

## **2.6.1 CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT**

### **I. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines that shall be uniformly applied to the management of stress resulting from critical incidents. Providing support following any critical incident will assist in minimizing the chances that involved personnel will suffer from the negative physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions that may occur.

Law enforcement duties often expose officers and support personnel to mentally painful and highly stressful situations that cannot be resolved through normal stress coping mechanisms. Unless adequately treated, these situations may cause disabling emotional and physical problems. It has been found that critical incidents such as officer-involved shootings, vehicle accidents, line-of-duty deaths, and gruesome homicides may cause adverse reactions and behaviors in officers.

### **II. POLICY**

It is the responsibility of this department to manage critical incident stress by providing personnel with a critical incident stress management (CISM) program. The CISM program shall be utilized to provide personnel with information on reactions to the trauma associated with critical incidents and assist in the deterrence of negative responses. It is the policy of this department to take immediate action after such incidents to safeguard the continued mental well-being of all involved personnel.

### **III. DEFINITIONS**

*Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder:* An anxiety disorder that can result from exposure to a traumatic event and is diagnosed as such if symptoms persist after 30 days.

*Acute Stress Disorder:* An anxiety disorder that can result from exposure to a traumatic event and occurs within 30 days of exposure.

*Critical Incident:* An incident that is unusual, violent, and involves a perceived threat to, or actual loss of, human life that may overwhelm an individual's normal coping mechanisms and cause extreme psychological distress.

*Critical Incident Stress Management:* A formal process used to assist an individual who has been involved in a traumatic event to return to or maintain an effective level of functioning.

*Critical Incident Stress Debriefings:* A formal one-on-one or group discussion conducted by a qualified mental health professional and, where possible, an appropriately trained peer support officer that is designed to assist participants in understanding their emotions and strengthening their coping mechanisms following a critical incident.

*Qualified Mental Health Professional (QMHP):* Any individual who is licensed as a mental health professional and has an in-depth understanding of the law enforcement culture.

*Peer Support Team Members:* A formal group of individuals consisting of department members who have undergone training in peer support methods.

*Involved Personnel:* Any employee who is directly affected by a critical incident. This may include officers who are on the scene at the time of the incident, those individuals who respond to the scene immediately following the incident, and/or support personnel participating in the response to the incident, such as emergency dispatchers.

## **IV. PROCEDURES**

### **A. Immediate Response Following a Critical Incident**

1. During any period where it is reasonable to believe that involved personnel may experience physical, cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioral reactions to a critical incident, the department shall provide personnel with the proper mental health resources.
2. Those resources can include but are not limited to:
  - a. Access to a QMPH
  - b. Access to the POST Team
  - c. Resources provided by the Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 86.
3. Where possible, the supervisor shall briefly meet with involved personnel to:

- a. ask supportive questions concerning the critical incident;
  - b. discuss any standard investigations that will occur concerning the incident; and
  - c. advise the involved personnel that they may seek legal counsel if necessary.
4. At all times, when at the scene of an incident, the supervisor should interact with all involved personnel in a manner that acknowledges the potential stress caused by the incident and refrain from passing judgment regarding the critical incident or the reactions of individuals.

#### B. Post-Incident Procedures

1. The supervisor shall notify the appropriate person in his or her chain of command so that a QMHP can be contacted as soon as possible in order to schedule a one-on-one or group debriefing for all involved personnel. The on-scene supervisor shall brief the QMHP on all important and relevant aspects of the critical incident.
2. The President of FOP Lodge 86 or his designee shall be contacted and advised of any QMHP debriefing or any activation of the POST team following a critical incident.
3. All involved personnel shall be required to attend a one-on-one and/or group debriefing provided by the department's QMHP as soon as reasonably possible. After a QMHP meets with the involved personnel, and with the involved personnel's understanding and release, the department shall be advised of
  - a. whether it would be in the best interest of certain individuals to have time off work; and
  - b. the best continued course of counseling and intervention.

4. Follow up counseling services should be made available to every individual who was involved in the critical incident. The initial follow-up should be face-to-face.
5. In order to promote trust and encourage the use of CISM services, all one-on-one debriefings and other individual counseling sessions shall be kept confidential **and** shall not have any bearing on the involved personnel's fitness-for-duty evaluation. Any information provided to the QMHP will be used solely for return-to-work status recommendations. Whenever possible, the QMHP involved in the CISM program should not conduct this department's fitness-for-duty examinations.
6. This department strongly encourages the families of the involved personnel to take advantage of any available department mental health/counseling services. It is recommended that family/relationship joint counseling services be offered to the involved personnel and their families or significant others whenever possible.
7. Any department investigation of the incident shall be conducted as soon as practical. This department shall make every effort to expedite the completion of any administrative or criminal investigation with the understanding that it can decrease the negative distress reactions that the involved personnel may experience.

#### C. Daily Stress Recognition

1. Physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions or problems may not arise immediately. In addition, involved personnel may attempt to hide their negative responses to the critical incident. Supervisors are responsible for monitoring the behaviors of personnel for any adverse reactions or symptoms.
2. A supervisor may mandate that involved personnel seek assistance or counseling from a QMHP upon recognizing behavioral indicators that suggest stress may be disrupting the individual's job performance.

#### D. Training

1. This department shall provide employees with training pertaining to the negative physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions that may occur following a critical incident and the uniform procedures contained in this policy. This training should be offered on a regular basis.
2. Supervisors and administrators shall be trained to identify physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions to critical incidents.
3. Supervisors are responsible for making available to their personnel information about the department's peer support, chaplains, and mental health services.

Effective Date: 09/27/2018

By Order Of:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert F. Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "R".

Robert F. Johnson  
Chief of Police