

Cobb County Police Department

Policy 2.10

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT (CISM) PROGRAM

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Rescinds: None	Page 1 of 4
The words “he, his, him,” which may appear in this policy, are used generically for clarity and ease of reading. These terms are not meant to imply gender and relate to all employees of the Department.	

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for the effective deployment of the Department’s Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)/Peer Support Team in order to minimize the effects caused by critical incidents, as well as assist employees in coping effectively with reactions to these incidents. The CISM/Peer Support Team provides assistance to sworn and non-sworn Department members who have been involved in a critical incident, or who are cumulatively experiencing significant stress, whether work or personal related.

I. POLICY

The Cobb County Police Department will take a proactive stance in assuring all Department members are assisted in addressing issues that may adversely affect their ability to successfully function both professionally and personally.

II. DEFINITIONS

- A. Critical Incident:** Any incident, action, or event, which has the potential for producing significant emotional trauma that may adversely affect the psychological well-being of personnel. A critical incident may include, but is not limited to:
1. Officer involved shootings
 2. Officer involved incidents that result in death or serious injury to anyone
 3. Incidents where an employee witnesses or is involved in a traumatic event
 4. Traumatic death of an employee
 5. Critical incidents involving children
 6. Incidents involving:
 - a. An unusually large number of victims
 - b. Victims who are familiar to, or have a special relationship with, involved employees
 - c. Prolonged, stressful involvement of employees
 - d. Special or unusual media attention
- B. Critical Incident Support:** A process designated to assist Department personnel, or their family members, in coping with stress caused by critical incidents. It is recommended for all persons exposed to a critical incident. Critical incident support is not meant to replace the counseling and mental health benefits provided by EAP resources or by employees’ health plans, nor does it provide substance

abuse or psychological counseling.

III. CISM/PEER SUPPORT TEAM

A. Team Composition

The CISM/Peer Support Team is comprised of a cross section of Department personnel who have volunteered to participate in assisting Department employees as peer support providers. The members are specifically trained in critical incident stress management techniques. Through this team, efforts are made to mitigate the effects of critical incident stress, and/or cumulative stresses, and attempt to maintain the operational readiness of employees. The team will be comprised of:

1. Team Commander: A Department Captain or above, appointed by the Chief of Police to command the team.
2. Team Coordinator: A team member who facilitates response based on the situation, need, and experience level of the team member.
3. Team Member: A member of the Department who meets the qualifications listed in the selection process.

B. Selection Process

1. When considering a candidate for the CISM/Peer Support Team, the candidates work history, letters of appreciation, or other enclosures that reflect upon the candidate's judgment, maturity, and ability to communicate with people should be reviewed. Specific criteria for consideration will include, but are not limited to the following:
 - Basic listening skills
 - Exposure to critical incidents
 - Motivation for becoming a team member
 - Standing in the Department
 - Ability to maintain confidentiality
 - Non-judgmental approach to personal behavior, lifestyles, and personal problems
 - Ability to recognize common crisis indicators (e.g. depression, suicide, and substance abuse)
 - Willingness and availability to attend regularly scheduled training and meetings
 - Patrol or equivalent experience
2. If, in the past three years, an individual has received serious formal discipline (e.g. a suspension of three days or more), an unfavorable fitness for duty evaluation, notice(s) of performance problems/deficiencies, or an overall performance rating of needs improvement, he shall not be eligible for consideration.

3. Team members must be willing to respond to a request when called out by the Team Commander, Team Coordinator, or other appropriate authority.
4. Team members shall complete a course of formal training, and shall attend regular training sessions.
5. A team member may be removed from the program by Team Commander for the following:
 - Breach of confidentiality
 - Lack of satisfactory participation
 - Poor performance (regular duty assignment or as a team member)
 - Voluntary withdrawal from the program.

IV. INTERVENTIONS

- A. One-on-One: When an employee is experiencing signs or symptoms of critical incident stress, or when an employee wishes to speak to a team member for any reason. The one-on-one support process provides a format in which personnel can discuss their feelings or reactions to a critical incident. The support session is confidential and voluntary. All sessions are strictly confidential.
- B. On-Scene Support: When a team member is called to assess the on-scene personnel for possible signs and symptoms of critical incident stress. The team member(s) should evaluate the need for demobilization, defusing, debriefing, or other related services.
- C. Demobilization/Crisis Management Briefing: For major events with prolonged on-scene times or large deployments of personnel. A brief informational session may be held before personnel are returned to normal status. The secondary function may be to assess the need for further debriefings and other related services.
- D. Defusing: To help reduce the cognitive, emotional and psychological/physical symptoms caused by an incident. Defusing can also assess the need for further debriefings and other related services and should be provided within 8 hours of an incident, whenever possible.
- E. Debriefing: May be used to mitigate the impact of a crisis or other traumatic event. Debriefing can also be useful in accelerating the recovery process of personnel and to identify any need for follow-up action, or referral to other providers. The need for a debriefing should be determined by a team member and provided within 72 hours of an incident.

Debriefing is meant to be a structured, peer driven, group discussion of critical incident crisis intervention strategies with educational techniques for coping with stress. It is a format that allows personnel to discuss their feelings and reactions, and thus reduce the stress resulting from an exposure to a critical incident. It is not a critique of Police Department operations; performance issues will not be

discussed. Debriefing will be strictly confidential and participation is voluntary.

V. CISM/PEER SUPPORT TEAM ACTIVATION PROCEDURES

- A.** The CISM/Peer Support Team Commander should be notified promptly of any critical incident involving a Department employee, and determine the level of response needed from the team.
- B.** Commanders or supervisors who need assistance from the team, due to an immediate incident for an employee related issue, shall make the request through the 911 Communications Center, or to the CISM/Peer Support Team Commander. This does not preclude any Department employee from informally contacting any team member for personal assistance. The CISM/Peer Support Team Commander will provide a current-on-call roster for the team to 911 Communications center.

VI. CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality is a priority, and the CISM/Peer Support Team will operate in accordance with O.C.G.A. 24-5-510. The privacy of those who received assistance or support from the CISM program must be protected.

- A.** Unless required by law, or as stated below, team members shall not divulge, or be compelled to divulge, the identity of any employee who requests support, or discuss information obtained while acting in a peer support capacity, with anyone else, regardless of rank, other than the participating team members and/or mental health professionals. This shall include administrative and criminal investigations.
- B.** Disclosure of information shall be required in the following circumstances:
 - 1. If the employee authorizes disclosure in writing.
 - 2. If the information obtained suggests that the employee is a danger to himself or a danger to other persons.
 - 3. If employee misconduct constitutes a violation of state or federal law, or a serious violation of Department policy is admitted. A team member who learns that an employee is engaging in illegal activity shall inform the team commander.
 - 4. In response to a valid subpoena.