for all of us who are trained, we will audit ourselves, other team members and the processes that we use in an effort to provide continuous process improvement by sharing our lessons learned.

Top 10 CISM Lessons Learned

By: Kimberly Willis, ICISF Member

1. **ONGOING EDUCATION:** to assimilate program into ever changing hospital community
2. **EMPOWER:** any healthcare worker to activate CISM
3. **ONGOING TEAM DEVELOPMENT:** gathering/ refresher training for team-review cases, skills review
4. **CLEARLY DEFINE:** context for debriefing/defusing; "didn't here about it, just showed up"
5. **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:** Always, always-voluntary participation! People are traumatized, few appreciate being put on the spot, presence and silent solidarity are significant offerings and should be honored
6. **PROVIDE LINKS** for ongoing support-EAPs, Spiritual Care, etc...
7. **GENTLE RE-FRAMING:** purpose is non-operational; operational will happen-different format
8. Invite those impacted by Critical Incident to reflect on the people, places, practices that help them heal; empowers them to participate in their own healing
9. **CAREFUL COORDINATION:** clear details=clear and concise leadership, impacts entire process
10. **DEBRIEF CISM TEAM:** what worked? What was challenging? What would you do differently? Easy to forget or be too busy to do this but there are gems just waiting to reveal themselves to you!