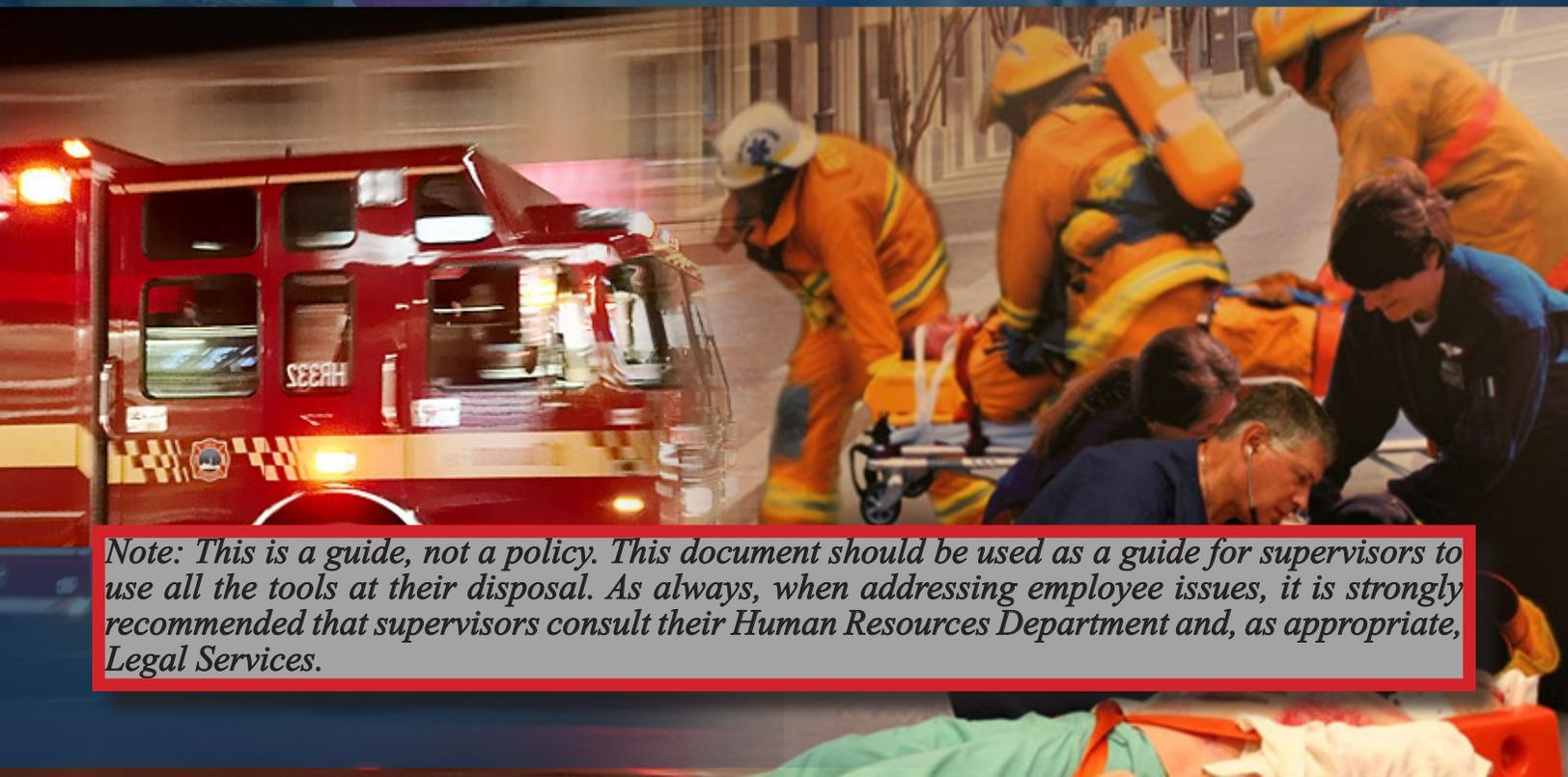




# A Supervisor's Guide to Handling Critical Incidents



DEER OAKS  
EAP SERVICES



*Note: This is a guide, not a policy. This document should be used as a guide for supervisors to use all the tools at their disposal. As always, when addressing employee issues, it is strongly recommended that supervisors consult their Human Resources Department and, as appropriate, Legal Services.*

# A How-to-Guide for Supervisors & Managers



## WHAT ARE CRITICAL INCIDENTS?

A traumatic event, known in the workplace as a critical incident, is a crisis event that is shocking, creating an unusually strong emotional reaction either during or after the event. The impact of the critical incident may interfere with normal coping abilities. Critical incident stress is the reaction of normal people experiencing normal responses to abnormal events. The stress response can be immediate or delayed and can be triggered by one or by a series of events.

Critical incidents can be unexpected, involve personal danger or loss, create uncertainty and involve exposure to shocking sights, sounds or smells. Some examples which may occur in the workplace are:

- Serious injury/death of a fellow staff member at work
- Cumulative events involving serious trauma
- Unexpected death of an employee
- Employee suicide
- Workplace violence
- Traumatic events attracting media attention to staff



## WHY DEAL WITH A CRITICAL INCIDENT?

It is to both the employee's and employer's benefit to help workers manage the impact of a workplace critical incident. Research indicates that workers exposed to a critical incident that is dealt with inappropriately are likely to experience more personal and health problems than before the incident. Workers who are not supported are at greater risk of using more sick days, having lower productivity or leaving their employment.



# A How-to-Guide for Supervisors & Managers



## WHO WILL BE IN CHARGE?

It is very important for the employer group to identify one key person who will coordinate the Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) Response. That person is often a member of the Human Resources or Risk Management Department.

The CISD Coordinator will be in charge of contacting the EAP and relaying all pertinent information regarding the crisis, the employee's reactions, and the employer group's request for an on-site debriefing group. The time, place, and departmental attendees will be discussed and clinical resources will be mobilized accordingly.

## WHAT IS MY ROLE AS MANAGER/SUPERVISOR?

The Supervisor/Manager plays a central role in helping employees to recover from a traumatic event. Two factors greatly reduce critical incident stress:

- 1) **Pre-Trauma Awareness.** Education and familiarization with critical incident stress can help protect your work group.
- 2) **Prompt Support After the Critical Incident.** Most workers feel that their bosses rather than company policies set the tone for workplace response to trauma and grief.

As soon as possible after the event, it is important that you ask how staff members are doing. Even if this means an outreach call to their home if they are not back at work, the acknowledgement from you that something difficult and out of the ordinary has occurred may be enough to reduce stress. If more support is requested or if strong feelings are evident, there may be a need for a formal intervention. Be sure to let the staff know that any intervention is for their support, is confidential and will not be used as a performance critique or evaluation. In fact, you, as their supervisor will not be part of this process other than to arrange it. A separate consultation and support process is available for you as a supervisor.

# A How-to-Guide for Supervisors & Managers

## HOW DO I ASSESS THE NEED FOR RESPONSE TO A CRITICAL INCIDENT?

Everyone reacts to a critical incident differently, depending on factors such as type of event, length of incident, personal stress levels and amount of support provided during and following the incident.

Not all incidents require professionally led group interventions. In fact, to do so may be counter-therapeutic. You can consult with a Deer Oaks counselor by calling 1-866-EAP-2400 to determine if an intervention would be helpful.



## WHAT ARE THE LEVELS OF RESPONSE TO CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS?

A comprehensive crisis management program provides a continuum of responses.

**Consultation.** Offers problem solving, planning and support to managers, supervisors, and Human Resource personnel.

**Education.** Provides educational seminars and literature regarding traumatic stress reactions, self-care and utilizing the EAP as a resource.

**Crisis Management Briefing.** A large group meeting held at any time during or after an event with the goal of allowing psychological decompression and promoting stress management. Meetings last 30-45 minutes and are repeated as the situation changes. Information, stress survival skills and instructions are provided.

**Defusing.** A small group process held on-site within the first 12 hours post-crisis that acknowledges the discomfort and complexity of stress reactions; explains and normalizes the traumatic stress reaction; identifies “red flag” and healthy coping mechanisms; and encourages use of the EAP throughout the recovery process. Trained non-involved peers, mental health professionals and pastoral care are among those who may offer this service.

**Individual Crisis Intervention.** Telephone or face-to-face counseling with an EAP counselor to discuss the impact of the incident on the individual, provide stabilization, discuss self-care/resources and plan for the immediate future.

**Debriefing.** A Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) is a therapeutic intervention by facilitated mental health professionals for a group of individuals who have been exposed to a traumatic event. A CISD is usually conducted 1-14 days post-crisis and can last two to three hours. The goal is to promote psychological closure after an event and to triage for future support such as referral of individuals for mental health intervention.

**Post-Debriefing.** Allows the response team (e.g. Human Resources, Medical, Risk Management, etc.) an opportunity to review the impact of the incident, attend to outstanding action items, plan and monitor the recovery plan, and plan for future critical incidents.

*Deer Oaks EAP Services- A Resource You Can Trust*

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## HOW DO I ACCESS SUPPORT FOR MY WORK GROUP?

In the case of a critical incident, always follow your agency protocols, inform your designated EAP Agency Representative of the situation, and then call Deer Oaks via the toll-free, confidential Helpline:

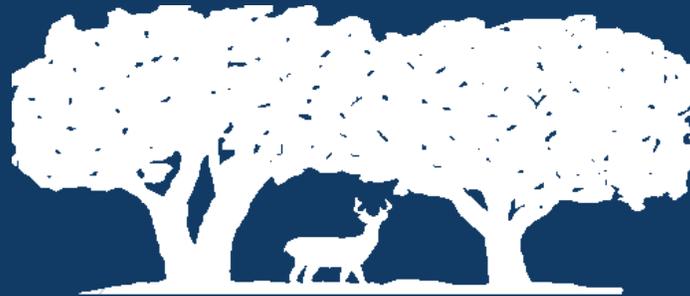
**1 (866) 327-2400**



## WHAT IS THE MANAGER'S ROLE IN PREPARING FOR A DEFUSING/DEBRIEFING GROUP?

1. Coordinate necessary arrangements for meeting rooms, beverages, transportation and communication.
2. Obtain authorization to keep people on-site or other arrangements for attendance at intervention.
3. Identify employees who could be considered at high-risk or who have exhibited signs of acute distress and give them the information about the EAP.
4. Provide information to employees about the incident, updates and action plans.
5. Monitor and communicate, with the EAP, the progress of action items and the process until employees are feeling a restored sense of safety.
6. The EAP Counselor will also be available to you, the manager, for support throughout and after the critical incident.

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**Deer Oaks EAP Services, LLC**

**1 (866) 327-2400**

**eap@deeroaks.com**

**www.deeroaksYUd.com**

