Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)

CISM is a comprehensive, integrative, multicomponent crisis intervention system. Developed for the first responder community in 1983 by Dr. Jeffrey Mitchell from the University of Maryland and Dr. George Everly from Johns Hopkins University, CISM has now greatly expanded both in its capabilities and the populations that it serves. It is currently being utilized in law enforcement, hospital and health care services, military branches, business and industry, and education in all 50 states and over 70 nations around the world.

CISM is considered comprehensive because it consists of multiple crisis intervention components, which functionally span the entire temporal spectrum of a crisis. CISM interventions range from the pre-crisis phase through the acute crisis phase, and into the post-crisis phase. CISM is also considered comprehensive in that it consists of interventions which may be applied to individuals, small functional groups, large groups, families, organizations, and even communities.

The 7 core components of CISM are defined below:

1. Pre-crisis preparation. This includes stress management education, stress resistance, and crisis mitigation training for both individuals and organizations.
2. Disaster or large-scale incident, as well as, school and community support programs including demobilizations, informational briefings, “town meetings” and staff advisement.
3. Defusing. This is a 3-phase, structured small group discussion provided within hours of a crisis for purposes of assessment, triaging, and acute symptom mitigation.
4. Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) refers to the “Mitchell model” (Mitchell and Everly, 1996) 7-phase, structured group discussion, usually provided 1 to 10 days post crisis, and designed to mitigate acute symptoms, assess the need for follow-up, and if possible provide a sense of post-crisis psychological closure.
5. One-on-one crisis intervention/counseling or psychological support throughout the full range of the crisis spectrum.
6. Family crisis intervention, as well as, organizational consultation.
7. Follow-up and referral mechanisms for assessment and treatment, if necessary

Research indicates that CISM can be effective when two criteria are met: (1) that those who conduct these interventions were specifically trained in the CISM model and, (2) that they adhered to the model they were trained in. This includes applying the CISM model for those populations for whom it is intended.

Development of Critical Incident Stress Management continues worldwide and is supported by the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation. The Foundation provides a broad level of training both regionally, nationally, and internationally. See ICISF Education and Training.