



December 2013

Critical Incident Stress Management to Launch in January

When it comes to assisting the youth at DYS, there are days when it's very rewarding and other days when the work is very challenging. During difficult times, it's vital that we support each other.

Beginning in January, employees won't have to deal with the tough situations alone. Instead, trained co-workers and colleagues will offer their assistance. It's called Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM). It's designed to provide timely support, referrals and resources when staff members encounter difficult personal and professional issues or experience traumatic events.

"CISM is about helping our employees deal with the enormous amounts of stress that we have and manage it," said Bruce Adams, Victim Services Administrator. Since June, Adams has been carving out the CISM program for the DYS agency. This month, 45 employees from all facilities, regions and central office attended two days of training enabling them to assist their colleagues with the aftermath of a riot or hostage situation, assault or death of an employee at work.

The process for selecting the CISM Team was extensive, including a review of personnel history, evaluation of interpersonal and communication skills, and the candidate's willingness to attend ongoing training sessions. The members will not receive compensation and are volunteering for CISM duties, Adams said. Team members will attend on-site meetings, off-site seminars and visit local hospitals.

Beginning in January and continuing through March, team members will raise awareness of CISM and its services by attending roll calls at the facilities, regional monthly meetings, pre-service and in-service trainings.

Eventually, CISM Peer Assistance Teams will also help employees with personal issues, such as divorce, substance abuse or anxiety and anger. This peer support is not part of the official debriefings but is available on a one-on-one basis.

Adams is quick to point out that it is not the function of any CISM team to replace professional counseling or employee assistance programs, but to provide immediate, incident-specific crisis intervention with a proven model.

There are two key components of the CISM model – defusing and debriefing. Debriefing gives employees time to process the event, reflect on its impact and recover from these traumatic situations. Ideally, debriefing takes place on or near the site of the event.

Defusing allows for the ventilation of emotions and thoughts associated with the crisis event, and the CISM team presents healthy ways to cope. This involves a smaller group of participants.

Debriefing and defusing sessions should be available as soon as possible, but typically within the first 24 to 72 hours after the initial impact of the critical event, according to Adams. After experiencing trauma, personal reactions vary. However, certain responses are overwhelmingly common:

- Typically, there's an initial sense of shock and disbelief that lasts for approximately 24 hours.
- After this initial period, the victim is likely to experience a variety of effects, such as nightmares, intrusive thoughts (in which the victim voluntarily re-experiences the event or part of the event), sleep disturbances, irritability and inability to focus.

"CISM is all about providing a response when critical incidents occur so that staff has the ability to process the situation and feel supported," Adams added.

For CISM to be effective, training of CISM team members will be ongoing. Two more training sessions are set for February and April; the first of these will be related to the peer-support process.

Our employees are vital to the operation of our agency. Our jobs are demanding and it is important that we provide the necessary tools and resources to our staff so that they can overcome the difficult and stressful situations with healthy alternatives.