

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT

←← What is vitally important to understand and remember, is that most people involved in disasters or other traumatic events will experience strong emotional and physical reactions, and these are normal and predictable reactions.

By recognising and understanding when you are experiencing CIS you can make choices that will protect your health and how well you do your job.

Typical reactions include:

- Exhaustion and sleeplessness.
- Disturbing flashbacks related to the event.
- Nightmares.
- Withdrawal.
- Anger – feeling impatient and irritable.
- A pre-occupation with negative thoughts.
- A loss of self-worth and confidence.

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE DEFUSING

Defusing, is an intervention technique, using a structured format, applied by a trained peer. It is best carried out within 12 hours of a critical event, before the damage is done. Its aim is to reduce stress reactions and restore adaptive functions. Defusers provide support to peers and are not professional counsellors; they are dedicated and caring people who receive no financial recompense for their services.

TRAINING COURSES

The training course involved to be a peer, 'Individual Crisis Intervention and Peer Support' is carried out over a three-day period by an International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF) approved instructor. IFATCA sponsored courses can be made available in the UK if there is enough interest from ANSPs.

If CISM is to be fully integrated into an ATC unit then it is vital that management are fully on board with the commitment towards training of personnel, including periodical refresher training. There are proven cost benefits of quickly returning a controller back to work and fit for purpose.

HOW GATCO HELPS

GATCO does not have trained CISM personnel within its own management structure to provide the support described here, although we would endeavour to provide support to any member in need of help. We do recognise the need for ATC units to have robust CISM in place from within their own workplace, and GATCO can provide information to aid the introduction of such systems. GATCO strongly recommends that units introduce CISM into their workplace.

CONTACT GATCO

If you require further information or support to help introduce CISM into your workplace then please get in touch through the Central Administrative Facility - caff@gatco.org.





CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT

Sooner or later, many people involved in the field of transportation experience critical incident stress. Critical Incident Stress (CIS) is the reaction of controllers to unusual situations or circumstances and Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) is the process that addresses the reaction of controllers to those same occurrences or incidents.

GUILD OF AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL OFFICERS

There are potentially many people who leave the profession of ATC, who do so for reasons that can be traced back to a particular event, or a series of events that they experienced in their operational careers. CISM specifically addresses the significant stress responses that we feel as operational controllers to such traumatic events that occasionally come along and that we have to live through. It is a process, that had it been employed years ago, many people may still have been controlling today.

Critical Incident Stress can be defined as any situation faced by a controller which causes them to experience unusually strong emotional reactions that could interfere with their ability to function, either at the time or later.

This booklet is provided by GATCO to help you understand what CIS is, and how to deal with it if it happens to you or a colleague.

THE FIRST STEP IS RECOGNISING A CRITICAL INCIDENT

Can you remember a specific event or situation when you felt an overwhelming reaction that interfered with your ability to do your job, or get on with your life in general? If so, the chances are that you have experienced CIS.

Traditionally, the emergency services have had CIS Debriefing available to them, a service provided by trained professionals. We are not like other emergency services in that we do not necessarily see the results of the disaster close-up, nor experience the on-site trauma that other professions do; therefore we do not

suffer the same stresses. A controller is very much involved from the beginning, playing an active role during the build-up and will typically be in place at the conclusion of an incident. Therefore, a more specific support mechanism, directed towards the controller, is required.

The perception of showing any kind of weakness or vulnerability is something that we, as operational controllers don't openly do. And if we do do it, we do it to a peer or colleague and someone that we trust implicitly.

Remember, it is not the situation that makes it critical but the individual's reaction to that situation. What might be a critical incident to one person may not be to another and vice versa. It is your reaction to the event that makes it critical.

Examples of incidents that may result in CIS:

- An operational irregularity – usually a single incident
- Technical loss of separation
- Near collision
- A violent incident at work
- The suicide or traumatic death of a friend or colleague.

The cumulative or PILE-UP effect may intensify the effects of a single incident. This can be very hard to recognise but it is pertinent because the effect of a number of smaller incidents that haven't been dealt with, particularly for those who have served over a number of years in ATC, can suddenly come up and be a real issue to an individual. →→