Post Action Staff Support (PASS):
A Method for Evaluating Team Member Skills
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In the past, we have always emphasized the importance of completing a Post Action Staff Support (PASS) process as a method for taking care of the psychological and physical needs of the CISM team(s) who have responded to a critical incident. While this is one of the most important features of the model, another equally important aspect of a PASS is to actually critique the performance of the team and the team members, not from the perspective of blame, but rather from the point of view of skill building and performance enhancement.

The original model of *Debriefing the Debriefers* created by Paul LaBerteaux and myself, and its evolution into PASS does have this feature within it. The potential for actual evaluation of individual performance has not been widely understood as a component of the process. I suspect this has to do with the fact that while all CISM activities are based from an education model and that we emphasize in every CISM component that it is NOT a critique of anyone's performance. Thus, when we review team member's performance during a response, we have neglected the educational component of a critique of our own performance, or that of our team members. In fact, probably few teams have an organized process for determining and monitoring the performance of it's members. This is, of course, both dangerous to the participants of the CISM response, the reputation and future work of the team, as well as being demoralizing for other team members who do have good skills, but no easy way to provide information to the leadership of the team about their concerns.

Another complicating factor in team members evaluating each other, is the social norms of a team to "protect" it's members. Our society places a large social norm against "ratting out" members of your group. Since team members are often volunteers, there is often a strong desire to fit in and to not cause disruption or controversy within the team. When dissatisfaction remains hidden, team members with skills might start to become more "invisible" and drop out. If the weaknesses of individual team members are not addressed, the morale of the team can drop, the quality of it's work is affected, and the possibility of significant damage to the reputation of the team can be done. Studies conducted in the field of retail indicate that an individual needs about 10 positive interactions to counter a negative one. Can your CISM team provide for 10 positive interactions to overcome a positive?

WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO NEGATIVE REACTIONS?

I have been involved in leadership positions with CISM teams and part of the Michigan Crisis Response Association since 1988. During this time, I have helped to train members of many of the 50+ teams in Michigan. I have observed within the teams that I have directly worked with, and where I have been consulted, that negative reactions of people receiving CISM services seem to fall in three categories: mental health personnel try to do therapy, chaplains try to preach, and peers have inappropriate interactions outside the CISM activities.

If a team does not have a structured, routine format for evaluating itself regularly, these activities can be going on without the knowledge of the team leadership. This can lead to

disastrous results for the team, the team members, and the people we are wishing to serve.

WHY DO IT?

At the close of a CISM intervention, the team needs to have a process to evaluate their work as a team, evaluate their individual performance, to assess each team member for reactions to the event, and lastly to remind ourselves of good stress management techniques for taking care of ourselves. I suggest that PASS might be a model that would be helpful.

Through the process of PASS, you are working to accomplish four goals:

- You are **evaluating the performance** of the team and it's members , to enhance future work
- You are using this as an opportunity to t**each and reinforce appropriate skills** during the CISM response.
- You are attempting to **reduce negative reactions** such as vicarious traumatization, cumulative stress and the effects of negative self judgment.
- You are "**practicing what we preach**"

By assuring that PASS is a standard operating procedure for your team, you are working to increase their effectiveness and longevity on the team. You are decreasing the chances for any negative personal reactions by members of the team and monitoring the team for any adverse reactions. Lastly, like you did for the participants in the CISM activities, you are preparing the CISM team for re-entry into the world.

Normally the PASS should be done shortly after their work is done and before the team separates to go home. If a team has been involved in a particularly difficult response or a series of defusings/debriefings/demobilizations over a prolonged event response, the PASS might better be done within a few days. This will allow the team an opportunity to process some of the event on their own and then to finish the work together.

The PASS process normally takes 15 to 30 minutes for "regular" CISM activities and longer for particularly difficult or long responses.

WHO SHOULD DO IT?

Usually the team leader or an experienced peer can lead the PASS process. Again, if the CISM team has been through a particularly difficult or long response, their PASS is best accomplished by someone who was not a direct part of the activities. This allows all team members to participate in the full experience of the PASS process.

HOW DO YOU DO IT?

The Post Action Staff Support process uses a variation of the CISD. It consists of three phases, **REVIEW, RESPONSE**, and **REMIND**.

The **REVIEW** phase is essentially a combination of the Introduction/Fact/Thought phase of the regular CISD. It utilizes questions designed to have members think about and

discuss the CISM activities and their participation in it. The following questions are examples of this phase:

- How did it go?
- What themes emerged?
- How do you think you did?
    - What "ditzy" thing did you do?
    - What did you say that you wish you hadn't?
    - What didn't you say that you wish you had?
- What was one thing each of your teammates did that made the process go well?
- What was one thing each of your teammates did that may have made the process go astray?
- Is there any follow up to be done?

During this phase, the leader can guide the discussion into teaching what made the CISM response go well or give examples of other ways to have handled some aspect of the activities that might not have gone so well.

The **RESPONSE** phase is a condensation of the Reaction/Symptom phase of the CISD and works to elicit comments on the self perception of the team members and any concerns they may have about their performance. The following types of questions seem to work well:

- How has this CISM response affected you?
- What is the hardest part of this response for you?

During this phase, the leader guides some group discussion of the members self perceptions. What usually follows is reassurance by the team members that no major errors occurred. This is also an opportunity for the team leader and team members to reassure each other that each individual contributed to the process and to offer alternative methods for handling problem issues.

The **REMIND** phase correlates to the Teaching/Re-entry phase of the CISD. Questions in this step serve to help the team remember to do the same sort of things that we encourage the debriefees to do.

- What are you going to do to take care of yourself in the next 24 hours?
- What will it take for you to "let go" of this debriefing?

By using this structured approach to a PASS, CISM teams are maximizing the opportunities for teaching members new skills, minimizing the chances for members returning home distressed or full of self doubt and assuring its members that they are valuable assets to the team. Being involved in a CISM team ought to be a rewarding experience for all team members it is our responsibility to take care of ourselves at least as well as we try to take care of others.

If we believe in what we are doing for the individuals we serve, we should believe in what we are doing for the individuals providing the services!