

PRACTICAL CONCEPTS
AND TRAINING
EXERCISES FOR CRISIS
INTERVENTION AND CISM
TEAMS

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FOREWORD BY

KENDALL JOHNSON, PhD.

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Crisis is no stranger in our communities, our workplace or at school; anywhere people gather there is drama. Homes burn, autos crash, and parents die. In my work within schools, teachers, school psychologists and counselors, college deans and coaches have always provided informal student support during student emergencies. Over the past thirty years that support has been gradually formalized. Crisis intervention, specialized training in emergency mental health, and student support teams have become the order of the day.

Since the early 1980s when writings about Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) first began to appear, the focus was always for first responders. Times are changing, however, and present unprecedented challenges to communities and schools that require a broader, more comprehensive approach than ever before. The basics of individual crisis intervention are not enough to prepare schools to adequately meet student and staff needs following natural disasters, large-scale incidents, and civil unrest. Targeted school violence, bombs, and the growing specter of terrorist strikes on or near schools, call for more flexible and thorough approaches to school crisis response and management. Schools have never existed apart from their communities, but community events now reach the school more frequently and with greater intensity.

Training personnel to respond to emergencies takes special resources, and this book provides just that. Dennis Potter, James Stevens, and Paul LaBerteaux bring years of hands-on crisis response experience to the table. I have known Dennis and Paul

for years through my work with the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation. They work within the framework of Critical Incident Stress Management (Everly and Mitchell, 1999), a comprehensive, multi-component approach that addresses crisis issues from pre-incident preparation through post-incident follow-up and referral. This book utilizes CISM in a friendly, practical, no-nonsense manner that has important implications.

The first implication recognizes the growing trend toward multi-agency community and school crisis teams (Johnson, 2000; Tortorici Luna, 2002). This book encourages and employs a community based and multi-agency approach. The authors recognize two critical aspects of contemporary crisis management. The first is that CISM teams can expect larger crises that involve the community. The second is that the community can provide precious human resources for the school. Coordination with community resources is critical, and school personnel working alone simply cannot provide the high standards of student care that communities expect.

With that comes the need to articulate a common language and shared strategies. In addition, school and community resources must work together in planning sessions to define the manner in which emergency responders and school personnel can coordinate their efforts to each other's benefit. Pre-incident planning provides this opportunity, and training provides the vehicle.

One of the strengths of this book is the compilation of simulation training scenarios. A number of interesting situations are provided for team exercises; these are carefully thought out and are field-tested. I was fortunate to teach for a time at the California Specialized Training Institute (training arm of the Office of Emergency Service, and prototype for the FEMA Emergency Management Institute). CSTI has long utilized simulation exercises to assist emergency personnel in

synthesizing diverse information and strategies and become familiar with their orchestration. Until learning results in action, it is only partial.

Productive simulations must move beyond rote role-play. They must incorporate complex situations with variable options, unanticipated developments, and elements of duress in order to maximize training potential. I have tried to introduce such elements into my own team training.

This book is the first resource I have seen that provides a wealth of suggestions, scenarios, and situations appropriate for action-based team training. Simulation exercises are provided for incidents involving fire/EMS, law enforcement, community settings, as well as school incidents, using multi-agency, multi-disciplinary crisis teams.

Finally, it must be recognized that community organizations and schools are not emergency agencies. If materials and approaches are to be useful and helpful within these settings, they must allow for flexible adaptation to meet the complex and multi-dimensional demands of the organization, culture, scope, and-yes-political realities. The concepts and training exercises herein are highly practical. While they are firmly based upon solid theoretical ground, they are not dogmatic. The training approach utilized is suggestive and does not attempt to super-impose a rigid paramilitary structure. I am sure you will find *Practical Concepts and Training Exercises for Crisis Intervention and CISM Teams* both school and community friendly.

Potter, Steven, and LaBerteaux are to be congratulated for providing a major and significant contribution to an essential field. Crisis management is becoming central to the safety of our nation, our community, our children, and the safety of our children is more necessary now than ever before.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
Why Script a Scenario?	3
Writing Your Own Scenarios	5
A Word of Caution.....	5
Section 1 CISM OVERVIEW.....	7
Critical Incidents vs. Crisis	11
Appropriate Responses.....	13
The Use of Peers	14
Primary Purpose of CISM Activities	15
CISM Core Components and this Guidebook.....	18
Section 2 OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES	23
Administrative Structure	23
Membership Application and Screening.....	33
Initial Training	35
Dispatching a Team into the Field	38
Post Action Staff Support (PASS).....	47
Other Techniques	52
Handouts	54
Referrals for Additional Service	55
Monitoring Team Members Performance	56
Record Keeping	58
Quality Control.....	60

<i>Section 3 CONTINUING EDUCATION & TRAINING STRATEGIES</i>	65
Continuing Education	65
Training Strategies	72
1. One on One Role Plays	73
2. “Table-Top” Exercises	76
3. Small Group Role Play	81
4. Group Games	89
<i>REFERENCES</i>	99
<i>ABOUT THE AUTHOR</i>	101

*Section 2**OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES*

This section will examine issues regarding the daily operation of CISM teams. For teams that are just getting started or for teams that have been in existence for some time, it is usually a good idea to review methods of operation on a regular basis. It is through this type of critical self-examination that Coordinators assure themselves that their teams are operating effectively and efficiently.

Administrative Structure

There are many things that must be considered as a team begins to develop its operational guidelines. The first task is to determine the mission and target population of the team. Most teams have similar mission statements but may have different target populations.

The structure of CISM teams varies widely throughout the world. Some teams become incorporated and highly organized; others follow a more leisurely and relaxed organizational development. Some have elected boards of directors; others have agency appointed leadership responsible for the activities of the team. As with any type of organization, there are benefits to all the approaches used, and some disadvantages as well. There is no “right” or “wrong” way to organize a team, provided it works well to promote the activities of the team, supports CISM principles in its work, provides for marketing of its services, and trains and supports its members.

Types of Teams

There are basically two types of teams, the “specialty” team, and the “generic” team.

A **specialty team** is devoted to a single population of people for whom they are willing to provide CISM services. This can be the traditional first responder team, a school-based team, an “in-house” team, or any other team that is focusing their efforts on a certain defined population.

A **generic team** is willing to provide CISM services across a broad spectrum of community events and usually has some sub-specialties within it. For example, a generic team might provide services to anyone in their community but have first responder personnel who primarily respond to fire, police or EMS staff, or school personnel who mainly respond to school situations. A generic team must be careful to assure that the team members going out on an event are knowledgeable about the population they will be serving. These teams are often more prevalent in smaller rural communities and offer the advantage that one community-wide training can bring CISM services into a variety of professional settings and allow for much mutual aid in the event of a community-wide incident.

Sponsorship of Teams

Once the team has determined whom it is going to serve, one of the next issues to be resolved is the leadership structure and sponsorship of the team. There are three common types of sponsorship: lead agency, agency owned, and independent.

Many CISM teams are sponsored by a **lead agency**, as described by Mitchell and Everly (2001). The lead agency does not “own” the team but often provides financial and logistical assistance. It might provide a place to meet, postage for mailings, an answering service or pager number, and a mailing address for the team. Lead agencies often contribute the most man-hours by providing employee time to serve as team coordinator or clinical director. When deciding on a lead agency, care must be taken to make sure that significant community “political baggage” is avoided. If a team is seen as

too closely allied with a given agency, other agencies and community groups might not take advantage of the services.

Some teams are directly **owned** by the sponsoring agencies. This would include employee assistance program (EAP) teams, school-based teams, in-house CISM teams, or any teams that are directed under the aegis of the sponsoring agency. This team usually has a paid staff that is responsible for the development and deployment of the team. Its team members are often staff of the organization, who work with employees of their own organization or for those with which it has contracts to do CISM.

The third type of sponsorship is the **independent team**. This team has the advantage of not being closely allied with any community agency but is burdened with the necessity to support itself. While the costs associated with a CISM team are usually not substantial, the team must at least provide itself with a method by which people can access the team (usually a cell phone or 24-hour answering service), and must be able to provide handouts, team brochures and other marketing aids.

Leadership Roles

Some of the key initial functions of the leadership structure are:

- identifies the goals of the team and constituency to be served,
- establishes the initial organizational structure and operational guidelines,
- obtains legal counsel to operationally define issues (if necessary),
- provides for the financial support of the efforts and activities of the team,
- establishes the criteria for membership on the team,
- provides for the recruitment of appropriate team members.,
- provides for the basic training of the team,

Section 3

*CONTINUING EDUCATION
& TRAINING STRATEGIES*

In this section, issues regarding the initial education of the team, the need for continuing education and, lastly, some specific techniques for accomplishing education will be examined.

Continuing Education

Even after team members have received their training and have some experience, their education should not end. Teams that are successful in maintaining their membership and services within the community often have provided their members with on-going educational opportunities on a regular basis. This might include an annual training seminar for the team or shorter trainings at the regular team meetings.

These trainings work to keep the team skill levels up between calls, increase the skills of the team and in general keep them “fresh.” It is probably not as important what is done, as that it is done on a regular basis. An exercise or two from this Guidebook at quarterly meetings, with larger refresher trainings annually, is a reasonable expectation.

In deciding what to train, Dr. Raymond Flannery’s research provides a refreshingly clear example of a logical premise: To help someone become more stress-resistant, identify and teach those skills used by the naturally “Stress-Resistant-Person.” (Flannery, R.B. “Becoming Stress Resistant”, 1994) Study those with natural skills, identify what they do, and teach others to do the same.

What are the skills of the best CISM workers? What goes through the mind of an experienced CISM Team member during

SECTION 3

a response? How can the Coordinator or Clinical Director impart those things?

The *Art of Facilitating* involves training for:

- what one listens for,
- what one thinks about and asks oneself, and
- remaining focused in the presence of emotion and time demands.

After all team members are familiar with the steps of the various responses and have a working understanding of the purposes of each phase and the basic mechanisms for making them work, there is additional training required to ensure the well-rounded competence of all team members. This training as well as additional CISM concentrates on listening skills that help the CISM team members to uncover the underlying issues that will come up in each of the phases of the response. This also works when you are doing a One-on-One intervention.

While we have no interest in trying to turn all team members into “mini mental health workers,” we do think it is important that all team members are working equally hard during each phase of the process. This includes listening intently during each phase to ensure that by the *Teaching* and *Re-Entry* phase, all of the major issues have been addressed.

Listening for Themes

What is the primary purpose of all CISM responses? This seems like a silly question, but have you really asked yourself what is at the core of all CISM activities? It is not something we really talk about explicitly during the core trainings. In fact, it is not something we give notice to from an overview perspective. This section proposes the following:

The primary purpose of all CISM activities is education.